PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT
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AND NORTHERN IRELAND
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HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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House of Commons

Monday 22 February 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Imprisonment of a Member

Mr. Speaker: I have received a letter from the resident magistrate of the Belfast petty sessions informing me that Mr. Peter Robinson, the hon. Member for Belfast, East, has been sentenced to a period of imprisonment of 30 days. I shall cause the text of the letter to be published in the Votes and Proceedings and in the *Official Report*.

Following is the letter:

Dear Mr. Speaker

Peter Robinson, Member of Parliament for Belfast, East was convicted by me at Belfast Petty Sessions on 8 December 1987 of using a mechanically propelled vehicle without a licence under the Vehicles (Excise) Act (NI) 1972 contrary to Section 8(1) of the said Act. I fined him £75 ordered him to pay arrears of duty of £100 and £3 for costs within 28 days.

As those sums have not been paid Mr. Robinson was today committed to Prison for a period of 30 days.

F. G. Harty
Resident Magistrate

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KEBLE COLLEGE OXFORD BILL [*Lords*]

SELWYN COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE BILL [*Lords*]

As amended, considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Air Traffic (Safety)

1. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority on the safety regulations for flights over London, Glasgow and Manchester.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Paul Channon): The regulation of air safety is the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority. The chairman keeps me informed on important issues.

Mr. Wray: Does the Secretary of State agree that we have had two near misses in the past fortnight and 365 near misses since 1986? Obviously, many complaints have been made to the Civil Aviation Authority, and air traffic controllers have complained about the reporting system. Does the Secretary of State agree that the skies have become like the A74, in that they are overcrowded, and will he consider extending the vertical and horizontal space?

Mr. Channon: The hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that in recent years the number of risk-bearing air misses for commercial air transport has been decreasing, not increasing. That is important. We must not be complacent, but nor must we overreact. It is important to understand these incidents and to keep them in perspective. The near miss that occurred yesterday was between a PanAm Boeing and a BCal BAC 1-11. The BCal aircraft was in level flight at 25,000 ft. and the PanAm was descending from 31,000 ft. to its cleared altitude of 26,000 ft. Preliminary indications — I emphasise that they are preliminary — are that the pilot of the PanAm aircraft descended further than the controller intended. The controller noticed this and took immediate remedial action — I stress that: immediate remedial action. Naturally, the incident will be investigated.

Mr. Higgins: I accept what my right hon. Friend has said, but is he satisfied that everything is being done to encourage the reporting of these events so that we have reliable statistics? On the question of capacity, is there not an argument for having more routes, especially across the Channel, so that traffic can be more widely spread? In particular, will my right hon. Friend investigate the restrictions placed by the Ministry of Defence on Channel flying?

Mr. Channon: As my right hon. Friend knows, he and I are in discussion with the Ministry of Defence about that latter point. I do not want to raise his hopes, but obviously we shall investigate that.

It is important that the House should understand the procedures. The CAA chairman has initiated discussions of the air miss reporting and investigation system and he has invited my officials to participate. It is an extremely sensible idea and I hope that the House will welcome it.

Mrs. Ray Michie: Does the Secretary of State accept that my right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal party was not being alarmist when he last raised this matter on 8 February? Does he accept that we are seeking a proper investigation into what is going on? One does not want to be alarmist, but I, too, fly regularly up to and down from Scotland — *[Interruption.]* Flying frightens the living daylights out of me. Many people are seriously worried. If there is so much traffic in the south-east, why does the Secretary of State not accept that more planes should fly out of Prestwick, for example?

Mr. Channon: I am longing for more planes to fly out of Prestwick and every other provincial aerodrome, including Scottish ones. The more traffic that can be encouraged to do that, the better. I think that that is common ground between us. I hope the hon. Lady realises that the number of near misses on the form of transport that she is now using is going down, not up. That is the point that I must make the House understand. With respect, her right hon. Friend's speech last autumn— I cannot understand why people keep referring to it—was alarmist and irresponsible and did not take these factors into account.

Mr. McCrindle: With the incident over Essex at the weekend coming only two weeks after he announced an inquiry into the severe air miss of a couple of weeks ago, will my right hon. Friend consider extending the range of that inquiry within his Department to include the more recent incident? Taking our cue from him, and trying to keep a balance between those who wish to be alarmist and those who wish to be complacent, may we ask whether the time is not on the horizon when individual inquiries into individual incidents should be replaced by an inquiry into the whole issue of air traffic control, so as to bring some sort of reassurance to the many who fly and those who live under flight paths?

Mr. Channon: I understand my hon. Friend's views, and I listened to what he said this morning. The present signs are that the incident to which he referred was not a risk-bearing air miss — I told the House why a few moments ago. It is the chief inspector, not I—I have no power to change this without legislation — who by law decides what the AAIB is to investigate. It is right that he should not be under political pressure from Ministers. An inspector's investigation of the incident over Lydd on 6 February is under way. Any safety recommendations that emerge about air traffic control systems from the investigation will be reported to the CAA without delay.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Does it not make matters worse for the south-east that large numbers of northerners must still travel down to Heathrow and Gatwick to reach destinations abroad for which there should be scheduled services from Manchester? What recent action has the right hon. Gentleman taken further to develop the regional airports?

Mr. Channon: The right hon. Gentleman knows better than anyone — we discussed it recently — that there are now a substantial number of new international destinations from Manchester. I hope that we shall have formal discussions with the Americans before long. I am at one with the right hon. Gentleman in wanting opportunities for Manchester airport, and many other provincial airports, to expand. That will be good in itself and will help to ease congestion in London.

Mr. Colvin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important to differentiate between reported air misses and risk-bearing air misses? It is clear from what he said that it is four times safer to fly today, in terms of reported air misses, than it was 10 years ago. Following on from what he said about risk-bearing air misses, the figure for 1986 was only 16, while the figure for 1977 was 45. There again, there has been a massive improvement. Does he agree that it is wholly inconsistent with the dedication and skill of air traffic controllers for a small minority of that profession to try to make political capital out of the present circumstances?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend has put his finger on the right point, especially in the first part of his question. Trends in risk-bearing air misses have been markedly downwards in recent years. That is precisely the point. I hope the House realises that, as a result of that, air journeys in the London area have been proved safer in recent years than they were in the past.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does the Minister realise that many flights from the three main regional airports, Glasgow, Manchester and Belfast, do not leave on time because of chaos in London? Even if they leave on time, they cannot land because of chaos there. As one-hour flights now require one and a half hours, will the Secretary of State stop passing the buck to the Civil Aviation Authority and accept the responsibility for the increasing chaos at London airports?

Mr. Channon: I am not passing the buck. The CAA has the statutory duty by law, as passed by this House. That is why I must reiterate where the statutory duty lies. I am considering a number of points about Belfast flights which concern the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues.

As for the general issue of delays at airports, the most important duty must be for the CAA and controllers at airports to ensure that safety is paramount, even if it causes delay from time to time.

Mr. Jessel: May I remind my right hon. Friend that there has been no major crash at Heathrow since about 1972? As there are 300,000 flights per year, that is a very impressive record. However, near misses are alarming for people beneath the flight path and I hope that the inquiry will be extremely thorough.

Mr. Channon: I endorse what my hon. Friend said about the large number of flights from Heathrow and the very good safety record there. That is why I urge the House to understand what is going on and to appreciate the extraordinary good record of pilots and air traffic controllers, all of whom ought to be congratulated.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Does the Minister not recognise that he has become so complacent at the Dispatch Box that he has degenerated into using claptrap? What on earth is a non-risk-bearing air miss? If it is not risky, why is it reported? To talk like that does not help the situation one little bit. The time has come for the Secretary of State to get all the interested parties together to have a proper investigation into air safety. The Secretary of State may think that people are not worried, but I can tell him that they are, and that they will be especially worried at Easter when there will be much more traffic in the air than there is now.

Mr. Channon: Untypically, the hon. Gentleman has asked a ridiculous question. All incidents and sightings should be reported, whether they contain a risk or are non-risk bearing. Preliminary indications in the incident at the weekend are that there was not a risk. Quite rightly, air statistics have been compiled like this for a great many years, including the years when the hon. Gentleman's party was in office. I cannot understand why he makes that ridiculous attack.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that within controlled air space aircraft in a position where they ought not to be should properly be reported by other aircraft using the same air space? In that situation there is not necessarily any risk, but it comes into the category of an air miss. It is unfortunate that Opposition Members do not understand the difference between the genuine concern about what ought to be done and the fact that there is a need, perhaps to satisfy the public, for some alternative to the Civil Aviation Authority investigating itself. That may well be one of the ways of alleviating risks. I do not accept that there is an increasing risk.

Mr. Channon: I agree with my hon. Friend's first point about air misses. I thought that that was common knowledge throughout the House, and I am amazed that it is not. My hon. Friend asked about air miss reporting and investigating systems. As I have told the House, the CAA chairman has initiated discussions about that matter. My Department will participate in them. It is an extremely good idea and I hope that the House welcomes it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have allowed a rather long run on that question and I think the House will understand if we now proceed rather more rapidly.

Safety Standards

2. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to review the enforcement of transport safety standards by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: The safe movement of people and goods is one of my top priorities. Effective enforcement of safety standards is part of that and I keep it under constant review.

Mr. Davies: I should like to return to yesterday's near miss, because the Secretary of State has said that on the one hand it was a near miss and on the other hand no safety implications were attached. Secondly, he said that in any event it is not his responsibility. That is completely unsatisfactory. Does the Secretary of State not understand that when hundreds of lives are put at risk there is a clear need to investigate, not only the original individual circumstances, but the system of reporting that allows such events to take place? Will he give an undertaking that he will launch a thorough and open investigation, not only of individual cases, but of the system of reporting?

Mr. Channon: I have already answered that point twice and I do not know why the hon. Gentleman wants to return to it. He has completely distorted my original answer. The whole House knows that if there is a sighting, or any other incident that should be reported, it must be reported. The vast majority of incidents that are reported are not risk bearing. Surely that must be understood by the House. It seems from preliminary reports that yesterday's incident was such a case.

Mr. Ashby: In matters of transport safety, does my right hon. Friend think it right that the Civil Aviation Authority should investigate itself? Does he also think it right that when the authority produces a report, it produces it to itself? Does he not think that he should be the recipient of that report and that it should be the sort of report that can be debated in the House?

Mr. Channon: In general, air miss reports are widely circulated. I see them because my civil aviation safety adviser wants to discuss them, and it is he who receives the reports from the CAA. Therefore, I have answered my hon. Friend's point. As for the air miss reporting and investigation system, I have told the House four times that the CAA chairman has initiated discussions. I very much welcome that.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Secretary of State not realise that for all inhabitants of London his replies will not be satisfactory? Following the point made by his hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby), unlike sea or rail safety standards, which are the responsibility of the Secretary of State and which are open and visible, that for the Civil Aviation Authority is not visible or open. The CAA is judge and jury in its own court. Surely that is wrong and we need legislation to change it.

Mr. Channon: As I have said, the CAA chairman has initiated discussions. The House says that the situation is unsatisfactory. I do not wish to politicise the issue, but I must point out that when the Labour Government were in office there were non-risk-bearing air misses. It is important that the House should understand that this is not a new situation.

Mr. Tony Banks: It is getting worse.

Mr. Channon: It is not getting worse. In 1978 there were 119 non-risk-incidents. Traffic has increased since then. For some reason the House will not accept that incidents can be non-risk-bearing. In fact, the numbers of no-risk misses are lower than they were in 1978. So this is not a new phenomenon, and the preliminary reports of the recent incident reveal that there was no risk.

Channel Tunnel

3. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has had any recent meetings with representatives of the Anglo-French Channel tunnel construction consortium.

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend the Minister of State last met senior representatives of Eurotunnel and their contractors Transmanche Link on 15 February.

Mr. Dykes: Will my hon. Friend confirm that when that brilliant project, which is going so well and was recently warmly endorsed by the Prime Minister, is completed, as soon as possible in the early 1990s, it will be the best way to allay the anxieties of people who worry about air misses between London and Paris?

Mr. Channon: Certainly, it is a brilliant programme and it will be completed in the early 1990s. We shall take every step to ensure that it is completed to the highest safety standards.

Mr. Anderson: Is the Minister not concerned about the disparity in Chunnel-related investment on each side of the Channel? The French are spending at least £1,200 million on the Paris-to-tunnel rail line, while British Rail is spending only £400 million on the total infrastructure. Will the Minister take shelter behind saying that this is a matter for the board, or will he take the lead and say that it is a matter of national concern with enormous regional implications, and that the Government will do something about it?

Mr. Channon: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood one point. The Channel tunnel is a comparatively small part of the French investment. The French are investing in a high-speed rail system linking them with Brussels and, eventually, Cologne and Amsterdam, and they are spending vast sums of money on that at the moment. British Rail has been asked to study the adequacy of investment by June this year, and it will report then. As the House knows, BR has put forward many investment proposals during the past few years, all of which have received approval.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

4. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 25 January, *Official Report*, columns 23-24, what estimate has been made of the percentage of heavy goods vehicles from abroad which are overloaded, in the light of the 24 per cent. of weighed vehicles which are found to be overloaded; and what actions he proposes to reduce this figure.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Peter Bottomley): A series of surveys carried out between 1980 and 1986 showed that 20 per cent. of foreign goods vehicles selected on a random basis were overloaded by more than 5 per cent. We propose to install weighbridges at Ramsgate and Immingham, the two major ferry ports which lack them. Consultations are also being held with selected port authorities about testing automatic equipment for weighing incoming lorries.

Mr. Chapman: Will my hon. Friend accept that the fact that one in five incoming vehicles is found to be overweight is a matter of deep concern? As the maximum penalty on a successful prosecution is only a £200 fine, should not, at the very least, magistrates courts be encouraged to impose the maximum fine?

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There must be effective deterrents. We must be able to catch and deter them. Overweight lorries are unsafe, they are cheating and they cause more damage to the roads than they pay for. I agree with my hon. Friend.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Minister satisfied with the situation that police forces, for understandable reasons, are not taking action when they know that the drivers will soon be out of the country, and possibly will not return for prosecution? There is a problem, and it is becoming an increasing worry.

Mr. Bottomley: [illegible]erloaded vehicles are prohibited movement until the lo[illegible] is adjusted, and that is one of the ways in which it cannot pay lorry drivers to overload. We need to use both deterrence and enforcement, as well as trying to ensure that the enforcement strategy is such that people find that it is not worth their while cheating.

Mr. Sayeed: Following the point made by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), does it not make sense to seize part of the cargo of overweight lorries, take a lien on it and not hand it back until the fines are redeemed?

Mr. Bottomley: It would be right for us to go on considering effective ways to reduce this bad problem.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Will the Minister confirm that one of the problems identified after the sinking of the Herald of Free Enterprise was the danger posed by overloaded lorries on ferries? The Minister's complacent response to this problem will not do. What will the Government do, both in negotiations with foreign Governments and at British ports, to ensure that it is virtually impossible for lorries to risk life at sea by coming to this country overloaded?

Mr. Bottomley: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the last sentence of my initial reply.

Merchant Fleet

5. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the future of the British merchant fleet.

Mr. Channon: A policy document from the General Council of British Shipping, a leaflet from the National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers, and about 45 letters from members of the public.

Mr. Wallace: Will the Minister accept that in spite of the admittedly helpful measures in the Merchant Shipping Bill, which is passing through the House, there is still considerable anxiety about the state of our merchant shipping, not only because of the dramatic decline in merchant tonnage, but because over the past 10 years the pay rates for seafarers have gone down considerably in comparison with rates paid in comparable occupations on land? With the Budget looming, has the Secretary of State made, or does he intend to make, representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about having special tax arrangements to encourage the replacement of ships or the undertaking of heavy repairs? Will the Secretary of State also promote special tax and social security arrangements for seafarers, as is done in other EEC countries?

Mr. Channon: As the hon. Gentleman knows, taxation is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, not for me. I am grateful for what the hon. Gentleman said about the Merchant Shipping Bill measures. Yes, the fleet is slimmer, but it is more efficient, and company success should not necessarily be judged by the number of ships. The important point is to improve efficiency on sea and on land and open up new trade.

Mr. Irvine: When did my right hon. Friend last receive representations about the size of the merchant fleet from the Ministry of Defence, and what was the nature of those representations?

Mr. Channon: All letters from the Ministry of Defence are confidential, but I cannot recall one on that issue. I have already answered the question raised by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). If my hon. Friend is asking for taxation measures, I must point out that that is entirely a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Transport Supplementary Grant

6. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by how much transport supplementary grant will be increased in 1988-89 vis à vis 1987-88.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: By £11 million—6 per cent.

Mr. Jack: I note my hon. Friend's reply, but he will know of the concern in Lancashire over this year's transport supplementary grant application. Will he do all that he can in the financial year 1989-90 to ensure that the projects in the transport planning programme for Lancashire, which his Department has seen, are adequately funded, as they contain many much-needed road improvements, particularly in west Lancashire and my constituency of Fylde?

Mr. Bottomley: I will do the best that I can for my hon. Friend, as I would for any other hon. Member. It is worth recognising that if everyone knew how well Lancashire did on occasion, I would face much more pressure from around the House.

Mr. Flynn: Is the Minister aware that large lorries cause at least £200 million worth of damage annually to roads, and the effect of the increase in the weighings of lorries by 50 per cent. at ports, to which the Minister referred, will mean that only 1·5 per cent. of lorry movements inwards and outwards from Britain will be subject to weight checks? In view of the damage caused by lorries to our roads, is it not about time that the Government stopped being permissive and started getting tough?

Mr. Bottomley: I shall try to bear that in mind when considering the transport supplementary grant next year.

Mr. Soames: I thank my hon. Friend for the courtesy and help that he has always shown to West Sussex with regard to transport supplementary grant, but is he aware of the very serious problems that exist on the roads, particularly around Crawley and beyond, caused by the M25? Will he assure the House that he will do all that he can to confer the same benefits on my constituency as he intends to confer on the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack)?

Mr. Bottomley: I congratulate my hon. Friend on managing to get me to visit Sussex to see the work that is going on and the work that needs to be carried out. I hope to visit Sussex next week, but I am not sure whether I will be spending much time in his constituency.

Mr. Speaker: Mrs. Fyfe to ask question 8.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): Mr. Speaker, would it be in order for me to answer question 7?

Mr. Speaker: That would not be in order, because I have already notified the Government Whip that question 7 has been unstarred. We will have question 8.

Commuter Services

8. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has commissioned any studies on the economic impact of the provision of rail commuter services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Transport and Road Research Laboratory has published or collaborated in a number of national and international urban transport studies.

Mrs. Fyfe: What did the Minister tell the Bank of England's City commuter services group, which reported to him that a survey of 5,250 employers revealed that more time was lost from work because of delays and cancellations than through sickness or any other cause?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Lady is complaining about delays.

Mr. Snape: There have been delays here.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Lady has complained about delays and the reliability of trains. There is great interest at the moment in Network SouthEast, and reliability on these services has improved from 98·5 to 98·8 per cent. of trains running. Reliability and punctuality have improved. If the hon. Lady can give me a specific area of anxiety in Scotland, I shall write to her.

Mr. Snape: This is not fair on the Government. Is the Minister aware that groups as diverse as the transport users' consultative committees, the Railway Development Society, Transport 2000, the Confederation of British Industry, the TUC—I wonder whether the Minister has found the right page for this answer yet—the *Evening Standard* commuter club and the Monopolies and Mergers Commission have complained recently about the "inadequacy, strain and danger" and overcrowding on British Rail services? Why is it that when Ministers find the right page, we receive only platitudes written by civil servants? Why has the chairman of the British Railways Board received a knighthood for being the most incompetent public servant in the country? Why is the ever-greedy road lobby the only group to be delighted by the incompetence of the hon. Gentleman and his fellow Ministers?

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his supplementary to question 7. New quality standards were set and accepted by British Rail last July. Punctuality, reliability, cleaning, overcrowding, inquiry delays and queueing for tickets are all covered by the standards. Those matters have been accepted by the chairman of British Rail. In the last six months of last year there was an improvement in punctuality and reliability on the Network SouthEast commuter services.

Mr. Yeo: Is my hon. Friend aware that the commuter service from Manningtree is very important? Despite a rather erratic record of reliability, that service is used by an increasing number of my constituents and others elsewhere in East Anglia. Is he further aware that a great shock was caused when, following the construction of a large new car park at the station, British Rail announced its decision to eliminate most of the InterCity services? At the next meeting with British Rail's management, will my hon. Friend prevail upon it, if he can, to adopt more business-like practices and not to treat its customers as an inconvenience?

Mr. Mitchell: I shall be seeing the sector director of Network SouthEast this evening, and I shall draw that point to his attention.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: If the Minister seriously wants to receive complaints from Scotland, is he prepared to accept dossiers from Scottish Members of Parliament, who can all cite extensive cases of the problems faced by our commuters? Does he accept that one of the major problems facing commuters in Scotland is the poor quality of the rolling stock and the fact that the upgrading, being so slow as to be ineffective, is hindering economic recovery?

Mr. Mitchell: I am aware of the improvements that have occurred in ScotRail. If the hon. Lady is referring to section 20 services, she must refer to the passenger transport authority concerned.

Motorway Repairs

9. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received about the speed with which motorway repairs are undertaken.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Various representations have been received which urge speedy completion of repairs. We aim to minimise delays by careful programming, improved traffic management and greater use of lane rental contracts which give an incentive for early completion.

Mr. Knox: Will my hon. Friend explain why it appears to take so long to effect motorway repairs?

Mr. Bottomley: It now takes between 30 and 40 per cent. less time than before lane rental was introduced. It is important to organise the work properly and to ensure that it is carried out efficiently and effectively. We are seeing substantial improvements. We are extending the use of lane rental contracts. We will not see such an improvement in time because lane rental is now being extended to some of the more complicated roadworks. I should like to see it on other roads as well as motorways.

Mr. Grocott: Is the Minister aware that part of the M54 to Telford has been under repair almost since the day it was opened? The Minister let us know recently that some inquiries were taking place into long-term but permanent remedial work on the motorway. Can he tell us how those inquiries are proceeding?

Mr. Bottomley: It would be simpler for me to write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hoyle: Does my hon. Friend accept that his reply is completely complacent? I ask him to come with me and drive on a Friday from London to my constituency. A journey that used to take four and half hours now takes six and a half hours because of the miles and miles of coned-off A1 from Rotherham, north, which adds about one and a half to two hours to a journey. If the Minister had to pass through that in order to get to work, he would damn soon get rid of some of the cones.

Mr. Bottomley: If I were going to my hon. Friend's constituency on a Friday night, I would go by train. It is worth remembering that some of the roadworks are to improve and expand the network, and I think that that is generally welcomed. It is also worth saying that if it had started in 1975, rather than in 1979, the roads would be in a much better state than they are now.

Electrification

10. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of British Rail concerning the electrification of the rail network and other matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend last met the chairman of British Rail on 11 February. A variety of railway matters were discussed.

Mr. Hughes: When the Secretary of State next meets the chairman, will the Minister ensure that he reminds him of the need for the early electrification of the London to south Wales main line? Will he also tell the chairman what provision the Government are making for our local authorities to ensure that they are able to provide for local halts, such as that in Magor in Gwent, which are so urgently needed?

Mr. Mitchell: The answer to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question is no. It is for British Rail to come forward with proposals for electrification where it considers that to be appropriate. I have had no application from British Rail in respect of that line.

I shall write to the hon. Gentleman on the matter of smaller stations.

Mr. Sackville: Will my hon. Friend say what progress has been made on assessing the possibilities for an improved rail service linking the Channel tunnel with Manchester and the north of England?

Mr. Mitchell: British Rail is required by section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 to prepare a plan by the end of 1989 setting out its service proposals. It intends to consult widely in preparation for the plan, but it is too early yet to say exactly what it will entail.

Mr. Snape: Will the Minister join me in congratulating the north-west group of Labour Members on their success in persuading British Rail not to take the nonsensical decision to abolish sleeper services to Manchester and Liverpool and to run empty sleeper trains in one direction? Does he not think that that shows the effectiveness of my hon. Friends from the north-west?

Mr. Mitchell: It was not only Opposition Members who were responsible for making representations on that matter. I am delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman is now converted to approving of the chairman of British Rail and his activities.

Rail Services (Quality)

12. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of the Central Transport Consultative Committee to discuss the quality of rail services.

Mr. David Mitchell: I met the chairman of the CTCC in September 1987 to discuss quality of service and other matters.

Mr. Haynes: The Minister is not talking about quality; he is talking about inequality. Why is his Department cutting £3 million a day from financial support for British Rail when people are moaning and groaning all over the country? I want to know when we shall get our proper service from Mansfield and Ashfield to Nottingham to catch the London train. Is the Minister aware that I want to travel on that train, see the beautiful countryside in Nottinghamshire and read what the local papers are saying about me? What will he do about that?

Mr. Mitchell: The key to the standards of service that the hon. Gentleman would like to see is investment. The Government have approved any worthwhile investment proposals put forward by British Rail. My in-tray is empty, and I shall be happy to have it filled again.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

"Stalker" (Prosecution)

55. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Attorney-General when he now expects to reach a decision on whether to prosecute Mr. John Stalker under the Official Secrets Acts in respect of his book entitled "Stalker".

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 11 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden).

Mr. Greenway: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that Sir John Hermon, Chief Constable of Northern Ireland, said on television yesterday, and will say again today, that Mr. Stalker is thoroughly immature and that his book is a tissue of lies? Should not the public, therefore, treat Mr. Stalker and his book with the contempt that they deserve?

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend expresses himself with characteristic robustness. I am not responsible for the views expressed by the Chief Constable or, indeed, by anybody else. Naturally, the Government deplore any breach of confidence of the kind to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr. Archer: Does the Attorney-General agree that, in respect of decisions about prosecutions, he is accountable to this House, and only to this House? Although there may be difficulties about disclosing particular facts, does he agree that that accountability should be made a reality, either through a Select Committee or another acceptable channel? Has he directed his mind to that question, and would he care to make a statement?

The Attorney-General: I am accountable to this House. That does not need to be made a reality. It is a reality.

Mr. Cormack: Does my right hon. and learned Friend know whether the book is a tissue of lies, or a breach of confidence? Surely it cannot be both.

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend speaks as though these things are mutually incompatible and as though the entire book, or any book, is wholly consistent in falling into one category or another. That is not always the case.

Mr. Rees: Is the Attorney-General aware that I agree that, although the Stalker book obviously contravenes the Official Secrets Act 1911, he is right not to prosecute? Will he consider other circumstances in the background to the case in which it is alleged that, while the report was being undertaken, details were passed to a journalist in Manchester? Will he speak to the Northern Ireland Office and the Home Office and suggest that, in the light of his investigations and these worrying allegations, senior officers who are put in to investigate other police forces should be given instructions on how to carry out those investigations?

The Attorney-General: The right hon. Gentleman speaks with much authority and experience. I shall undertake to ensure that his observations are referred to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and for the Home Department, who plainly have an interest in the matter.

Mr. Fraser: Was one of the Attorney-General's considerations that it might have been in the public interest for the public to have the right to know Mr. Stalker's conclusions on his investigations in Northern Ireland? If the right hon. and learned Gentleman's conclusion not to prosecute was based on that consideration, will it apply similarly to any civil proceedings?

The Attorney-General: It falls to me to take into account, in my criminal jurisdiction, all relevant circumstances. The hon. Gentleman has referred to one of them, but all of them have to be considered and a right and sound judgment has to be reached at the end. That I endeavour to do.

Mr. Anthony Cavendish (Memoirs)

56. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Attorney-General what has been the cost hitherto of his actions against various publications in relation to Mr. Anthony Cavendish's memoirs.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): The total amount of costs expended to date in the actions, relating to the Cavendish memoirs, brought against *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer*, is £157.

Mr. Dalyell: Wherein lies Mr. Cavendish's alleged breach of security?

The Solicitor-General: Mr. Cavendish, as a former member of the security service, owes a lifelong duty of confidentiality. It is to establish and enforce that lifelong duty that the actions were brought.

Mr. Dykes: Why is Mr. Cavendish being treated more lightly and generously than Mr. Peter Wright?

The Solicitor-General: He has not been treated in any substantially different way as a matter of principle.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: If, in pursuing further action against Mr. Cavendish, consideration has to be given to

the expenditure which may be incurred, will consideration also be given to the abortive expenditure which has already been incurred in the Court of Session in Scotland?

The Solicitor-General: Matters in Scotland have not yet reached their conclusion, and therefore it remains to be seen whether they are or are not abortive.

Mr. Favell: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that a prerequisite of joining the secret service is the ability to keep a secret?

The Solicitor-General: I agree.

Mr. Fraser: Do I understand from the Solicitor-General's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that there was no breach of security – that there was only a breach of confidentiality?

The Solicitor-General: The action was brought to enforce the lifelong duty of confidentiality.

Alleged Government Subversion (Prosecutions)

57. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Attorney-General what recent consideration has been given to initiating prosecutions in relation to offences concerning alleged attempts to subvert the Government of Lord Wilson; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the Prime Minister's statement of 6 May 1987, in which she said that this matter had been investigated by the then director general of the security service; that no evidence or indication had been found of any plot or conspiracy against Lord Wilson by or within the security service; and that she did not propose to institute any other inquiry into the matter.

Mr. Allen: The Attorney-General will be aware that allegations have been made by a senior former MI5 operative — Mr. Peter Wright — in his book "Spycatcher". Will he now stop his inactivity in this matter, because many people feel that by not having a further inquiry the right hon. and learned Gentleman is condoning the security service acting as the second team, or back stop, to the Conservative party?

The Attorney-General: I do not go along with what the hon. Gentleman has said at all. In matters of this kind it is for the Director of Public Prosecutions to decide what, if any, action is to be taken in the face of any evidence, however presented, relating to the commission of any possible offence.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: Are these not just about the most damaging allegations that can be made about Crown servants – that they tried to destabilise a legally elected Government? For public confidence, is not the best way forward to have an independent inquiry into these matters? We had Lord Franks' inquiry into the conduct of the Falklands war. Surely such an inquiry would lay to rest the public's anxiety, because people would then know that public servants are there to help, not undermine, the country's institutions.

The Attorney-General: That point was made to the Prime Minister – no doubt it was made by my hon. Friend – when she made the statement to which I referred in my original reply. As the ultimate prosecuting authority in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, I am not responsible for whether there should be public inquiries. The Prime Minister is, and she dealt with the matter fully and to the satisfaction of the House in the answer that she gave in 1987.

Prosecution Policy

58. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Attorney-General when he last met the Director of Public Prosecutions to discuss prosecution policy.

The Attorney-General: Last Thursday morning.

Mr. Winnick: Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware of the immense harm done to Anglo-Irish relations by the statement that he made two weeks ago, in which he said that there would be no prosecution of RUC officers? While a later statement was made on the issue only last week, the fact remains that immense harm has been caused to Anglo-Irish relations. Would it not be wise to look again at the decision?

The Attorney-General: This question relates not to the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland, but to the DPP for England and Wales. The point raised by the hon. Gentleman by way of a supplementary question has no bearing on it, but if it had, my answer would be no.

Mr. Gow: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the decision not to prosecute was made, not by him, but by the DPP for Northern Ireland?

The Attorney-General: That is entirely true, as I made clear in my statement on 25 January.

Mr. Cryer: Has the Attorney-General discussed with the Director of Public Prosecutions the possibility of prosecuting Chapman Pincher? All the information produced by Peter Wright in the book "Spycatcher" had been provided for Chapman Pincher. Is it not hypocritical of the Attorney-General to wax lyrical about a lifelong duty of confidentiality for members of MI5 when he knows full well that information has been provided to Chapman Pincher with the approval of the Government and Government officers? If Peter Wright and others are open to prosecution, should not Chapman Pincher, as the Government's mouthpiece, be subject to prosecution as well?

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman is probably aware that nearly a year ago I announced that the prosecution of Mr. Chapman Pincher would not be in conformity with the code for Crown prosecutors.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

International Fund for Agricultural Development

61. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is planning any meetings with officials from the International Fund for Agricultural Development to discuss investment policy; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Chris Patten): No, Sir.

Mr. Smith: In view of the good track record of the International Fund for Agricultural Development in investing in agriculture for the benefit of those who need

it most — the rural poor — will the Minister give an undertaking that Britain will contribute to the next replenishment of IFAD funds? Will he consider making a larger contribution than we have made in the past, so that this country can give a lead in obtaining adequate resources for a viable level of work from this invaluable organisation?

Mr. Patten: As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, we have committed about £47 million so far to IFAD, including £7 million for the special programme for Africa. We are playing, and will continue to play, our full part in the negotiations about the next replenishment. I was pleased to be able to discuss that issue, among others, with the president of IFAD — who does a splended job — as recently as last November.

Commonwealth Schools (Textbooks)

62. **Mr. Hannam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to provide textbooks for schools in Commonwealth developing countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: This year we expect to spend about £1·3 million from the aid programme on textbooks for schools in developing Commonwealth countries. I am also considering support for some interesting proposals to provide textbooks no longer needed in British schools to developing countries.

Mr. Hannam: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpful reply. Can he tell us whether the Ranfurly library is involved in the project? Can he also give some details of which countries are being considered for assistance?

Mr. Patten: The Ranfurly library service, which does such a magnificent job, is centrally involved in the proposals, which are being discussed with Rotary and the British Council. I very much hope that the scheme will get off the ground. If it does, it is intended to cover all developing Commonwealth countries.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Is the Minister aware that, in addition to the provision of textbooks, many developing countries welcome the provision of audio-visual aids, and that the British Council, which is doing splendid work in many countries, would be able to assist if more resources were made available?

Mr. Patten: Through the aid programme we have been making more resources available to the British Council, which has been doing a superb job in helping to manage our technical co-operation and training programme. Of course, audio-visual aids have an important part to play in education in developing countries, as do books, which is why we have increased spending on the books presentation programme.

Public Service Pensions

63. **Mr. Stanbrook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received asking the Government to rectify the anomaly whereby all public service pensioners receive credit for pre-appointment war service except where that public service was overseas.

Mr. Chris Patten: Over the past few years there have been many representations from the Overseas Service Pensioners Association and its members, primarily through constituency correspondence. The Government have also taken note of early-day motions tabled by my hon. Friend on this matter.

Mr. Stanbrook: Is my hon. Friend aware that one early-day motion has been signed by no fewer than 245 right hon. and hon. Members, asking the Government to rectify this anomaly as soon as possible? Is it not a fact that the anomaly concerns only a small amount of money and that the number of people involved is small, and is getting smaller in the natural course of events, as most of them are elderly? Is it not a matter of honour for the Government to rectify this anomaly? Will my hon. Friend press for funds to enable him to do justice to these deserving people?

Mr. Patten: I think I am right in saying that the matter relates to between 5,000 and 6,000 pensioners. The estimated cost — it is only an estimate — is about £6 million a year. We are keeping the matter under careful review. I am afraid that, so far, the Government have not felt able to accommodate this extra commitment. I am sorry to have to tell my hon. Friend that I cannot add anything substantive to what my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs — the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar) — said in the debate last July.

Ghana

64. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what United Kingdom contribution will be made to the Ghanaian Government programme of action to mitigate the social costs of adjustment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The United Kingdom helped the Ghanaian Government to draw up their programme of action to mitigate the social costs of adjustment — PAMSCAD. Following the recent conference on the programme we shall be discussing with the Ghanaian Government ways in which we may use our substantial aid to Ghana to contribute to PAMSCAD's objectives.

Ms. Mowlam: As the Minister has previously voiced his support for the debtor nations that adopt programmes like PAMSCAD to help the poor in their own countries, will he say whether, on such an important programme, the Government would consider extra cash outside the bilateral aid that he has mentioned?

Mr. Patten: So far we have contributed almost £50 million for the support of the economic reform programme in Ghana. I envisage our making a further substantial commitment before too long. A health sector mission will visit Ghana in March, and I hope that some of its proposals on the development of primary health care and mother and child health will make a considerable contribution to PAMSCAD, which is so valuable and such a model for other countries.

Bilateral Aid (Country Programmes)

65. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in adopting the recommendations of the second report from the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on "Bi-Lateral Aid (Country Programmes)."

Mr. Chris Patten: The Government welcomed the second report from the FAC, and its reply (Cm. 225) is a detailed response to the Committee's recommendations.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that it is unfortunate that the Department of Overseas Development has many millions of pounds at its disposal for the assistance of what are, in effect, industrial exports? Although some of those exports may have a development element, would it not be better if the sums spent for that purpose were deducted from the Pearson targets or any other percentage related specifically to overseas aid?

Mr. Patten: I thought that our response to the FAC on that point was overwhelmingly convincing.

Comic Relief

68. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government will match, pound for pound, the money raised by Comic Relief.

Mr. Chris Patten: I should like to congratulate the organisers of Comic Relief on their magnificent effort. We attach great importance to the work of the voluntary agencies. That is why we have increased, by 50 per cent. to £9 million next year, the support of the joint funding scheme, which matches pound for pound the cost of agreed projects.

Sir Russell Johnston: That is not exactly an answer, as the Minister knows.

Mr. Skinner: Of course it is an answer, but it is a lousy one.

Sir Russell Johnston: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) as always. Will the Minister specifically match pound for pound the amount raised by Comic Relief and give a Government commitment, which would surely have a positive effect on any future voluntary efforts, to match pound for pound the money raised for overseas aid in this way?

Mr. Patten: If we were to do what the hon. Gentleman suggests—I accept that it might be a headline-making gimmick—it might limit the amount of money that we provide to the Horn of Africa. So far, taxpayers' generosity has exceeded that of those who contributed so magnificently to Comic Relief. As taxpayers, we have contributed almost £36 million to the relief operation in Ethiopia. When I was in Sudan recently I announced an extra £15 million worth of support for Sudan, in addition to the £10 million that we made available just before Christmas.

Miss Lestor: I acknowledge the contribution that the Government have made to Ethiopia and other areas. Does the Minister agree that the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) was asking for extra money—not that the Government should merely match what has already been given—to stimulate interest in this country? Comic Relief—and the little effort that was made here—captured the imagination of thousands of people. Will the Minister reconsider his action, bearing in mind that such action from him, in addition to what is already being given, would help to keep people's minds on the problem and encourage them to give more generously?

Mr. Patten: Of course I welcome the interest that was shown in the contributions to Comic Relief. I repeat that we shall be doing more in Ethiopia and Sudan. We shall be adding to what we have already given from a growing programme. We have increased by 50 per cent. our support for the pound-for-pound joint funding scheme with non-governmental organisations.

Kampuchea

67. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding the provision of development assistance for Kampuchea.

69. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current level of United Kingdom overseas aid to Kampuchea; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patten: I have received a number of representations. As I said on 1 February, in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), it would, in the Government's view, be wrong in principle to give development aid to the illegitimate and unrepresentative regime in Phnom Penh. We should nevertheless be prepared to consider providing humanitarian assistance in the context of any internationally organised relief effort. We provided nearly £1·5 million in 1987 to help Cambodians who have sought refuge in the camps along the Thai-Cambodian border.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Does the Minister agree with the views given in the White Paper that was produced by Oxfam, specifically regarding Kampuchea? Does he agree that, if people are living in poverty and if there is infant mortality and problems of personal health, they are entitled to our aid and assistance without any regard to the political views that a minority in those countries might express?

Mr. Patten: I do not agree with Oxfam on this matter. I agree with the 116 countries, in addition to the United Kingdom, which have endorsed the position taken by the United Nations General Assembly.

South of Scotland Electricity Board (Coal Imports)

3.32 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the decision of the South of Scotland Electricity Board to allow tenders for the importation of coal."

It is a specific matter as it refers to the two coal-fired power stations in Scotland, at Cockenzie and Longannet.

It is important because the coal from the Lothian coal field—from the pits at Monktonhall and Bilston Glen—goes to Cockenzie. The Clackmannan coalfield, which is based largely in my constituency, with mines at Castlebridge and Solsgirth, is dedicated exclusively to the production of coal for Longannet power station. The latter is known as the Longannet complex, and all the coal output is dedicated to the station. It is taken there by conveyor belt from the underground face to the furnaces.

The importation of coal from abroad, which is purchased on the spot market at prices which may, in the short term, be lower than those charged by British Coal, will result in the closure of the Scottish coalfield, the loss of 4,000 jobs directly and many thousands indirectly.

The matter is urgent because the closing date for tenders is today. Last Thursday my hon. Friends and I met the Minister of State, Scottish Office, but he refused to intervene.

The Scottish Office is responsible for the operation of the SSEB. The buck stops at the Secretary of State for Scotland. That is why he should be called to account today, before the electricity board makes a decision that would have dire consequences for the Scottish economy and is due more to the rush to privatisation and the personal aggrandisement of a few than for the protection of the consumer, the continuity or supply or the jobs of my constituents and those of my hon. Friends.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the decision by the South of Scotland Electricity Board to seek tenders for the importation of coal and its consequences on the Scottish coalmining industry."

I listened with care to what the hon. Member has said but I regret that I do not consider that the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20 and I cannot, therefore, submit this application to the House. No doubt he will find other ways of bringing it to our attention.

Master of the Rolls

3.35 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether you could give the House some advice on the rules in "Erskine May" about hon. Members criticising judges. The matter arises out of an early-day motion, of which you will be aware, in the names of myself and certain of my hon. Friends in relation to the Master of the Rolls, Sir John Donaldson, after his judgment in the "Spycatcher" case. I subsequently wrote to the Prime Minister about this matter, and then, to my surprise, I received a letter from Sir John Donaldson. I had copied my letter to the Prime Minister to Sir John Donaldson. He wrote to me and told me that he had written to the Prime Minister. Sir John Donaldson, the Master of the Rolls, has gone outside what he said in the court and, as it were, entered the affray.

As I understand the rules of the House, we may attack judges only by way of an early-day motion, but if a judge were to go outside the courts—for example, if a judge were to launch a criticism of a Member of Parliament in relation to his judgment in a newspaper article—the emeritus professor of law at the London School of Economics, John Griffiths, says that that might well place a totally different complexion on things.

I ask you to look at the matter, Mr. Speaker, to see whether, in view of the fact that the Master of the Rolls, Sir John Donaldson, has gone outside the courts by writing to myself and the Prime Minister about his judgment, we may criticise him on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member is quite right to say that it is not open to hon. Members to criticise a judge, except by an early-day motion. He has correctly done that. What he alleges—the possibility of a newspaper article—is pure speculation at the moment. I have no knowledge of that. I shall look carefully at what the hon. Member said.

Mr. Dennis Skinner: (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In reply to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) you mentioned the possibility of letters, and so on. It is not a question of speculation.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the House did not misunderstand me. I was referring to the possibility of an article in the newspapers.

Mr. Skinner: That is exactly the point that I was making. It is not a possibility, and it is not speculation.

The Master of the Rolls, Sir John Donaldson, has brought the matter into the public domain. He wants to have his cake and eat it. We are not allowed to criticise judges on the Floor of the House, because they are not able to criticise Members of Parliament except in a court of law. If judges have the right to attack Members of Parliament outside the courts, we should have the right to attack judges in the House. That is the point that my hon. Friend made. It was not about a speculative effort. It is about the fact that Sir John Donaldson has put it in writing and put it in the public domain.

Mr. Speaker: As I understand it, if I heard the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr.

[Mr. Speaker]

Sedgemore) correctly, the letter was written to the Prime Minister. It is not a question of its being in the public domain.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. What about retired judges, or judges who have gone to the House of Lords? For example, last night I watched Lord Denning in a television programme, "Rough Justice". He said that it is unfortunate that some innocent people are in prison—it is just too bad. Am I not allowed to criticise Lord Denning for making such an idiotic statement? If innocent people are in prison, they should be released. If "Rough Justice", or any other television programme, helps that end, surely it is important for democracy and the rule of law.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows the rules about that, too. Peers—Lord Denning is a peer—may be criticised only by motion.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), did you not make it clear that the letter was not in the public domain? Surely a Prime Minister's letter written, as I understand it, to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) is in the public domain. This is not exactly a peripheral matter, as some hon. Members seem to think. The Master of the Rolls has gone on record as saying that certain actions that the rest of us might consider illegal are legal in relation to the security services. That is a highly controversial statement, and to say that his letter is not in the public domain is giving the benefit of the doubt away from Parliament.

You, Mr. Speaker, have been the protector of Parliament. Do you not think that, in this context, you should see your role as the protector of the House of Commons against a Master of the Rolls who is doing what no other Master of the Rolls has done in the history of the office?

Mr. Speaker: I have already said that I will look into the matter, and I will do so.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It cannot be correct, as you said in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), that we cannot criticise judges when they make such extraordinary statements. Yesterday Lord Denning appeared on a television programme and engaged in an argument. Any hon. Member should be entitled to make any comment that he wishes about Lord Denning or any other judge.

Secondly, is it not true that, whether they are judges or not, it is perfectly open to Members of this House to criticise members of another place? They must do it in certain ways, but they are entitled to do so.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, will you make a statement on the subject to the House tomorrow? Lord Donaldson's judgment was an exceptional event. He said that something that is happening now is beyond the law and he called on Parliament to regularise it. Something is happening that is a breach of the law and he is inviting Parliament to change it. That is not a judge acting as a judge. It is a judge acting as a politician and saying, "We want the matter to be decided by Parliament."

Will you make a statement on those three matters to the House tomorrow? If the rulings were upheld, it would be a grave infringement of the rights of debate in the House.

Mr. Speaker: I have already said that I will look into the matter, and I will do that. As for Lord Denning, the question is whether he was acting in his official capacity, or in another capacity, but I shall look into that matter, too.

European Court of Justice

3.42 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Moving from judges in the United Kingdom to judges elsewhere, you will be aware that the next business on the Order Paper relates to the appointment of judges to the European Court and its extension. Can you advise me whether, under Standing Order No. 102, if more than 20 hon. Members stand in their places, the debate on that document will be on the Floor of the House and will not be referred to a Standing Committee, as the Government wish?

Mr. Speaker: What the hon. Gentleman says is correct, but I am informed that that motion will not be moved.

Local Government Finance Bill (Allocation of Time)

3.43 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: May I anticipate the hon. Gentleman? I have not selected the amendment in the names of the hon. Gentleman and several other right hon. and hon. Members.

Sir Peter Emery: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for your statement. However, in procedure, is there not a great deal of difference between debating a matter and testing the support of the House for a matter? On this matter of principle, how can the House reach a decision? On the Education Reform Bill, an exactly similar amendment, which you agreed was in order and which was tabled by members of the previous Procedure Committee, was not selected.

This amendment, which tries to regulate the position, is supported not only by my inferior self, but by a previous Leader of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), a previous leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), the deputy leader of the Liberal party, the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and other distinguished right hon. and hon. Members. The amendment has not been selected. How, therefore, on this most important matter of timetabling, which is a limitation of Members' rights—there cannot be anything much more important than that—can we ensure that the principle set out in the amendment is not just debatable —we realise that it can be debated—but can be forced to a Division? Surely it is not otiose that we force the Government to a particular point rather than accept their assurances or intentions. Must that not make Members look to you, Mr. Speaker, to ensure their rights against the might of the Government? How can we do that if we cannot vote on the matter?

Mr. Speaker: I imagine that every Business Committee considers a Bill with a view to ensuring that every part of it is debated. That is the object of the Business Committee.

Sir Peter Emery: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May we have that as an official ruling in "Erskine May"? At present that is not the case, and it would be a most important new step if the Business Committee always sought to ensure that every part of the Bill was debated.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter to be included in "Erskine May".

3.46 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:

Committee

1.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the Bill is allocated shall report the Bill to the House on or before 24th March 1988.

(2) Proceedings on the Bill at a sitting of the Standing Committee on the said 24th March may continue until Ten p.m., whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 25th March 1988.

Report and Third Reading

2.—(1) The proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in four allotted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten p.m. on the last of those days; and for the purposes of Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) this Order shall be taken to allot to the proceedings on Consideration such part of those days as the Resolution of the Business Committee may determine.

(2) The Business Committee shall report to the House its Resolutions as to the proceedings on Consideration of the Bill, and as to the allocation of time between those proceedings and proceedings on Third Reading, not later than the fourth day on which the House sits after the day on which the Chairman of the Standing Committee reports the Bill to the House.

(3) The Resolutions in any Report made under Standing Order No. 80 may be varied by a further Report so made, whether or not within the time specified in sub-paragraph (2) above, and whether or not the Resolutions have been agreed to by the House.

(4) The Resolutions of the Business Committee may include alterations in the order in which proceedings on Consideration of the Bill are taken.

Procedure in Standing Committee

3.—(1) At a sitting of the Standing Committee at which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee the Chairman shall not adjourn the Committee under any Order relating to the sittings of the Committee until the proceedings have been brought to a conclusion.

(2) No Motion shall be made in the Standing Committee relating to the sitting of the Committee except by a member of the Government and the Chairman shall permit a brief explanatory statement from the Member who makes, and from a Member who opposes, the Motion, and shall then put the Question thereon.

4. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which Clauses, Schedules, new Clauses and new Schedules are taken in the Standing Committee but the Resolutions of the Business Sub-Committee may include alterations in that order.

Conclusion of proceedings in Committee

5. On the conclusion of the proceedings in any Committee on the Bill the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.

Dilatory Motions

6. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be made in the Standing Committee or on an allotted day except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Motion under Standing Order No. 20: extra time

7. If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Private business

8. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Conclusion of proceedings

9.—(1) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or the Business Sub-Committee and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new

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Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment or Motion is made by a Member of the Government;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded; and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(3) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time;

(b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(4) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

10.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made in the House by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order (including anything which might have been the subject of a report of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee) shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion moved at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving.

11. Nothing in this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order or Resolution applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order or Resolution, or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Recommittal

12.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on Consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings, at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of recommittal.

(2) On an allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation

13. In this Order

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day or is set down for consideration on that day;

"the Bill" means the Local Government Finance Bill;

"Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee" means a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee as agreed to by the Standing Committee;

"Resolution of the Business Committee" means a Resolution of the Business Committee as agreed to by the House.

The House will be well aware of the importance of the Local Government Finance Bill to which this motion seeks to apply a timetable. The objectives of the Bill are well known. They are, first, to abolish the injustices of the present domestic rating system; secondly, to make local authorities more accountable and responsive to their electors; and, thirdly, to provide much needed protection for business ratepayers. The Bill will achieve these objectives through the replacement of domestic rates by the fairer community charge, the introduction of a simpler and more stable system of paying revenue support grants to local authorities, and the establishment of a uniform national business rate.

This is not the time or the occasion to go into the details of this measure, but I will make some general comments. The present system of local government finance, where 20 million of the 35 million electorate make no direct contribution to the cost of local services, is not an equitable one, and can lead to irresponsible local authorities of the type that we have so regrettably seen in many of the areas controlled by the Labour party. Moreover, half of local revenue is raised from businesses which are defenceless against exploitation by these same authorities.

Our proposed community charge will introduce the accountability which is currently lacking. All electors, not just a minority, in a local authority's area will have a close personal and financial interest in their council's performance, and will therefore be more concerned that necessary services are provided efficiently. Local democracy should be much strengthened by the Bill.

Mr. Simon Huges (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the Leader of the House say how businesses will have a greater say after the legislation, given that they will have absolutely no influence on their local rate? Their only influence will be on the Government, and Governments can be just as arbitrary and unlistening as local government.

Mr. Wakeham: Local businesses have no vote and no great influence—[*Interruption.*] In some areas they may do, and in some areas they do not. We believe that businesses will have more influence through a uniform rate applied throughout the country, which will bring much needed relief to some parts.

Even the Labour party admits that local democracy——

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): The Leader of the House does not seem to understand what the Bill is doing. At present, every local authority has a statutory obligation to discuss the implications of its local budget with the local business community. That obligation is wholly removed by the legislation and there will be no requirement on local authorities to discuss matters with the local business community.

Mr. Wakeham: If some local authorities had exercised their statutory responsibilities and consulted and listened,

we might not have got into the difficulty in which we now are. The hon. Gentleman goes right to the heart of the problem. The Labour party admits that local government democracy will be strengthened by the Bill. I quote from the Labour pamphlet, "Labour Councils in the Cold", issued by the Labour Co-ordinating Committee. It states that one of the effects of the community charge would be that

"when the local council wants to carry out a programme of service expansion, local people will no longer be cushioned by increased business rates and rate support grant. They will want to know that increased expenditure is well spent".

They will indeed. It is such a pity that the Labour party seems to regard that as a drawback.

Our proposals for replacing domestic rates have long been public knowledge. More than two years ago, the Green Paper "Paying for Local Government", published in January 1986, set out the broad policy now embodied in the Bill. There was widespread consultation on the Green Paper and more than 1,200 responses were received during the 10 months that followed. Separate documents were subsequently published on the community charge, non-domestic rating, the new grant system and the mechanism for appeals.

Moreover, we put our proposals explicitly to the country. Our manifesto for the 1987 general election stated:

"we will legislate in the first Session of the new Parliament to abolish the unfair domestic rating system and replace rates with a fairer community charge."

That commitment was the culmination of a long search for a replacement for domestic rates and was subsequently endorsed in resounding fashion by the electorate. This undertaking was renewed in the Queen's Speech at the opening of Parliament, and the proposals were approved by the House when it gave the Bill a Second Reading by 340 votes to 253.

The House had the opportunity on Second Reading to discuss the principle of the Bill at considerable length, for about 12 hours in all. Since then, more than 72 hours have been spent in Committee in detailed consideration of the community charge alone. So far the Committee has discussed 16 clauses and one schedule, plus five new clauses and a new schedule. More than nine hours were spent debating the 21 non-Government amendments to clause 1, which runs to only five lines. Sixty-seven non-Government amendments were tabled dealing with exemptions from the community charge, set out in clause 2, with 15 hours of debate.

I do not deny that the Bill deserves careful consideration, but so far only 21 clauses, in 72 hours, have received such careful attention.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Can the Leader of the House tell us why it was more than 100 hours before the guillotine was introduced on the Scottish legislation in the last Parliament, and longer before it was introduced on the Rates Bill, of which only six clauses had been debated before the guillotine was introduced? Why is this the earliest guillotine introduced for a local government finance measure, after less time for consideration? Is it because the Government cannot bear to listen to the arguments?

Mr. Wakeham: That is the substance of my speech. Bringing forward the guillotine earlier will ensure that the Bill in total is better discussed in Committee, which is exactly what my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), my predecessor as Leader of the House, and other right hon. and hon. Gentlemen want.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): How many Government amendments have we discussed in Committee? I am sure the right hon. Gentleman will acknowledge the Government's inefficiency in drafting the Bill.

Mr. Wakeham: I have no doubt that there were plenty of Government amendments. I have no doubt that they were wise amendments, based on having listened to the debate and having taken notice of it. That shows a proper consideration of the Bill in Committee, which is something that we all want. I hope that I shall set a timetable that will allow further Government amendments, should they be necessary, and time for Opposition amendments, which may not be quite as helpful.

I fear that we do not have available the 400 hours in Committee that would be necessary at the pace that we are going to deal with the remaining 116 clauses and 11 schedules to the Bill. I do not believe that such time would be necessary even if it were available—first, because the essence of our proposals is in part I of the Bill and has already been the subject of wide-ranging debates, and secondly, because I am not wholly convinced that the best possible use has been made of the hours spent in Committee debate. I would not be alone in the House in questioning the worth of discussing eight amendments from the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) which sought merely to amend the name of the community charge, particularly when the hon. Gentleman admitted that their acceptance would not alter his attitude to the Bill.

We have to ensure that there is opportunity for due and structured consideration of all the provisions in the later parts of the Bill. They deal with complex and important issues, such as the revenue support grant and non-domestic rates, which are an integral part of the reform of local government finance. I am concerned today, as I was in bringing forward a timetable motion for the Education Reform Bill, to provide sufficient time for all the issues in the Bill to be properly discussed by this House before it goes to another place. That is the intention of the timetable motion.

The motion would require the Committee to complete its consideration by 10 pm on 24 March. If the Committee continues to sit on the same basis as it has been doing at present, there would be time for more than 80 hours further consideration in Committee. As is customary, it would be for the Business Sub-Committee, which has the important task of allocating the amount of time for discussion of each part of the Bill within the total days available, to decide whether the present pattern of sittings should be maintained or might sensibly be increased. In this context, the amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and other distinguished hon. Members, although not selected, will be a helpful reminder to the Business Sub-Committee of what is expected of it.

In addition to the Standing Committee's consideration, a further four days on the Floor of the House have been allocated to the Bill's remaining stages. The Business Committee would provide for this time to be used

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appropriately to allow discussion of all the most important issues. No Leader of the House can consistently introduce timetable motions, each of which is the most generous for 20 years. However, I hope that hon. Members, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton, who are concerned to see proper discussion of all a Bill's provisions in this House, will agree that the generous amount of time provided and the stage at which it is brought forward put this motion in the same class as the one that the House approved three weeks ago for the Education Reform Bill.

This is not

"a timetable which ends real debate, with backbench independence stifled"—

to quote a leader last week in a newspaper that has recently proved its devotion to the alliance by splitting itself in half. This is not the old-fashioned guillotine intended abruptly to cut debate, such as we saw 16 times in fewer than three years when the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) was Leader of the House. It is, rather, a carefully planned timetable motion and I am moving it early enough in the Committee stage to ensure that all parts of the Bill receive parliamentary scrutiny. I am sure that the House would not wish another place to be able to complain that this had not been done.

In this case, there is another reason for bringing forward arrangements expediting and structuring discussion of the Bill. It is the task that faces local authorities in implementing it. In little more than 12 months, local authorities will be preparing to canvass their communities for the community charges register and will be getting their registration, billing and collection systems in place. To do this effectively, they need sufficient time for planning.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): As the Bill is apparently the flagship of this Administration, can the right hon. Gentleman explain why his right hon. Friends the Members for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) and for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), his hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) and his immediate predecessor as Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), are vigorously opposed to the poll tax? As those are just a few of the many Conservative Members who are opposed in principle to the poll tax, how on earth can the country be convinced that this measure is right? Is it surprising that the latest opinion poll shows that over 60 per cent. of people are opposed to the poll tax?

Mr. Wakeham: I noticed that the hon. Gentleman just picked a few names out of a hat in any old fashion. These proposals were very much part of our election manifesto and have been endorsed in the House by a substantial majority. I do not see present any of my right hon. Friends that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. *[Interruption.]* I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) is present. The vote will show that many hon. Members are in favour of the timetable motion.

We are doing what we can to disseminate information to local authorities, as early as possible, but they cannot implement the charge without the certainty that comes from the legislation and regulations made under it. Many details remain to be prescribed in regulations, and we cannot do that until the legislation has passed through the parliamentary processes. The longer this is delayed, the more difficult we make the task of the local authority practitioners who have the responsibility to their community of making the system work. If time were lost needlessly in Parliament, the local authorities' task would be made unnecessarily onerous.

I commend the motion to the House, in the belief that it provides for measured consideration of the Local Government Finance Bill in the context of the timing constraints within the parliamentary framework, and those outside which I have just outlined. If I may borrow a phrase from the Labour Members:

"the country is crying out for change".

Local electors and local businesses are crying out for a change from an unfair system of local revenue raising, to a more equitable one that will increase local government accountability and strengthen local democracy. The Bill will give them such a change, and the motion will ensure that the remaining clauses of the Bill will be adequately considered and that the community charge can be implemented, as planned, in two years' time.

4 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): The House could be forgiven for acknowledging that there is a certain predictability about timetable debates. The Leader of the House explains exactly why debate on a crucial issue should be restricted. It is the Opposition's job to explain exactly why debate should go on for considerably longer. It is my job to explain why there should be far more consideration of the Bill, although the House might understand why some Opposition Members adopt a certain ambivalent attitude when we consider what the public at large think about the poll tax.

The Times on 21 January this year stated:

"Tories alarmed at growing opposition to the poll tax".

The figures show that well over two thirds of the electorate are concerned about the effect of a poll tax. Even better, last week, *The Independent* mentioned

"Strong opposition to poll tax from voters in marginals."

I have to declare an interest. I have a long-standing personal interest in the activities of voters in key marginals. I am delighted to see that, according to the poll in the *Local Government Chronicle*, a substantial majority of voters in key marginals are wholly opposed to the poll tax, identifying it as an unfair tax. Indeed, many Conservative Members fully appreciate the unfairness of that tax.

The Secretary of State for The Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to one of the conclusions of that particular poll, which stated:

"The Conservatives still hold a clear lead in these key areas."

Mr. Grocott: It refers to Conservative-held marginals. As the Secretary of State will appreciate, 4 per cent. of the electorate were willing to change their vote. It may not be many to him, but it is extremely important to some hon. Members.

I could not have put it better than the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) who said on Second Reading—this is what we shall be telling the country in the months and years ahead—

"Responsibility for the poll tax will now be targeted precisely and unavoidably at the Government who introduced that tax. That tax will be known as a Tory tax."—*[Official Report*, 16 December 1987; Vol. 124, c. 1141.]

We shall make sure that no one remains in any doubt about that.

It might be in the interest of the Labour party to give the Government some assistance. When the poll tax proposals slip through people's doors, that will be good news for us. However, not for the first time, I ask my hon. Friends to put the public interest before the party's interest and ensure that the Bill is thoroughly scrutinised. If that means some delay, so be it.

There is no doubt about what will be that impact of the poll tax when it happens, whether or not we accept the guillotine motion. There has not been sufficient time to debate the Bill. As has already been explained, only 16 clauses have been debated and we have reached only the first schedule to the Bill.

It should be remembered that there is no precedent for such a Bill in England and Wales, although one exists in Scotland. I am sure that if some of the Conservative Members form Scotland who voted for the guillotine on the Scottish Bill just over a year ago were present today, they would advise their hon. Friends whether there should be another guillotine.

The tax is unique in its scale. Never before has a new tax been introduced which will directly affect 30 million of our fellow citizens. Never before has there been on such a scale a new tax that is unrelated to people's ability to pay or to the quality of services that they receive. Never before has a tax been introduced which is redistributive not in the way that most 20th-century economists understand the term, but in a notion unique to the Tories under Thatcherism—not through a tax system which helps the poor, but through a tax system which redistributes the burden from those best able to pay to those least able to pay. That is a novel concept. Never before has a tax been introduced which will cost twice as much to collect as the system which it replaces.

The poll tax is unique and requires unique parliamentary consideration. It is also unique in the unanimity of opposition to it. It would not be a bad parliamentary principle if the consideration that the House gives to legislation was at least related to the degree of opposition to it in the country. The opposition to the poll tax is unanimous.

Only last Wednesday, my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) asked the Secretary of State for the Environment

"how many letters he has received from members of the public *(a)* in support of the community charge and *(b)* opposed to the community charge."

I should have thought that that was a fairly simple question which might have a fairly simple answer. However, the Secretary of State replied:

"A summary of 1,271 responses received . . . was placed in the Library . . . Since then my Department has received a large number of letters commenting on specific aspects of our proposals and requesting further information." —[*Official Report*, 17 February 1988; Vol. 127, c. 960.]

I bet that he has received further comments and proposals, but he did not give a straight answer to a straight question. The Secretary of State has had an expensive education —I was going to say "a good education". I am sure that he is capable of giving a straight answer to a straight question, but we have not heard how many people are against the poll tax, in terms of the representations received, and how many people are in favour of it.

Everyone is against the poll tax. On a free and secret ballot, I am sure that many Conservative Members would vote against it. All the professionals in local government are against it. In repeated survey of local government finance since the war the poll tax has had hardly a mention as a serious way of financing local government. It appears by a fluke at this very late stage.

Again I quote the right hon. Member for Henley, who on Second Reading said:

"by the time that consultation period on the Green Paper was over, the idea of a poll tax had no friends. It was dismissed by the Cabinet with hardly a backward glance. I wish that I could come to the House and say that I won the argument, but in truth there was no argument."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1987; Vol. 1432, c. 1138-39.]

That sums up the view of the right hon. Gentleman, which is shared by many Tories.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that that followed the Layfield commission, which is broadly accepted by both sides of the House as the most definitive analysis of local government finance which did not find it worth considering?

Mr. Grocott: The hon. Gentleman knows that repeatedly, from the Allen committee in the 1960s through the Layfield report, the Green Paper and the report of the Select Committee on the Environment, that proposal has not received any serious consideration. Least of all has it received serious consideration from those at the sharp end — those who will implement it. In my area of The Wrekin, the district council officers have prepared a report on the costs and problems of the implementation of the poll tax, which says:

"On the assumption that 97,000 adults will be liable to pay poll tax, then an additional 760,000 payments could be received, an increase of 370 per cent. It is envisaged that the increase in workload, due to increases in volume and likely problems with collection, will be massive."

That is one district council's assessment of what will be involved.

Mr. Winnick: Is my hon. Friend aware that in the Select Committee on the Environment, on which the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) and I sit, when there was a clear Tory majority in 1981, there was no vote in favour of a poll tax? Does my hon. Friend agree that if there were a free vote in the Cabinet, only two would be in favour of the poll tax — that fanatic, the Prime Minister, and the Secretary of State?

Mr. Grocott: Strange things happen in Cabinets where Prime Ministers are surrounded by sycophants, and that is one of the problems that we face.

No one, particularly those at the sharp end who will have to deliver the system, is in favour of the poll tax. The opposition to it is near unanimous, and the Bill requires parliamentary scrutiny in view of that fact.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Grocott: No, I will not.

There is another reason why it is essential that we debate this proposition more than we would any normal legislative proposal. This measure, rightly called a poll tax, is a threat to our democratic process. That is not true of most taxes. I do not like VAT, but I do not think for a moment that it is a threat to democracy. Can anyone seriously doubt that the imposition of the poll tax will be a serious disincentive to many of our citizens from registering their right to vote in the normal way? We already know that electoral registers are used for many

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strange purposes. They get sold to finance companies, discount agencies, insurance companies and the rest. Who can doubt that the poll tax man will get his hands on the electoral register? It is inevitable.

I am delighted that the public are in no doubt about what kind of tax this is. In the opinion poll to which I referred earlier, carried out by NOP Market Research Ltd. — a reputable firm — and published in the *Local Government Chronicle*, 77 per cent. of those questioned referred to the tax as a poll tax. Only 2 per cent.—they must have been brainwashed by the Tories in some way — called it a community charge. Overwhelmingly, the public understand it for what it is. It is a tax on the right to vote. It will be forever known as the poll tax, however much the Leader of the House may resent the fact that we tabled amendments about a change to that name.

So far, no Government spokesman has explained the difference between a tax and a charge. Why do they persist in calling it a community charge? Is it just the doctrine that one expects from a Ministry of Truth trying to pretend that a tax is not a tax? By any definition, this is a tax. I dread the Tory propaganda at the next general election. It may say that since the Government have replaced rates with a community charge, there has been a substantial reduction in taxation.

If the Government are honest about calling taxes charges, why do they not introduce a "pay-as-you-earn income charge" or a "value added charge" as a way to pretend that tax does not exist? We should beware if the Government persist in playing with words in this way. The Prime Minister told us in the general election campaign that the Government would not introduce VAT on children's clothes or on food. I know that some of my hon. Friends do not believe that, but even if we take the Prime Minister's words at face value, she did not say anything about the imposition of a value added charge. Perhaps we can look forward to that.

Such a proposal could come only from a Government composed of a Prime Minister surrounded by sycophants who do not even dare to tell her when all of them know that what is being proposed is absurd. This proposal is the product of a Government who think that they can walk on water, but who deserve to sink without trace. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends will insist that the poll tax should get the full parliamentary treatment that it deserves, and that is why I hope they will vote against the guillotine motion.

4.15 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): These occasions always have a casual and friendly character about them, and this afternoon is no departure from that tradition. Although the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) made a speech of some length, and eventually worked himself up to the enthusiasm appropriate for a Second Reading debate, he did not identify the guillotine as the most onerous and most undemocratic imposition upon the House as it deals with one of the most unacceptable Bills that has ever confronted it.

I was pleased that the hon. Member approached the matter in that spirit, because we already know that political hotheads north of the Tweed are talking about non-payment of this tax. Therefore, we are entitled to hear from the Opposition Front Bench right away that such action will have their condemnation, and if they are not prepared to do it formally, the mild and civilised way in which that speech was delivered was a clear sign that they will distance themselves from the activists in Scotland who are proposing to boycott the tax.

I am pleased to have had the chance to sign the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) and I appreciate the order in which the debate will proceed. I hope that on some future occasion we can so arrange our affairs that the amendment, which is in order and has been so adjudged, may be part of our debate in more tangible terms than merely being a matter for discussion.

I shall comment on the terms of the guillotine motion in general. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House on bringing in this guillotine earlier, and on providing rather more time, than has traditionally been the case. This is a welcome evolution, and I hope that it will point to a final conclusion and to the end being sought by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton. That will be to the advantage of the House when dealing with these matters.

In particular, we require all the time that has been mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, because the time already spent has been devoted substantially to the form of the community charge. It has not yet resulted in any major alteration, and that is an oversight which the House must remedy. As ever, in these matters, I travel with some hope, because my right hon. Friend prayed in aid as the precedent for his action today what had been done in respect of the Education Reform Bill. The House will know that, within the last few days, amendments to that Bill have been tabled—amendments of the most far-reaching character, which will have a substantial consequence on the provision for universities.

That is an encouragement to those on both sides of the House who believe that if one decides—it is a decision which I endorsed and voted for on Second Reading—that it is better, in local authority revenue matters, to have a tax on persons than a tax on property, how one elaborates that judgment, that choice and that decision is a matter which belongs properly to Parliament. It is a sector in which the Executive should never be afraid or unwilling to make major adjustments. We have the clear and reasonable example of the Education Reform Bill to inspire us. I say that in the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), who can speak with far more authority than I about the content of the Local Government Finance Bill. Our debate is not so much about the content of the legislation as about the modalities within which the content can be debated.

There is no doubt that many people — I am among them — believe that the idea of a graduated community charge based on Inland Revenue records has more equity and practicability than the proposal before the House. Of course the hon. Member for The Wrekin was right to dwell for a moment on the effects of taxation on the political processes. It was valid for him to claim that certain taxes have become part and parcel of a controversy which has run over time. That tax issue exemplified social and economic judgments that were identified with the political participants. I dare say that that fate will await this tax. It will be several years before its final implication and execution are perceived by the public.

When considering these issues, we are not trying to deal with a short-term battle of consequences in the first half

of a parliamentary Session. I remember the great part that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, who now sit on the Treasury Bench, played in the campaign against the selective employment tax. That campaign was conducted with great skill and eventually that tax foundered in derision and resentment. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment may believe that he is the captain on the bridge of the flagship, but that ship may turn out to be the Titanic.

4.21 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): The earlier part of the comments made by the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) almost led us to believe that he was supporting the Government's action. He spoke in such a persuasive and emollient manner that, for a moment, even one or two of his former colleagues on the Government Front Bench were deceived. However, those of us who know the right hon. Member, know him better than that.

I can summarise the right hon. Gentleman's speech even more abruptly than he summarised it himself. He was trying to tell the Government Front Bench that only a bunch of blithering idiots could have assembled on a Thursday morning and pushed through such a measure as this in the hope that they could carry it on to the statute book. Nothing so demeaning to the House of Commons or so insulting to the electorate would ever have occurred while the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North was a member of that Cabinet. The sooner they put it right the better. That is roughly what the right hon. Gentleman was saying, although he did not use exactly those words.

Mr. Ridley: The right hon. Gentleman does my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) a disservice. He was a member of that Cabinet.

Mr. Foot: When was the decision taken to carry through the poll tax? No doubt the Secretary of State listened to the discussion, although we have been told that there was hardly any discussion about it in Cabinet. If the Secretary of State will reveal secrets about what happened, I dare say that the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North will be eager to respond to protect his reputation. Indeed, no doubt many other dissenting members of that Cabinet would want the right to put their points of view. If the Secretary of State is so eager to jump to the Dispatch Box to claim that the decision was unanimous, the full truth should be revealed, instead of the partial truth that we have come to expect from the Secretary of State, particularly when he is defending a very weak case, as he is now.

I hope that the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North will not leave the Chamber, because I am about to refer to that part of his speech that appeared to support the Government. The right hon. Gentleman began with some quietening references to the whole question of procedure. He commended the procedure motion on the grounds that it did something much earlier than is normally the case with guillotine motions. He is quite right about the timetable arrangements under which these proposals are normally brought forward.

It is the case that this motion, like the previous guillotine motion that the Leader of the House introduced a fortnight ago, is being introduced earlier than usual in the Session. That is one of the reasons why I am opposed to the motion. The hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) has long advocated making the procedure of these discussions cut and dried. He has advocated timetable motions from the beginning of the proceedings on every Bill. He believes that this is the proper way in which these matters should proceed. I am sorry to see that the hon. Member for Honiton appears to have the support of the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North today. He also had the right hon. Gentleman's support a fortnight ago. The right hon. Member for Shropshire, North carries great influence in the House, and I am sorry to see him joining in this campaign.

I signed the hon. Member for Honiton's motion, not because I am in favour of the general proposition, but because I believe that anything is better than anything that this Government ever propose. Therefore, when they propose such a timetable motion, naturally an amendment of this type would limit it and would have some value if it were carried by the House. I am sorry that we will not have the opportunity to vote on the amendment. It would at least have helped to ensure that proper time was allocated to these different subjects under the normal procedure.

I do not believe that it would be good for the House or for the scrutiny of Bills if there were timetable motions on every Bill. I was opposed to the motion when the Chairman brought it from the Select Committee on Procedure and I strongly supported my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) on that occasion. Although I have been known to favour guillotine motions—I shall deal with that in a moment as it has been referred to, just as I shall deal with the Leader of the House's attitude—I am strongly opposed to this motion.

I have participated in more guillotine debates than has any other hon. Member. Indeed, I have participated in these debates since 1945. Sometimes I have been in favour of them, and sometimes not, but there has never been a guillotine motion that could be justified in the way that the Leader of the House is trying to justify this one.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow West): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that when he introduced five guillotine motions in one day he used almost exactly the same form or words as those used by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House? Does the right hon. Gentleman recall saying:

"it is a particular illustration of the malice, folly and absurdity into which right hon. and hon. Members on the Opposition side have got themselves that when we exercise those ancient rights it is cheating and when they exercise them it is freedom."? — [*Official Report*, 20 July 1976; Vol. 915, c.1543.]

Mr. Foot: What I said then was extraordinarily apposite. I would not dream of withdrawing a word. If the hon. Gentleman looks back into history he will see that, as usual, I was stating the case with the utmost moderation. I was trying to restrain my language, while putting my opponents in their place.

Of course I was going to refer to the day when I introduced five guillotine motions. I would not dream of apologising for that. I would be willing to give way to the Leader of the House in a moment. Indeed, I will give way to him now, as he appears eager to speak.

It is 22 February today, and the previous guillotine motion was introduced, I believe, on 1 February. There is a great difference between introducing such motions on 1

[Mr. Foot]

February, 10 February or 11 February and introducing them when I introduced mine. If the Leader of the House knows so much about this, perhaps he will tell the House when I introduced those motions. When was it? He is shaking his head. He rebuked me last week and said that I did not know what I was talking about. Before doing that he should have looked up the date.

Those five guillotine motions were introduced on 20 July. That is quite late in the Session. If we had not had the guillotine motions, all those five measures would have been destroyed. There is not the slightest doubt about that. They were five good measures and, as I have said, if it had not been for the guillotine motions, those measures would never have reached the statute book.

Mr. Wakeham: I was taught that fine words butter no parsnips. When the right hon. Gentleman was Leader of the House, he was responsible for 16 guillotine motions in three years. I shall not go into detail, because he can do that. However, in none of those motions did he allow the four days for Report and Third Reading that are contained in this timetable motion. Also, none of them had more than 10 days for the completion of the Standing Committee proceedings, and there are 20 in this motion.

Mr. Foot: I must introduce the Leader of the House to some of these matters. He must try to grasp the point. If one introduces a guillotine motion in July, it is very different from introducing it in January or February.

If one starts to introduce timetable motions in January or February, one is moving towards the principle, advocated by the hon. Member for Honiton, of saying, "Let us timetable all measures almost from the beginning." Therefore, by subterfuge, the Leader of the House is effectively saying that we will have timetable motions on every Bill but that it will not be done by putting to the House a general motion that upholds the doctrine of the hon. Member for Honiton. They are trying to sneak it through and are attempting to distract attention by spreading great misconceptions about what happened on 20 July 1976, even though they did not have the foggiest notion of the date.

Mr. Wakeham: When the right hon. Gentleman was treating the House to a confidential recollection of those days, I thought that he might have told the House that for quite a number of weeks before that date the then Labour Government did not have a majority and were waiting for a couple of by-election results. Therefore, I am not sure that the right hon. Gentleman's arguments are as convincing as he makes out.

Mr. Foot: I can tell the Leader of the House that I recollect the time much better than he does. I had much better reason for ensuring that the calculations were correct. Some people have said that arithmetic is not always my strongest point. However, I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that I can count the numbers in the House. There were some quite big commotions before that time.

The critical issue is that Governments have the right, in certain circumstances, to introduce timetable motions. It was right in 1976, and I justified the motions at the time. We had a narrow majority, but that was part of the argument. If we had not introduced those timetable motions, all those measures would have fallen. I would be happy to discuss with the House what wonderful measures they were, although I am not sure that that would be in order.

One of those measures was the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Bill, the purpose of which was to protect jobs. One concerned the dock labour scheme, which again was to protect jobs. Another was an excellent Education Bill, which was supported by a potential member of the Social Democratic party. There was another excellent measure to abolish the tied house for the first time in our history. So good was it that not even this Government have dared to seek to repeal it. I hesitate to mention it, because when they see what wonderful measures are still on the statute book, thanks to the then Labour Government and the guillotine motions, they might be tempted to come forward with measures to remove them.

The problem of the tied house was solved by that Bill. It was a problem that had given rise to great injustices over many generations. It was solved partly because we were determined that the Bill would not be wrecked by opposition in the House or by opposition in the House of Lords. However, I do not want to say anything against the House of Lords now, because it might have a convenient role to play on this squalid measure that the Government are trying to push through by this even more squalid motion.

I hope that the Leader of the House will not come forward again quoting that famous day of 20 July. If he does, I hope that he will get his facts right. I know what a forceful figure he is in the Cabinet and how he bangs on the table and says, "We will not have that." I hope that at the next Cabinet meeting he will say, "No more timetable motions before 20 July." If the right hon. Gentleman will do that, he will do a service to the House as well as change the reputation that he may have about how he tells the Government to deal with the business.

One of the real troubles in the House today is that the Leader of the House has had great experience in the House, but in another capacity. Once a boy scout, always a boy scout, and once a Chief Whip, always a Chief Whip. Chief Whips should be elevated, but only with circumspection. Look what happened to a former Chief Whip, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). He got into trouble when he got out of his depth. That should be taken to heart by the Leader of the House, and he should be careful before he moves on to higher altitudes. He should be a little more careful in future and he should read up on history.

The right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewksbury (Mr. Ridley) must have a smattering of history from the public school that he attended. I should have thought that at least one of the Ministers would have said. "You cannot have a poll tax. We cannot introduce a measure that brought about the peasants' revolt." Do Government Members not know about the peasants' revolt? Most of them are well-heeled landlords, so they should know what happened. In that revolt, the Government were defeated. They thought that they could get away with a poll tax. The history is all on the record. If there had been any properly educated members of the Cabinet, that history should have been read out when the measure was first introduced.

An excellent pamphlet on this subject was published. A famous poet laureate wrote a book about it. He said:

"It is not to be wondered that this poll tax should contribute to heighten the discontents of the common people, seeing the heavy taxes . . . had been an intolerable burden on them, not lying so much on the nobility and the gentry as on their copyholders and tenants, who repined at these exactions, as impositions upon them without their own consent."

The poll tax was withdrawn and defeated, and the same will happen to this one. The Prime Minister should look at that example. Not even Richard II was fool enough to say that the poll tax was his flagship, which he wished to protect and sail into port. Everyone should know that what happened to him was partly a result of the poll tax that he introduced.

This is a serious matter. One part of the country—Scotland—has had a better chance than the others of discussing the poll tax. It has had a better chance partly because of the way in which the Bill affecting Scotland was introduced. I am not quite sure why the system should be tried out on the Scots in that way. I am not sure which member of the Cabinet said, "Let us see how they take it north of the border. We can try it on them, and if it works we will try it on the others." I cannot understand why they decided to try it on the Scots; nor can the Scots themselves understand why.

As even the Leader of the House should know, at the last general election the poll tax was repudiated throughout the country, as was the Conservative party in Scotland. If the Government proceed to force the poll tax down the throats of the people of Scotland and of the rest of the United Kingdom they will do great injury to the unity of the United Kingdom. There is great hostility to the tax in Scotland. I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman goes up there, but I can assure him that were he to do so he would get a hot reception. The preservation of the unity of the United Kingdom should be a predominant interest and, on that ground alone, the tax should be withdrawn.

The poll tax will eventually lead to the defeat of the Government. Whether it leads to their defeat before or after an election rests with them, but if a sufficient number of intelligent Members oppose the tax and exercise their vote tonight, even if we do not win, if the majority is cut to 10 or 15, the effect in the other place will be considerable. That includes the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North, whose advice on the matter, as on so many others, was no doubt unwisely rejected by the Cabinet. The poll tax should be defeated before it is brought to the country. By doing its duty tonight, and achieving that result, the House would be doing a service to the nation.

4.41 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) or, as I always remember him, for Ebbw Vale. He was in Ebbw Valean form in his speech. It was delightful in its charm and historical references, but in many ways it was entirely out of touch with what is happening in the country and with what will happen in the future when the Bill is enacted.

I do not wish to do as some other speakers have done and conduct a Second Reading debate yet again on the community charge. We are dealing with a timetable motion. I listened carefully to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House when he said that sufficient time would be provided for due and structural consideration of all parts of the Bill. That is part of my contention and what the Procedure Committee has been pressing on the House for many years.

The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent was doing me a disservice when he suggested that I had always advocated a timetable motion since the introduction of the legislation. I did not suggest that, nor did the Procedure Committee, and it would be wrong for the House to have that impression.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I appreciate that my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), as a member of the Procedure Committee, does not wish to advocate that, but that is precisely what we have had on the Bill. Proceedings in Committee were a great pleasure because of the free-going debate between both sides, instead of Conservative Members sitting like stuffed ducks on the Back Benches. The debate has been good-natured from the start. In the early stages of the proceedings, it was rumoured that there would be a guillotine. As a result, hon. Members felt encouraged to participate in a debate which otherwise would not take place in Committee.

Sir Peter Emery: I am delighted to hear the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) about the pleasures of serving on the Committee. However, nine amendments were tabled in respect of the title of the Bill, so that scarcely seems to represent free-ranging and massive debate about the Bill and associated procedures. We have spent 72 hours on the bill and debated only 21 clauses. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said, if that pace of jovial exchange continues, we shall need up to 400 hours. I do not know whether my right hon. Friend is right, but I see no reason to contradict him.

Mr. Leigh: Our debates in Committee have not always been so jovial. On one occasion, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) spoke for one hour and 40 minutes on one amendment and repeated himself frequently. I sympathise with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery). Does he agree that, if the motion is passed and 150 hours of debate are granted, the Bill will have been more thoroughly debated than virtually any other Bill before Parliament?

Sir Peter Emery: The Bill will certainly have as long as almost any other Bill before Parliament, but I am not certain whether it will be as adequately debated as I should have wished.

The Procedure Committee is not suggesting that, rather than have the present type of timetable motion the standard motion, with dates and times altered, but otherwise exactly the same as other such motions for a number of years — we should introduce a massive controlling element with all items in the Bill guillotined from the start. The Committee made a helpful suggestion which played very much into the House's way of dealing with legislation.

The only new aspect was that a Business Sub-Committee should be set up, consisting of the members of the Standing Committee, when the Standing Committee was appointed. After 12½ hours of debate, that Standing Committee, presumably with two Whips as members, should consider whether reasonable and proper progress

[Sir Peter Emery]

was being made. If so, that would be the end of the matter. However, if one or other side believed that that was not so, the matter should be decided when the date for the Bill to be reported to the House was known. When that date was known, the Bill should be pushed through with help from the usual channels.

The recommendation of the Procedure Committee clearly states:

"The Business Sub-committee of the Standing Committee shall allocate the time so as to ensure that all parts of the Bill can be adequately scrutinised and every substantive proposal of the Bill considered."

Those are the same words as are in the amendment that has not been selected. That does not necessarily mean that the Committee would debate every clause or amendment, but the major and substantive matters would be debated in Committee.

If, after 25 hours, the usual channels were unable to use their influence to obtain proper progress, the business sub-committee will act, as it will in respect of this timetable motion, to set times for debate of the different parts of the Bill in Committee and in the House. We would not, therefore, have to waste another half-day on another timetable motion.

We have already wasted half a day on a timetable motion on the Education Reform Bill, and there is a great possibility that there will be other timetable motions before the end of the Session. Time on the Floor of the House should be spent on matters which are far more important than a rerun of Second Reading, which is basically what we have had today so far. Time could be much better spent debating major issues which hon. Members want debated and for which the Leader of the House can never find time.

When I first came to the House in the 1960s, a timetable motion created great political divisions. Both sides of the House were full, normal relations between the usual channels were all but broken and we debated the motion for a whole day. It was a matter of high dudgeon. All that has passed. The past 20 years have altered everything, and today we have a rather anodyne debate which gets us nowhere and allows the Government to do what we ought to be able to arrange to do through Standing Orders, as suggested by the Procedure Committee. We could then save time on the Floor of the House and ensure that every contentious issue and important aspect of the Bill was properly debated. That is what the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent wants. Indeed, it appears to be what every right hon. and hon. Member wants.

We ought, towards the end of the 20th century, to begin to have a reasonable command of how we use our time on the Floor of the House and in Committee. The sooner we do that, the better it will be for legislation and the more likely it is that the public will know that every aspect of a Bill has been debated properly.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House hopes that all the issues will be debated properly, but there is no assurance that that will happen. I am sorry that we cannot vote on the amendment which I have tabled. With such an assurance, the Committee might have to sit on Wednesdays and Fridays. The House owes it to the people who have to put up with legislation to ensure that every clause is debated before a Bill comes back to the House on Report. I believe that, sooner or later, we shall have to adopt that view.

4.52 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I agree with the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) and support his amendment, which has been endorsed by two former Leaders of the House — the right hon. Members for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) and for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). My hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has signed the amendment, and my colleagues and I believe that it would be the right way in which to proceed. Because, however, there will not be ordered debate of the Bill and because of the Bill's nature, I strongly oppose the motion.

Nobody has yet mentioned the salient fact that the Bill has 131 clauses and 12 schedules and that we have spent just over 72 hours in Committee spread over 16 sittings. In an intervention, I asked the Leader of the House to make two obvious comparisons. The first was the equivalent Bill for Scotland, for which the guillotine motion was brought in after 101 hours of debate and after 20 of the 35 clauses had been considered. The second was with the Rates Act 1984, which was guillotined after 18 hours of debate when six of the 19 clauses had been debated.

The Leader of the House said that this time the motion is being introduced earlier so that things can be ordered earlier and all the arguments and issues can be considered properly. Observers of the Committee do not leave feeling that the Government have considered either the arguments or the issues. One of the most amazing statements of all was made on Second Reading, when the Under-Secretary of State said:

"My right hon. Friend made it clear early in the debate that the Committee will be delighted to look at any alternative proposals. I am sure that all alternative proposals will be totally unacceptable." — [*Official Report*, 16 December 1987; Vol. 124, c. 1184.]

If that is not an example of closing the mind before hearing the arguments, I do not know what is.

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that some of the 72 hours have been spent by his hon. Friend the Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), who I notice is absent, in what I would call a perambulation around the course and that, at times, he has gone virtually backwards?

Mr. Hughes: I am glad to put on record what my colleagues have achieved. The hon. Gentleman's assertion is untrue, because the one concession that the Government have made has been in response to an amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie). [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] I can provide the column number of the report. It was the only explicit concession that the Minister made, and concerned discretionary rather than compulsory punishment of defaulters by imprisonment. The event was well publicised.

We should consider which parties have moved amendments. Plaid Cymru has moved four, the Liberals have moved 15, Labour has moved 47 and the Government have moved no fewer than 49. It is the Government, whose Bill this is, who have taken up most of the Committee's time and effort. They did not get the Bill drafted properly in the first place, so they are having

to change definitions and introduce amendments and schedules to put the Bill in some presentable shape. If the Government had presented the Committee with a properly drafted Bill, they might have had a better case for asking for a timetable motion to be passed.

Mr. Patnick: How many of the Government's amendments have been moved formally?

Mr. Hughes: Quite a lot, because they were consequential. A Bill which is properly prepared, however, should not have to be amended by the Government in the first few sittings. Exactly the same can be said about other Bills. On the Committee presently considering the Housing Bill, the Minister concedes that not even all the ideas have been thought through, let alone the clauses.

We are presented with a fundamental change in the financing of local government. The Bill is long, but the Government are curbing debate much earlier than has been true of other comparable measures. The Government are rewriting the Bill as they go along, and they are not listening to the Opposition's arguments. Indeed, they are not even listening to their own Back Benchers.

When discussing the Government's failure to accept any amendments, the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North used a wonderful phrase—he said that it must be an oversight. It is not an oversight. The Government have clearly determined to accept no substantive amendments. The true motive of the Secretary of State has been revealed in Committee:

"We do not want one group of people making no contribution while others have to pay for everything. We want everybody to feel that they are making their contribution, however small. That is a move away from a two-class society of payers and takers, to a society where we all pay a little according to our means."

If we all paid according to our means, that might be all right. But, although the means of the Secretary of State and his Cabinet colleagues, for instance, are somewhat greater than the means of others, it is Cabinet members who are among those who on all the evidence will benefit the most.

I wonder whether the use of the word "takers" does not tell us something as well. Is it perhaps not true that the Secretary of State views pensioners who rely on the social services to stay alive as "takers", irrespective of the fact that in the past they may have given their all? Does that not apply to any other local services that are of a redistributive nature? The clear implication of the phrase is that the Bill will redistribute resources to the wealthy from the poor. That is why the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North warned the Government that this might be their Titanic.

It is also clearly a party political measure, and the guillotine is a party political proposal. The Leader of the House said that the Bill was intended to deal with the fact that people vote for the wrong party — he actually mentioned the Labour party — because voters do not have to pay. People often vote for the Labour party, or for my party, in areas of the country where they cannot pay. They do so because they know that we are the only people likely to be able to defend them against a Government who seem to think that they and their views and their circumstances do not matter.

It is not as if the Government had been putting forward intellectually wonderful and convincing arguments to detain the Committee, either. On 26 January, the Secretary of State put the following pearl before the Opposition, whom he possibly regarded as swine, and certainly regards as an unnecessary inconvenience. I get the impression that he regards Parliament as an inconvenience in general, and would like to be able to legislate by decree. Happily, however, after only three Thatcher terms, we are not there yet. The Secretary of State said:

"The Opposition also seem to equate the ability to pay with the concept of fairness, as if it were automatic. I do not believe that it is automatic. No one has said that it is unfair that everyone should pay the same vehicle excise duty or the same television licence fee because they are not related to the ability to pay."

The right hon. Gentleman may not have realised that people have a choice as to whether they have a car or a television. They do not have to have those items. But no one has a choice about whether to pay the poll tax. People will have to pay it even if they do not have a home, or do not have an income. Under clause 2, which defines a main or principal residence, the Government have said that it is not even necessary to have a house. Dossers, tramps, vagrants and travellers have no incomes and no homes, but, say the Government, "We shall make them pay." People have not been deceived by the present Administration, and this is their crowning glory.

I accept that, in comparison with the time allowed for other Bills, four days for Report and Third Reading is generous, and to be welcomed. My objection, and that of my colleagues, is the Government seeking to limit so early, and so substantially, the time given for proper consideration of such a momentous Bill. We had considerably more time to consider the Bill that abolished six metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council, although it did not affect nearly so many people.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman said that he would deal with this point, but I do not think that he has done so. If the timetable motion is passed, we shall have debated the Bill for 150 hours in Committee. I am not aware of many Bills that have been debated in Committee for that long. By passing the motion at this early stage, we shall ensure that all the clauses are properly debated.

Mr. Hughes: I think that I have answered that point, but I shall repeat my answer. I accept that a Bill should be debated in such a way that all parts of it are debated reasonably. My quibble is not with that notion, but with the total length of time provided. For a Bill of this importance, length and complexity, we are not being allowed enough time. I can draw all the comparisons that are available in the record of parliamentary debate on the subject.

The Secretary of State, on 26 January—obviously, it was a fateful day—also said:

"Support for the present rating system is practically zero."
—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 26 January 1988; c. 96-98.]

According to *Public Service and Local Government* of October 1987, an opinion poll revealed that 26 per cent. of respondents supported the current system of rates, while only 14 per cent. supported the community charge. If support for the present rating system is "practically zero", support for the community charge is considerably less.

The *Local Government Chronicle* of 29 January had figures to similar effect:

"Of all those questioned, 45 per cent. would choose to continue with the present rates system and only 21 per cent. would prefer poll tax . . . The only section of the population which favours poll tax over rates is the better off in social class AB, who will in general gain from a flat rate tax."

[Mr. Hughes]

Guess which social class the members of the Cabinet, to a person, belong to!

Despite the Government amendments, the Bill still contains anomalies. Prisoners on remand will be liable for the tax; convicted prisoners will not. Students will receive 80 per cent. relief as of right; student nurses will not. The Bill will legislate against those who care most for the most vulnerable in the community. Already, people are not registering to vote. Today's edition of *The Times* reports that the electoral register in Kensington and Chelsea contains nearly 5,500 fewer names, and the paper says:

"officials estimate that 3,500 of these have been deterred from registering because they believe the electoral roll will be used to enforce the poll tax."

In Glasgow, where preparations for the poll tax are already advanced, 11,000 names have this year disappeared from the register, against an annual drop in previous years of 3,000 to 5,000.

The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent was right to refer to the only other experience that we have had in England of a poll tax. A book by someone called Marie Louise Bruce tells us:

"By 1381 the peasants had a ready-made bonfire of discontents that only awaited a spark to ignite and this came in the form of a new poll-tax . . . it was impossibly onerous. Nevertheless revolt did not follow at once, the peasants tried a more peaceful means of evasion . . . They lied about the number of adults in their families".

They revolted all right, but first they tried to escape an unfair charge.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): There were no rebates.

Mr. Hughes: No, there were not. But, even without communication or a proper Opposition, they saw through the system of an autocratic Government.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: No; I want to reach the end of my speech.

The fact that the poll tax is not connected to people's ability to pay—except in the case of the very poorest—makes it not just a tax on people's votes, but a tax on their very lives. That is objectionable, but entirely consistent with the views of a Government who value property above people. They are willing to tax people who have little or nothing, but leave untaxed the property of those who have something or much.

Unlike many campaigns of opposition from politicians, the growing opposition to the poll tax will eventually win the day. Unusually, there is already an all-party fleet preparing to set sail to defeat the so-called flagship of the third Thatcher attack — "Flagship Futility", as *The Guardian* has called it. "Flagship Folly" would be a better title. The Opposition's job—and in the coming year no political job will be more nationally important in Scotland, England or Wales—is to ensure that as many members as possible of all parties and of none who, unlike the present Government, believe in the community and understand the unfairness of the charge, are the vanguard of the great people's rebellion to axe this new poll tax as they axed the last.

Any Government can ignore the community to an extent. But if they limit discussion and steamroller a Bill through the House without listening to the Opposition or conceding to any better arguments from either side, they risk the realisation in the other place that this legislation is a foolish way to proceed and the determination of the public outside to make their views abundantly clear.

The Leader of the House began his speech by saying that the country is crying out for change. If the Government are determined not to change this legislation, they will certainly pay for the consequences.

5.9 pm

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) can take this as a compliment if he wishes, but I am sure that the Committee would not have made the progress that it has made if he had been deliberating with us.

There is an element of ritual about these debates, as has been said. As far as I can see, the speeches are kept on word processors and remain the same as the parties change. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House might usefully have deleted the standard sentence, "The country is crying out for change," when he spoke about this piece of legislation, because all the evidence that I have seen shows that the more the country learns about the Bill, the less it is crying out for the change.

Having voted against the Second Reading of the Bill, I do not propose to accelerate its passage by voting for the guillotine. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) and my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) have said, the House does not yet have the right procedure for deliberating the Committee stages of a Bill, and I do not propose to vote against the guillotine. Four days on Report seem a generous Government move, and it is only right to put that on the record.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey asked why the Bill was being guillotined at an earlier stage than the equivalent Scottish legislation. I can only assume that the English get round the course slightly more quickly than the Scots. It takes quite a long time to debate a Bill with 139 clauses and 12 schedules and with 44 Members on the Standing Committee. I can accept the mathematical inexorability of the fact that if we continued with our present rate of progress we would be forced at the end of July either to give up our summer recess or to proceed with the legislation.

The more I listen in Standing Committee, the more I think that the Government were right four years ago to dismiss the poll tax. This does not seem a sensible place at which to pitch one's tent and resist, in that this is a procedural motion to enable the Government to have the discussion completed within a reasonable time. It seems sensible on Report, when there are four days for debate, for one to reopen some of the important debates in Committee which have not been satisfactorily resolved.

I do not believe that there has been any filibustering. The more contentious parts of the legislation have been debated in the first two months and, although one hon. Member may have spoken for an hour and 20 minutes, he spoke only once, or perhaps twice, and that should not necessarily be held against him.

Mr. Patnick: Twice.

Sir George Young: It may have been twice, but, if one adds the various contributions, one speech of an hour and 20 minutes may be less than several interventions. One or

two of the interventions by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) from a sedentary position cost the Government no few minutes.

Within the rather harsh constraints of policy, Ministers have been as helpful and as patient as they can be in dealing with the debates. That they are not able to give way on the fundamental inequity of the Bill is not entirely surprising. It is important in the remaining days to discuss clause 18, to which I think we shall come later this week, which deals with the system of rebates. If the Government are to criticise alternative methods of raising local government finance in some detail, it is necessary for them to be more explicit about the details of their scheme as they may affect the poor.

So far there has been substantial progress in Standing Committee. Two of my hon. Friends—one of whom is in his place — who voted for Second Reading have several times spoken against some of the Bill's important principles and on occasions voted against or abstained. The Government have stopped referring to the Bill as a community charge and now refer to it fairly often as a tax. At the heart of the argument against the Bill is the claim that it is not a charge, but a tax. I think that five times last Thursday my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State called it a tax. The moment it is defined as a tax, the question of how it is financed produces some very different answers compared with when one talks about a charge.

The debate in Committee has been basically between equity and accountability. Accountability has become slightly blurred at the edges. The impact of the rate support grant on the community charge will be important. If that is not right, community charge payers can legitimately point to the Government as being responsible for the high charge in their area. Within weeks, the Government changed their perception of how much the local authority in my borough of Ealing should spend. Rate capping now reduces the rates by 25 per cent. rather than 42 per cent. If those are the shifts in the Government's perception of what a local authority should spend, they will have a big impact on the community charge. How will the Government be able to argue that the level of community charge reflects local extravagance when there can be such a variation in rate support grant?

Accountability has also become blurred in the debates about households in which the husband and the wife are out of work. The husband will get the benefit, which includes his wife's contribution, and will have to pay on behalf of both. The Government have argued, without success, that many more people will be brought into the community charge net but, in practice, because of the way in which household finances are constructed, there will be little impact.

Some people have been written out of the script. The little widow and the four wage earners who live next door to her have not appeared for many episodes. There is widespread concern about what has happened to them. I suspect that they are not appearing any more because it emerged in another part of our debate that the community charge was not that important a factor because the bulk of local government would continue to be funded through the rate support grant, which was funded by progressive taxation, and the better off would therefore pay far more than the less well-off. Of course, that argument applied directly to the four wage earners who, it transpired, were paying far more than the little old lady next door and, as a result, all five have been written out of the script.

If the little old lady and the four wage earners have been written out of the script, a new character has emerged—the gardener from Selly Oak. He is almost sitting there in the Committee with us. The gardener from Selly Oak, in some pithy and rather earthy comments, asked why he should pay as much as the visibly prosperous Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark). In a nutshell, those earthy comments, by the gardener from either Selly Oak or Solihull, summarised public perception of the Bill.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): If my hon. Friend is referring, not only to the procedure, but to some of the substance of the debate, I imagine that it is in order to ask him a question. In my constituency, in what is locally called millionaires' row, the equivalent of the local tax would fall by two thirds for the average householder, whereas in the poorest road, where people would not be subject to a rebate system, charges for an average household would increase fourfold. Is that a new system that we can commend with enthusiasm to the waiting public?

Sir George Young: The opinion polls give my hon. Friend the answer that he seeks from me. I am grateful to him for his support for the fundamental argument that the community charge is unfair and should be related to ability to pay. In the remaining stages of the Committee I hope that the Government will explain why revaluation is unthinkable for domestic taxpayers, causing widespread turbulence, but is perfectly all right for the non-domestic sector, which has just woken up to the impact of the policy on it and is writing at some length to the Standing Committee.

A procedural motion is not the best time to pitch one's tent and do battle. More, or less, time in Standing Committee will not determine the measure's future. That will be determined by votes on the Floor of the House, by debate in the country as a whole and by the debates in another place. The guillotine motion injects a note of certainty about the dates and timing, and I welcome that and reserve my fire for the battle next month.

5.19 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I wish to speak against the timetable motion.

When the Leader of the House was making the business statement last week, he should have said not that the Bill was to be made the subject of a guillotine but that it was to be axed and that it was being rejected altogether. If he had taken note and cognisance of the clear public opposition to the Bill, he would have had second thoughts. He should remember that there is considerable opposition within the Conservative party to this proposal. Those Conservative Members recognise the implications of the Bill and have serious doubts about the direction in which we shall be moving if this legislation is enacted.

On Second Reading there were many abstentions, with some Conservative Back Benchers voting against the Bill. That rebellion would have been far greater but for the fact that those holding office within the Government and those hoping to hold office did not dare to show their true feelings.

The Government claim, as did the Leader of the House, that this measure had the support of the public at the general election in June. It would be true to say that the

[Mr. Peter L. Pike]

Tory party gave the poll tax legislation a very low profile. The Government did not make a major election issue out of it. Much of the public were not fully aware of the intentions of this legislation. However, opinion polls have shown that the more they become aware of it the more they oppose it. It must be remembered that if the votes in England and Wales for those parties who clearly opposed this legislation at the last election had been added together it would have shown that there were more people opposed to the poll tax than were in favour of it.

With regard to Scotland, which is at a more advanced stage in this legislation, the message of the voters was very clear and the Conservative party lost many seats. We have often talked about losers and gainers as a result of this legislation, and it is important that we should have done so. To some degree, this point ties in with the intervention of the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). The plain fact of the matter is that the majority of losers will be those who can least afford to lose. That must be a serious criticism of the legislation. A large number of the gainers will be those who least need to gain.

The right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) said that changes should be made to the Bill as it is debated to improve its principle, and, to some degree, to rectify the problems that I have already mentioned. I know that it is of serious concern to him that the Bill does not take into account the ability to pay. That point was also made by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) and other Conservative Members.

I fear that the Government will not take cognisance of those matters during the remainder of the Committee stage. There has been no sign that they accept that problems should be rectified. I believe that the Secretary of State is 100 per cent. committed to the legislation, although former Secretaries of State have opposed it. It has been said that, prior to 1983, the Environment Select Committee expressed opposition to a community charge. It has also been said that the Layfield committee opposed this proposal. Many people who are experienced in the financing of local government have said that it is not the way to rectify the problems with local government finance.

I accept that there are faults and anomalies in the present rating system, and that criticisms can be made of it, but to introduce a system that is worse and less fair is not the way to solve the problems involved. The Government should recognise that fact and axe the Bill.

We should have more time to debate the important, fundamental matters involved in this legislation. Many Government amendments have been tabled, which shows that the Bill was badly drafted. It was said earlier that many of those amendments were moved formally, but it must be remembered that clause 3 has been almost completely rewritten. From being a very short clause in the Bill, it is now a very long one. In addition, an extremely long new clause 4 has been introduced by the Government. The Government have made very important changes to the Bill.

We are aware that the Government originally intended to incorporate provisions in the Bill to enable prison sentences to be passed on those who do not pay the poll tax. Such a measure was not included in the Bill when it was first produced, and at present it is not included. However, when the Minister replied to a debate last week, he made it clear that on Report the Government intended to introduce an amendment enabling a prison sentence to be passed on those who do not pay their poll tax. He made it clear that, unlike other people in prison, they will not avoid their liability to evade the poll tax just because they have been sent to prison for not paying.

By proposing those amendments, the Government have shown that they recognise the complications and difficulties that will exist in collecting the poll tax. It will be difficult to collect and there will be difficulties in compiling the register. The register will change every day, so it will need a mass of workers in town halls throughout the country to keep it up to date as people move from one constituency to another.

The Minister said that registration officers will be able to check with other local authority departments on people who have applied for library cards or grants or who are receiving housing benefit, and check against the electoral register. The Government say that it is not a tax on votes, and I accept that, but the wording that they use makes it clear that if one registers to vote one will become immediately liable to pay the poll tax. However, one does not have to vote to become liable for the tax, because the registration officer will use the electoral roll to ensure that the names shown on it are on the community charge register.

We have debated not only many Government amendments but, at length, two very important principles. The first was the ability to pay; we shall return to that issue during debates on later clauses. I have no doubt that many Conservative Members want to debate that subject at length because there is clear concern about the ability to pay. The other matter that we attempted to deal with was exemptions; we shall want to debate that issue again later in Committee. They are both extremely important issues, and if the ability to pay is not taken into account one must try to give, in a wider way, exemptions to those who cannot afford to pay, if we are to put any sense into this proposal.

As yet, we have not debated the uniform business rate. It is clear that the CBI holds a different view from the Government on this part of the Bill. The National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses Ltd. has written to hon. Members expressing its concern and worries about the implications of the UBR on small businesses if the Bill is not amended.

Many issues must be debated at length. I fail to see that the Bill, even if it is amended, will be good. Although the Secretary of State is committed to the Bill, the Minister, with his legal background, is like a barrister who must defend a case in which he knows that the accused man or woman is guilty of murder, but he deals effectively with his brief, hopes to do well with it, and hopes for better things to come. He will be remembered as the Minister who forced iniquitous and unfair taxation on the people of this country.

If Conservative Members believe that the legislation is wrong and want to see it amended or defeated, I hope that they will support the Opposition and vote against the motion. It is important that the Bill is debated for as long as possible in Committee to try to ensure that, if the Government are determined to use their majority to force it through, regardless of the implications and the fact that it may cost them the next general election, we secure as many amendments as possible to make it work in the best way to minimise damage. We are talking about minimising the damage to society, business and the people who cannot

afford to pay taxation. That is why we need more time to debate the Bill and why it is important that the motion is defeated.

5.31 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): I am grateful for the chance to make a brief contribution to the debate. I hope that the Leader of the House will now consider whether we should have a debate about the procedures of the House, particularly to have a close look at the way in which we handle these timetable motions.

Along with most of my hon. Friends on the Committee, I have sat relatively quietly listening to the arguments by Opposition Members. From the outset it has been clear that Opposition Members are impaled on the horns of a somewhat uncomfortable dilemma. Indeed, the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) made that point clear when he opened for the Opposition today. Opposition Members are by no means clear whether to shoot the fox or merely graze it as it passes on its way.

If the Bill really is the great Satan, as some Opposition Members tell us, if it is the Achilles heel of the Conservative party, no doubt, in their hearts, Opposition Members wish it good fortune as an important and welcome landmark for a longed-for return to Government Benches, and would not wish to detain the Bill overlong in Committee. That is why we have heard some weasel words today on the guillotine motion. That is also why I would not seek to accuse the Opposition of filibustering in Committee.

It is true that we have spent a considerable time—perhaps over-long — in Committee discussing the position in respect of the names of dead people on the register. In addition, great time was taken in discussing the name of the Bill—time that could perhaps have been spent on more important issues. After all, by any other name, a rose is still a rose. We have gone in detail—often too much detail—through all the key matters that have so far been reached.

We have had lengthy discussions about exemptions. We should restrict the number of exemptions to the bare minimum. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been able to say that, in the case of bona fide religious orders in which vows of poverty have been taken—where monks and nuns are outside the system of state support—the community charge will not apply. That is a good example of the reasonableness and flexibility of my right hon. Friend and his ministerial colleagues

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): What does the hon. Gentleman say about those who have not taken vows of poverty, but, by the circumstances in which they live, have had poverty thrust upon them? Would they not be in similar circumstances to those of nuns and monks, who rightly should be considered?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman has almost answered his own point. Such people are covered by rebates. Monks and nuns, who are outside the state support system, have taken vows of poverty and do not receive benefit. They are clearly exceptions to the normal rules.

The principal reason why I support this generous timetable motion is that time will now be specifically allocated to ensure the scrutiny of all parts of the Bill. It may not be widely appreciated outside the House that discussion of clauses relating specifically to the community charge will not really be subject to any guillotine. Only one last substantive issue—rebates—remains to be discussed in Committee, so on the key issue that the Opposition have identified as the most objectionable part of the measure, there will effectively be no guillotine at all.

In spite of the usual head of steam that traditionally accompanies debates of this nature, but which has been markedly absent this afternoon, the Government deserve to secure their business within a reasonable time scale. The Committee has been proceeding somewhat more slowly than its counterpart Committee examining the Education Reform Bill. After all, that Committee reached clause 43 in 88 hours. We have been proceeding at less than half that speed.

Dr. Cunningham: What does that mean?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Member asks what that means. One of the major points that came out of the guillotine debate on the Education Reform Bill——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The House will stick to one Bill at a time. The hon. Member should confine his remarks to the Local Government Finance Bill.

Mr. Mitchell: I apologise for allowing myself to be led up the garden path by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). It tends to happen a great deal in Committee.

We must ensure that the measure proceeds in an orderly, structured, and rapid way. Those of us who were previously involved in inner-city areas, who saw the way in which businesses were treated by Left-wing authorities in respect of rates, and who saw the consequent loss of jobs and employment opportunities as businesses moved elsewhere or simply folded up, must ensure that time is balanced to allow discussion of all the important clauses, including those dealing with the future of the business rating system.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House why it is that the whole range of the business community, from the CBI, representing big business, to small traders, would rather keep the present system than have the system that the Government are introducing?

Mr. Mitchell: That is untrue. Most would readily agree that what we propose is an improvement on what exists. It depends whether they perceive themselves as gainers or losers. In inner-city areas of the type that I was talking about, one would have great difficulty finding any major business man who does not welcome the proposed changes in the system.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Michael Howard): Does my hon. Friend agree that the CBI has specifically said that, although it has reservations about our proposals, it regards them as a considerable improvement on the present system, and that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has totally misrepresented the position?

Mr. Simon Hughes: The CBI has made representations. As long as it does not have to pay so much, it prefers the proposed system. The hon. Gentleman and the Minister know that the business community is opposed to the Bill going ahead unamended. That applies in inner cities just as much as it applies elsewhere.

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. and learned Friend the Minister made the key point in response to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) — that the proposals are widely welcomed as a major improvement on what we have at the moment.

Dr. Cunningham: How can the hon. Gentleman say that the proposals are widely welcomed? They are opposed by the Institute of Directors, the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses Ltd., and chambers of commerce, including the London chamber of commerce, the biggest one in the country. The Confederation of British Industry has major reservations about the proposals. How can the hon. Gentleman construe that as a wide welcome?

Mr. Mitchell: With respect, the hon. Gentleman sows the seeds of his argument on fallow ground. He talked about chambers of commerce. Is he aware that, for example, the Nottingham chamber of commerce, one of the largest of these bodies in the country, is in favour of the terms of the proposals? The list that the hon. Gentleman trotted out will not stand up. My experience in Islington strongly supports the view that, over the years, local businesses were driven out. More generally, business men welcome the changes that are now coming to pass. The stance of Opposition Members would be easier to understand if they were propounding or supporting some alternative structure or formula for financing local government. They are not doing so.

These matters have now been discussed for years. They formed a key part of our election manifesto. The timetable measure strikes the right balance between useful and welcome scrutiny on the one hand, and unnecessary delays on the other. We should now get on with it.

5.39 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): The hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) has just displayed the originality with which he makes his contributions to the Committee by saying that a rose by any other name is still a rose. The subject that we are debating is a gross injustice and remains a gross injustice even when it is dressed up in words such as "community charge". That is why the people of Britain are calling it by the more realistic name of the poll tax and the Government have managed to persuade only a tiny number to use their phrase.

The Government are trying to shorten debate in Committee because they are suffering acute embarrassment. Every day that the Committee meets, more of the absurdities, anomalies, rank injustices and sheer incoherence of the Bill are exposed. All that they can do is repeat what a good thing it is for the classes which it is intended to benefit.

Recently, the Secretary of State for the Environment, in one of his infrequent contributions to the Committee, claimed that the community charge would be an excellent thing for just about everyone. I asked him whether he would come to Maryhill and tell the people what a wonderful thing it was. He riposted, "The hon. Lady should come to the Cotswolds." I accepted his invitation immediately, but did he accept the invitation to Maryhill? Not on your life. He dodged it and allowed the Committee Chairman to propose the next business of the Committee.

Not content to leave matters there, I wrote to the Secretary of State accepting his invitation to the Cotswolds, asking him when and where he wished to arrange a meeting, and asking him whether, in return, he would visit Maryhill. Today, I received a letter from the Secretary of State which I criticise in the same way as we criticise the contents of the Bill. He said:

"I doubt if you would be very welcome in the Cotswolds if you were to speak against my constituents getting relief from their excessive rate burdens!"

"Excessive rate burdens" in the Cotswolds? Who is he kidding? I know what I am doing by seeking an invitation to visit the Cotswolds. I know that I will find there rich, greedy people who are looking forward to benefiting from the poll tax, but I also know that I will find rich, unselfish people who do not wish to impose such a burden on their poorer friends and neighbours. Even in the Cotswolds there will be people whom the legislation will not benefit — but they will hear nothing about that from the Secretary of State. Someone must go there, and I am willing to do so any time he wants.

The Secretary of State went on to say in his letter:

"I would not impose such an unpleasant experience on you. I am far too fond of you!"

I am not at all fond of the right hon. Gentleman. Nor are the constituents of Maryhill, which is why, at the general election, Maryhill returned a Labour Member with a majority of 19,500. The Secretary of State is afraid to come to places such as Maryhill to put over his views, because he knows the sort of response he would be likely to get.

The letter continues:

"So shall we call it all off?"

My response is no, certainly not. My invitation stands, and I want to visit the Cotswolds. The final sentence states:

"The place for us to debate is in Committee Room 10."

That is exactly what we want to do. He is the one who is calling off the debate by imposing a guillotine on it, yet he says the place for us to debate is Committee Room 10. Well, I shall have to do that, since he will not come to Maryhill. I am surprised at the right hon. Gentleman's cowardice in this respect. I thought that the man who came to Clydeside to close our shipyards would not be afraid to come to Maryhill and tell us about the poll tax.

I make a bargain with the Secretary of State. I forewarn him about the points that I shall make if someone invites me to visit the Cotswolds. I shall ask people whether they think it sensible that prisoners on remand will pay poll tax if found not guilty, but will be exempted if they are found guilty. I shall appeal to their common sense.

I shall ask the women in the Cotswolds whether it is fair that they will have to pay the same poll tax as their husbands even if they earn nothing or a half or three quarters of what their husbands earn. I shall ask the women whether they think it fair that a wife will be jointly and severally liable for her husband's poll tax, as he is for hers, regardless of her ability to pay. Indeed, some women will have to ask their husbands to hand over the money so that her poll tax can be paid. Talk about a return to Victorian values!

I shall ask the cost-conscious people — the ones who wish to save money on local government — if it is sensible to introduce a system that will cost twice as much to collect as the present system. I shall ask the people who own second homes whether they think it sensible that they must pay the same standard poll tax whether their little holiday retreat is a country mansion or a small home with an outside toilet.

Above all, I shall ask the people of the Cotswolds whether it is right that the well-off farmer should pay the

same poll tax as his labourer. I shall ask the City fat cats who travel to London every morning whether it is right that they should pay the same poll tax as the milkman, the postman and the man who sells them their tickets at the railway station.

I shall have a great deal to say when I visit the Cotswolds — if anyone asks me — and I shall be interested to hear whether the Secretary of State intends to visit Maryhill.

5.46 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I support the timetable motion. For the past 15 years, during which I have been involved in politics, debate has centred on the fact that the current rating system is unfair and must be replaced. That replacement is almost on the statute book, and it is time that we allowed the opportunity for a full debate on it.

The community charge is necessary because many people will benefit from it, including about 2 million single old-age pensioners. It was a surprise to me to hear the Opposition members of the Committee wishing to deny the benefits to those 2 million old-age pensioners.

We have seen much literature suggesting that the community charge is unpopular. But that has been false literature produced by Labour councils, often at public expense, or by local Labour parties.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Why is the Conservative-controlled Association of District Councils completely opposed to the poll tax?

Mr. Shaw: I am fully aware that many organisations, Conservative and otherwise, have reservations about some aspects of the community charge. But whether others oppose it or not, it is certainly true that the current system is unfair and does not treat people properly. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) said, it is unfair to the old-age pensioner living in a house next door to four wage earners. During my four years on a council, I observed the number of households that did not pay fair rates because they had four wage earners in the family.

The Labour party has stirred up opposition to the community charge, and my constituents have written to me quoting Opposition literature. In reply, I have pointed out that, if the community charge is introduced on this year's figures, it is likely to be £151 in Dover compared with £600 or £700 in Labour-controlled areas, such as Brent, Camden and Islington.

Mr. Pike: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shaw: In a moment.

The key point that I make to my constituents is that it is better to have a well-run borough council and gain the benefit from it than a badly run borough council and suffer the disbenefit. In the Bill we are introducing a system whereby efficient local authorities which care about ratepayers' and taxpayers' money can demonstrate that fact to the benefit of their locality, unlike councils which could not care less.

Mr. Pike: When the hon. Gentleman replied to his constituents, did he point out that over the country as a whole the majority of those who will lose as a result of the legislation are those who can least afford to lose, while a substantial number who will gain least need to gain?

Mr. Shaw: I do not accept that. In Committee we have frequently given the Opposition the facts, statistics and exemplifications from the Department of the Environment which show the large numbers of people who will gain. We have also seen anomalies, but these are less than under the present system of rates.

The Opposition have frequently said that the community charge will be unfair. The Secretary of State in his generosity has given the Opposition the opportunity to suggest alternative proposals, but they have failed at every stage. That is why we have to debate this timetable motion: we cannot get sensible alternatives from the Opposition, yet they spend a great deal of time arguing that these proposals are unfair.

Mr. Dykes: I agree with my hon. Friend that the principal Opposition have not put forward any meaningful ideas so that debates are taking place within the Conservative party and, to a lesser extent, among alliance Members. How does my hon. Friend deal with the awkward point raised by our hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) in this debate and in Committee — that it is all very well constructing a theoretical idea that one can make a direct measurement between the extravagant and the non-extravagant authorities—presumably Tory-controlled authorities are the latter and Labour-controlled authorities the former —with this new system, but as it is most likely, because we live in a wicked world, that the central Government resource allocation input system, now to be called revenue support rather than RSG, will be manipulated by the Department of the Environment through its incomprehensible computer system just as it has been in the past, the whole system will become wholly otiose?

Mr. Shaw: I, too, have severe reservations about the rate support grant system and the way it has operated in the past, but all that we and the Government can do is try over a period to move to a fairer, better system under which the people who pay more will be those who are foolish enough to elect a local council which wastes money. Surely what lies behind amendments to the rate support grant system in recent years is the attempt to penalise the extravagant and to benefit those with good husbandry.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will concede publicly that the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who represents Plaid Cymru, and my two hon. Friends who represent the Liberal party on the Committee have throughout clearly stated our view that a local income tax is a fairer and more acceptable alternative. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Government should support that, even if the proposition must come from our parties because the Labour party has not yet decided on its alternative?

Mr. Shaw: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's point, but if he had the benefit of serving on the Committee—I realise that he is employed elsewhere—he would have learned that under a local income tax system, a nurse living in Camden would have to pay 26p in the pound. That is a phenomenal sum. Even if my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer manages to reduce income tax substantially in the Budget, it would take her rate of taxation above 50p in the pound. Local income tax is not a fair or reasonable alternative to the community charge. Time and again it has become clear in Committee that the Opposition have no alternative to the community charge.

[Mr. Shaw]

The motion is about making progress on the Bill and I hope that some of my remarks have shown that it is necessary to do so. Not only is this the only Bill before the Committee but it is the best Bill that the Committee could have. The Opposition have been taking far too long to make their points. Speeches lasting 20 minutes or more are common and 15-minute speeches are the rule. I would not object to that if it were not for the great amount of repetition.

Countless times I have heard the Opposition suggest that people will evade the tax. It shocks me that they can suggest that so many people are keen on tax evasion. *[Laughter.]* It is staggering. What is even more amazing is the number of Scottish Opposition Members who comment on that. Scottish Members seem to spend most of their time trying to make out that the people of Scotland are utterly dishonest. Indeed, if I were not married to a Scottish lady, I should have severe doubts about what the people north of the border get up to. In time, the Scottish version of the community charge will be seen to benefit Scotland as it will help to control local authority expenditure.

One message comes across in Committee. Not only do the Opposition not want to hear of the benefits from the community charge, but when they appear to listen they do not seem to want to understand. That is a critical reason why we are debating this motion.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The hon. Gentleman says that we do not listen to the benefits of the poll tax. Can he explain to the 94 per cent. of my constituents who will lose what those benefits are likely to be?

Mr. Shaw: If the hon. Gentleman will arrange for me to visit his constituency, I shall be delighted to explain to his constituents the benefits of the community charge.

It is important to consider the quality of the debates in Committee, particularly some of the statements about the costs of the community charge. We have had wild and extreme estimates, and references to hundreds of millions of pounds of computer costs. The House will be pleased to know that I have managed to obtain more accurate figures which I hope to bring to the Committee's attention in the next few weeks. The Opposition's figures have not been based on fact, nor have they been checked or audited. One often wonders whether the statements are solely for the purpose of playing to the gallery. They are certainly not to further the debate. The timetable motion will mean that the Opposition talk more sense and less nonsense.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) spoke earlier of Government amendments taking time in Committee. There have been many Government amendments to the Bill, but they were sensible, necessary and useful in assisting the administration of the community charge. They were speedily dealt with.

I cannot avoid one aspect of our discussions in Committee. Occasionally, and regrettably, we have heard some intemperate language from the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). Perhaps that was because he was tired of listening to speakers on his own side. I say that because Conservative Members have taken up little time. Our speeches have been brief and to the point.

I believe the Government want to give the Bill a fair chance of being discussed, which is why they have brought in the timetable motion. The House should support it.

6 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I want to discuss some of the arguments deployed by the Leader of the House when introducing the timetable motion. First, he argued that an excessive number of amendments had been tabled in Committee, especially on the first clause, which is only five lines long. Clause 1 deals with some of the basic principles of the Bill and categorises three different forms of poll tax or community charge that can be levied. So the amendments to clause 1 provided an opportunity to debate the wider implications of the whole measure, and the debate, at that stage, was worth while.

It has also been argued that the time spent on changing the name from the community charge to the poll tax was excessive—but to call the tax a community charge is a fraud. The name "poll tax" is clearly understood and honest, and it allows us to discuss the Bill's general principles. As such, it is well worth full discussion. I am a person who likes discussing words, ideas and principles and I see nothing wrong with that.

It might be well worth while for the Government to consider exactly what the Bill is about. It does two things. It switches wealth from one sector of society to another, in line with principles shared by most Conservative Members, who believe that investment emerges in that way. We disagree with that. Other elements in the Bill concern the excessive powers being given to central Government, carrying on from other legislation that dealt with rate capping and other matters of local government. The Bill is a further extension of provisions that give considerable authority to central Government.

Many of the Conservative Members in Committee need to reflect on whether they are really happy about so much authority being passed into the hands of central Government, and about local government beginning to disappear as an effective force and becoming a mere cypher, acting on decisions that have already been made centrally. Is that healthy for democracy and the dissemination of different views and interests? Is it good for concessions and compromises in society?

The Leader of the House also used the answerability argument, about which we used to hear a great deal in Committee. We used to hear how, as all voters paid the poll tax, their involvement made them and local councils responsible, accountable and answerable. Strangely, some of those arguments have now started to disappear. We had a debate in Committee about joint and several liability. It blew away once and for all the idea that the Bill is in some way about answerability. If, for example, a husband deserted his wife—did a runner, as they say—she would be jointly and severally responsible for payment of the outstanding poll tax moneys.

There is no essential link in the legislation between the payment of the poll tax and the exercise of the vote, and it would be nonsense if there were. Often, the head of the household might pay out the money for the whole household, and presumably, under a system of accountability, he would have to exercise a right to vote several times in line with the moneys he had paid out. Thus, the notion of accountability has begun to disappear; so has the notion that democracy is somehow enhanced by the operation of the poll tax.

It has already been mentioned that the poll tax discourages electoral registration. The Bill may provide for the electoral registrar getting hold of registers that are being compiled and reinstating people on them, but there will certainly be a desire to hide from payment. That will have an adverse effect on the universal franchise. As one of the Ministers has rightly said, this Bill will have a major effect on the franchise—the greatest since the early years of the century, and probably since the 19th century. It is the first move that we have had away from the universal franchise, rather than towards its extension.

Worse, the Bill attempts to fix the results of elections. Pressure will be applied such that Conservative councils will be the only option for election — not merely Conservative councils, but Conservative councils of a particular political flavour, which will keep poll tax levels down. If Labour or alternative parties try to operate, they will be allowed to do so only to the extent that they function in accordance with those same principles. How is that Hobson's choice a democracy? Surely a democracy should allow people to choose between alternatives and offer an avenue through which the poorer members of society can seek redress of some of the imbalances within it, so that money is paid by the wealthy to those who are poor. The Bill tries to exclude from the system an option in the democratic process.

The Leader of the House also used the argument that the poll tax was in the Tory election manifesto, so the Government could go ahead with it. That is one of the most pathetic arguments that could be used. There is no mandate for the poll tax: a mandate requires a full and frank up-front discussion during an election, which did not happen in England and Wales. That is perhaps, to some extent, the fault of the Labour party for not drawing attention to the tax as a major issue, as it should have done. If it had done so, some of the consequences in Scotland would have occurred here, too. The only area in the nation in which the tax has been considered fully and frankly is Scotland, where it was firmly rejected by the electorate. The Labour party was glad to have the opportunity to use the issue to fight an effective campaign there, and I hope we shall soon be doing the same in this country.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): The hon. Gentleman said that the only place in the country in which the poll tax was mentioned in the last election was Scotland, but I mentioned the community charge many times in my election campaign in June last year, and was returned with a majority of almost 20,000.

Mr. Barnes: It is a matter of degree; the issue was certainly mentioned in the election, and there was some publicity about it in the media, but I doubt whether the hon. Gentleman was the only element that determined the result in his constituency. We all know that elections here are much more presidential than that, depending a great deal on the party platforms that are argued across the country.

Such argument failed to take place in England and Wales on that occasion. Many of us tried to raise the issue in our constituencies but it was swamped by other issues that the Goverment sought to raise during the election. They staged propaganda campaigns about "reds" and raised "white surrender" scares. They were the major items considered during the campaign. It is only in those areas that the Government could possibly claim to have a mandate, but they do not have a mandate for this detailed bit of legislation or for many of the other measures that are passing through the House.

Mrs. Fyfe: Does my hon. Friend agree that the reason why the campaign against the poll tax was so effective in Scotland was that it was coming into force there a year earlier than in England? That concentrated the minds of Scottish people. Likewise, recent opinion polls in England and Wales have shown that people there are becoming more and more opposed to the poll tax.

Mr. Barnes: I agree with my hon. Friend. The immediacy of the issue concentrates people's minds upon it and brings it to the front of their minds, causing them to discuss their own circumstances and the problems that they will face.

There should not be a timetable motion. We need more time to discuss the issue in Committee so that the reality of the poll tax can begin to dawn on some of the Conservative Members. They need to be able to draw together the strands of their alternative position and decide upon the extent to which they will support Opposition amendments. The hon. Member for Acton (Sir G. Young) is seen as the major Conservative rebel, but in some ways he needs to get his act together and decide where he stands on various issues. He supports the idea of excluding student nurses in the same way as university students would be excluded and proposed amendment No. 72 in relation to that. That fell because a Government new clause was introduced.

In the vote on an amendment by the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), which was a substitute for amendment No. 72, the hon. Member for Acton is recorded in the Committee *Hansard* as voting against. On another occasion an amendment was brought forward under clause 11 by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), and there is no record of a vote by the hon. Member for Acton. He either recorded a no vote or was absent when the vote took place. I confront him with those matters, but if I have got them wrong I shall apologise to him. He has faced three ways on one issue and needs to be much more solid.

The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) has expressed reservations in the House and is in many ways a pale shadow of the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton in terms of his opposition. Presumably he is adopting a Fabian attitude, and his strategy may be to bide his time until the opportunity is exactly right. Then he will strike and vote with the Opposition on specific amendments. I hope that that is the case.

The hon. Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams) is seeking a small poll tax, and his amendment, which is to be discussed later, will move money towards the central Exchequer. If that happens, it will aid the process by which central Government have control and authority over what takes place at local level. It will get over the problem of imbalance and injustice and some of the unfairness of this measure. However, it will not tackle the issue of considerable centralised control. I hope that the hon. Member for Kensington will think of some fall-back position to try to get the best that he can out of his own ideas and values. I have said that in Committee.

The answerability argument has gone out of the window and hon. Members using it in Committee have

[Mr. Barnes]

lowered it considerably. It has yet to dawn on Conservative Members that central Government are operating massive powers. Some Conservative Members are strong advocates of free enterprise and competitiveness and are worried about monopoly control and development. For that reason, they should be worried about the development of centralised control.

The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) is not in the Chamber and is seldom seen in Committee. She adopts a very anti-state stance and is worried about centralised control. *The House Magazine* reports that she has on her House of Commons writing paper the legend:

"The state is the great fiction by which everyone seeks to live at the expense of everyone else."

If the hon. Lady thinks that the state is such a fiction and a corrupting centralised organisation, why is she willing regularly to vote for advancing the powers of the Secretary of State? In this measure the Secretary of State and in other measures other Secretaries of State are given enormous enabling powers. The Secretary of State will be something of a municipal Mussolini, but perhaps without the charisma that Mussolini had.

Conservative Members in the Committee need time to think the measure through and time to talk about their ideas before having them discussed in Committee. Labour has embarked on a listening campaign, and I was pleased to listen to the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) because those were the first words that I heard from him. The hon. Member for Gedling made, as it were his maiden speech on the poll tax, and his views must be considered.

My final point is on a matter that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). It has been said in Committee that a measure is to be brought forward on Report to introduce imprisonment as a fallback for those who do not pay the poll tax. That measure should be brought forward and fully considered in Committee and afterwards on the Floor of the House. I ask hon. Members to vote against the timetable motion.

6.16 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): As a new Member, I am continually surprised in this place, and this debate is no exception. This is the first guillotine motion debate that I have sat through. I had assumed, apparently wrongly, that I would be confronted by row upon row of indignant Opposition Members shrieking about censorship and the lack of time to deal with the Bill. Instead I see row upon row of total contentment, because I have always found that when people do not turn up it means that they are entirely happy about what is being done. I can only assume that the contentment on the Conservative side is mirrored by contentment on the Opposition side.

One other matter that surprised me is that I seem to be sitting through a Second Reading debate. We have heard all the reasons why the community charge is good or bad, why it should be introduced and the reasons for holding it up. However, we have not had much discussion about the guillotine motion. That is why I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) who said that perhaps the Leader of the House might find it useful to look at procedures. We ought to be discussing how we can have a sensible debate during the rest of the time that the Bill is in Committee. I have sat through most of the 72 hours so far and I did not recognise much of a sensible debate. It has been fairly repetitive and nit-picking. I welcome this chance to help impose some sort of structure on the rest of the debate, because some fundamental issues have still to be discussed.

Much has been said about the business rate but not much has been said about the change in the grant system. Eleven years in local government have taught me that the current grant system is understood by hardly anybody. When one does discover a bit about it, one sees that it is something of an absurdity. We must spend a sensible amount of time getting the grant system right. I hope that we shall also put some structure into the Committee from now on and will be spared further ramblings about the rating aspects of grand prix racing tracks and about when full-time cohabitation becomes part-time cohabitation. If we are spared more of that sort of debate, I shall be grateful.

The issues that seem to have occupied most hon. Members do not have much to do with the guillotine motion. The first argument that sticks in my mind is that, because there is no precedent for this legislation, it should be given extra time. But I have heard hour upon hour of discussion about what happens in Scotland. I have heard for hour upon hour from hon. Members representing Scotland. I keep being told that there is a precedent.

We have also been told that we should delay it because everybody is against it. My mailbag, my supporters and my council do not suggest that. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) causes some excitement only by saying that the ADC is against it. The hon. Gentleman knows better than to go beyond that.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I was making the point that every representative body of local government of whatever party is completely opposed to the proposals. The hon. Gentleman's own council may be in favour of it, but no letter has yet appeared in the Library showing that any council is wholeheartedly in favour of it. The hon. Gentleman must accept that no representative group of local government, north or south of the border, supports the measure, and it has been opposed by local government throughout the country.

Mr. Wilshire: In view of the time, I shall not rise to that. I refer the hon. Gentleman to my comments in Committee, which are well reported.

The last argument to which I shall refer is that we have not been listening. I have listened to the best part of 72 hours, I have listened until my ears ache, and I have yet to hear anything to make me change my mind. The measure is a good one, and the sooner it reaches the statute book the better.

6.21 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): All hon. Members who have spoken have agreed that the Bill, because of its importance, needs thorough and proper scrutiny. As several hon. Members have said, we are not talking only about a personal poll tax. We are talking about a Bill that will introduce a national business tax, under ministerial control. We are talking about a new grant system for the allocation of about £13 billion of public money each year. We are talking about proposals that will give Ministers budgetary control and poll tax-capping powers covering every local authority in England and Wales. We are talking about the future—it is not clear from the Bill

whether there is a future—of discretionary expenditure under what is at present section 137, the 2p rate, which is used by local authorities of all political persuasions for local matters such as economic development and the support of voluntary organisations and charities in their communities.

A large number of important issues still have to be considered by the Committee. It has always been, and remains, the intention of the Opposition that such matters should be thoroughly and adequately debated. That is why we have not sought to waste time. In spite of one or two comments to the contrary, it is generally recognised that there has been no deliberate time wasting in Committee by the Opposition.

Conservative Members who have been supporting the timetable motion have not recognised that there has been no White Paper about the proposals. The Government have not published the responses to the Green Paper on the proposals. The Government have consistently hidden that evidence from Parliament and from the Committee. Had that information been published, it might have saved the House and the Committee some time during their consideration of these issues. The Government gain nothing by being secretive. It is precisely for that reason, and for similar related reasons, such as the late publication, or availability in the Committee, of the Government's intentions on students that the Opposition have had to force debates and table amendments to seek clarification from the Government. We make no apology for that. After all, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said that the Government have tabled as many amendments to the Bill as anyone else.

It is also the case that the longest single speech made in Committee was made by the Minister for Local Government, who spoke for almost two hours in response to a very important group of amendments. I do not criticise him for that. I did not criticise him at the time. He tried, within the limitations of the principles embodied in the Bill, to respond to questions put to him in Committee, and he was right to do so. I am not complaining about that. It may be necessary for the Minister or for the Secretary of State to reply at length in future. If it is necessary, it is a proper and legitimate function in the Committee's consideration of such measures. It was a measure of 131 clauses and 12 schedules when it was published. Now, several new clauses have been tabled by the Government, in addition to all the amendments.

The measure is dubbed the Government's flagship, and as such I should have thought that everyone, including Conservative Members, would welcome a most painstaking scrutiny of it. After all, they would not want to spoil their flagship for want of a little paint and a ha'p'orth of tar. The right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) likened it to the Titanic. I suggest that perhaps it is more likely to end up like the Mary Rose. It may not get through its launch or its maiden voyage. It may capsize under the weight of its own inadequate design.

As I understand the motion, which the Leader of the House commends us to accept, we shall have approximately 70 hours more to discuss the issue. On the face of it, that seems generous. Several Conservative Members have made the point that we shall now have some structured debate and the timetable will guarantee the proper scrutiny of every aspect of the Bill. It will do no such thing. At each stage within the timetable, the guillotine will fall, whether or not there has been proper scrutiny of each clause in that section of the timetable. The timetable brings no such guarantee.

Indeed, 70 hours, when there are still more than 100 clauses and several schedules to be discussed, does not guarantee on average—although I accept that averages are not always meaningful—one hour of consideration in Committee per clause. It is not nearly as generous as the Leader of the House seemed to imply. The procedures of the House simply are not adequate to deal with measures of such a size, nature, complexity, and on which there is a dispute between parties. That seems to have been self-evident for many years.

Several hon. Members who are new to the House have said that this is the first time that they have taken part in a debate on a guillotine motion. I have taken part in a debate on a guillotine motion. I have taken part in several such debates from both sides of the argument, from the point of view of the Government, and from the point of view of the Opposition. I have to confess straight away that political head-standing is rather difficult for politicians, who generally do not make very good gymnasts. I think that it has something to do with the fact that the centre of gravity of most politicians is higher above the waist than it should be for them to perform good balancing feats. In some hon. Members it is too far above the shoulders.

The procedures of the House are not adequate, whatever the Government may say. The hon. Members for Crawley (Mr. Soames) is laughing about centres of gravity. He is the last hon. Member who should be laughing, although I have to concede that his centre of gravity is well down, if I can put it delicately. Perhaps he will be rather better than some of his colleagues at this kind of balancing act. I have no doubt that the Government planned the presentation of this timetable to the House when they were planning the whole of their parliamentary year. Notwithstanding that, the Government have tabled, and will continue to table, a large number of amendments.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) made an entertaining speech, but he could have taken a much earlier historical analogy. If I have learnt nothing else today, I have learnt that I can gain access to the Bible for reference by asking the Clerk of the House for the key and opening the Dispatch Box—something that I have never yet done. Since historical analogies seem to be in order in giving dire warnings to the Government—I hazard a guess that a right hon. Member with an address like "The Old Rectory" knows this already—I can give a much older analogy than the peasants' revolt. Here is a quote from St. Luke, chapter 2:

> "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed."

We have been along this road a lot earlier than the peasants' revolt, and the outcome has always been the same. Those proposing such taxes have ended up on the losing side. We have seen that most recently in Scotland, and I have no doubt that we shall see it again.

Mr. Dykes: The hon. Gentleman is trotting out rather tired metaphors about ships, gymnastics and now the Bible. When will we hear the Labour party's proposals?

Dr. Cunningham: I thought that I had heard Conservative Members say that this debate was about the

[Dr. Cunningham]

timetable and not about the merits of the Bill. I am not speaking about the merits of the Bill, but I would be more than happy to do so when we return to Committee tomorrow morning, as long as the hon. Member will promise me that his attendance will be at least as good as mine when we are discussing these matters—something that he has signally failed to do so far.

I say, most kindly, that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent is a traditionalist in these matters and his views depart slightly from mine. Having said that, I believe that the proceedings of the House are inadequate, and are regularly demonstrated to be inadequate, and I have some sympathy with the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery). It would be in the interests of the House if time were found to debate the second report of the Procedure Committee in the 1985-86 Session, which sought to bring the attention of the House to these matters. The problem is, and remains, one of inherent conflict between the views and the objectives of the Government and the views and objectives of the Opposition. It will be in the long-term interest of the House to make a serious attempt to resolve these matters, although I do not necessarily agree with everything that the report says.

Hon. Members may be asking themselves why I shall vote against the guillotine motion. It is because, in the end, like all its predecessors, it is being imposed arbitrarily by an Executive which already has too much power over Parliament in these matters — a power that is long overdue for redress.

6.33 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): The debate has been so relaxed and friendly that there has been time for some merriment. We have had added to the "gardener chappy" in Selly Oak, the municipal Mussolini, from the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes).

We had the delightful speech of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), and that of the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), who commented on my education, saying that it has been a good education. The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent had a good education himself. He went to Leighton Park school and then on to Wadham, where presumably he learned a little history. He might get it right. When the poll tax was introduced, King Richard II was 14, so we cannot blame him.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) thought that the Bill might turn out to be the Titanic, but at least it could not be as bad as the efforts of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, who lost four out of his flotilla of five Bills that he guillotined in that one famous afternoon in July, which all turned out to be Titanics.

Mr. Leigh: Is my right hon. Friend aware that on that famous occasion when the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) attempted to poleaxe consideration of five Bills, one young Labour Member said:

"I have not yet had the advantage of being in opposition and I do not intend to be in that position. 'Winner takes all' is an ugly phrase, but that is how the system works. If a party wins a General Election, it is the winner who takes all until the people are again consulted within five years . . . We are considering whether the Government are entitled to see that they carry out what they are mandated to do. That is what a guillotine motion is all about."—[*Official Report*, 20 July 1976; Vol. 915, c. 1654-55.]

The hon. Member who said that was then the hon. Member for Lichfield and Tamworth, but is now the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), who led for the Opposition today. Surely people in legislative glasshouses should not throw stones.

Mr. Ridley: That is typical of how these guillotine debates go, but it is not for me in the few minutes that remain to say what will be the right way for the House to debate these matters in the future.

Having spent 72¼ hours considering 21 clauses, including five new ones, and two schedules, including one new schedule, we must make a little more progress. The Bill contains another 115 clauses and 11 schedules, which means that, on the basis of progress so far, we would be sitting until the end of July.

There has been a marked lack of urgency on the part of the Opposition. We have perhaps been too accommodating. The start of the Committee was delayed from 19 January to 21 January because the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) was out of the country. We helped him further with an early finish on 28 January to enable the Opposition to attend a local government conference, at which they continued their fruitless search for a policy on local government finance. Perhaps we should give them another afternoon to pursue that, because they have not yet found one. On Thursday last, 18 February, they asked for the whole of the afternoon session, which once again we gave them. By these means, we lost 13 hours of debate—nor did we receive much progress in return when we did sit.

Mr. Allen McKay: Will the Secretary of State admit that, to facilitate that granting of time, we did not debate the sittings motion?

Mr. Ridley: I am going back to the point that we have not had the progress that we need.

From time to time, when the Committee has been sitting, little progress has been made. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), perhaps one of those who has spoken for longest, could be described—in the words of one of his friends, the former hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan in the Committee which dealt with the Scottish legislation — as suffering from natural verbosity. Then there was the speech made by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins), which took so long and was so incoherent that the Committee became inquorate and hon. Members had to take refuge in the Corridor outside.

Apart from such long-winded contributions from Opposition Members, the discussion has been amiable and has ambled along, but slowly. The atmosphere has been congenial and the debate has been generally constructive. In response to arguments advanced by various Opposition Members, the Government have willingly taken away a number of points for further consideration covering joint and several liability, register entries concerning deceased persons and remission from payment by the courts on the grounds of poverty.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said that only one such undertaking had been given and that that had been given to one of the Liberal Members on the Committee. However, that is not

right. Three or more undertakings were given. Indeed, I must tell the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey that I cannot tell the difference between a Liberal, Welsh nationalist, or Socialist opposition in Committee. There is no difference at all between them.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Ridley: I will not give way.

All the concessions that we offered are important. They are intended to improve the system that we have proposed and I am grateful for that. However, none of the arguments advanced by Opposition Members has in any way dented the principle of our proposals. Indeed, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), whom we welcome to the debate, at times seemed to hope that the timetable motion would be introduced soon, as it was the only thing that would concentrate the minds of his colleagues. Twice in Committee—on 28 January and 2 February—he predicted hopefully and wishfully that the timetable motion would be introduced on 11 February. He was clearly hoping and longing for it and wanted it as soon as he could get it. He will be delighted that it has been introduced now.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): It is a week late.

Mr. Ridley: Yes, the hon. Gentleman would rather have had it earlier. As the debate has borne out, very few hon. Members have been present, and at one point I thought that there was a danger that we might have run out of hon. Members wishing to speak. The opposition to this motion has been as weak, wobbly and wishy-washy as it was in Committee.

Sir Peter Emery: When the timetable motion on the Education Reform Bill was before the House, My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science said that he would try to ensure that all parts of the Bill would be adequately scrutinised and that every tentative proposal would be examined. Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment give the House the same assurance about the local Government Finance Bill?

Mr. Ridley: Indeed I will. However, principally the Opposition must decide how much time they want to give to each section of the Bill. Their judgment must prevail. They must decide how to divide the time that remains. It is my ambition to satisfy my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery).

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey drew a comparison with the progress of the legislation to introduce the community charge in Scotland. A timetable motion was introduced for that Bill after 101 hours of debate on 20 clauses which provided for a further six sittings to deal with the remaining 14 clauses. The point is that the timetable motion before the House now will allow a further 19 sittings and 83 hours of debate on the remainder of the Bill. By introducing the motion at this stage it is possible to ensure that fuller debate is given to all aspects of the Bill than was possible for the Scottish Bill. We have supplemented that, as has been much appreciated by hon. Members on both sides of the House, because we have recommended four days for Report and Third Reading.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Secretary of State accept that the argument that other hon. Members and I have advanced is that for a Bill of this importance we need to ensure that, if possible, every important matter should be debated and if the Committee believes that it has not unduly delayed matters, it should be allowed to run its natural course?

Mr. Ridley: That will be the case. If we do not waste time, there will be time for all matters to be considered.

The hon. Member for The Wrekin drew attention to the National Opinion Poll carried out last week. I found its conclusions very comforting. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not set much store by these polls. It concluded:

"The Conservatives still hold a clear lead in these key areas."

All those hopes, that the charge would lose the Conservatives political support and would rescue the Labour party, seem to have been dashed. Indeed, in a typically generous passage in his speech, the hon. Member for The Wrekin said that he wanted to put public interest before party interest and he would therefore not hold up the Bill because it was in his party's interests that it should get through as the Conservative party would lose votes. Only a week ago there was a vital county council by-election in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Campaigning under the community charge, the Conservatives, in the form of Warren Hawksley, won a seat from Labour.

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put the Question necessary to dispose of them, pursuant to Standing Order No. 81 (Allocation of time to Bills).*

The House divided: Ayes 317, Noes 223.

Division No. 190] **[6.45 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim

Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth

Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Mr. Frank Haynes and Mrs. Llin Golding.

Tellers for the Noes:

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:

Committee

1.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the Bill is allocated shall report the Bill to the House on or before 24th March 1988.

(2) Proceedings on the Bill at a sitting of the Standing Committee on the said 24th March may continue until Ten p.m., whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 25th March 1988.

Report and Third Reading

2.—(1) The proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in four allotted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten p.m. on the last of those days; and for the purposes of Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) this Order shall be taken to allot to the proceedings on Consideration such part of those days as the Resolution of the Business Committee may determine.

(2) The Business Committee shall report to the House its Resolutions as to the proceedings on Consideration of the Bill, and as to the allocation of time between those proceedings and proceedings on Third Reading, not later than the fourth day on which the House sits after the day on which the Chairman of the Standing Committee reports the Bill to the House.

(3) The Resolutions in any Report made under Standing Order No. 80 may be varied by a further Report so made, whether or not within the time specified in sub-paragraph (2) above, and whether or not the Resolutions have been agreed to by the House.

(4) The Resolutions of the Business Committee may include alterations in the order in which proceedings on Consideration of the Bill are taken.

Procedure in Standing Committee

3.—(1) At a sitting of the Standing Committee at which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee the Chairman shall not adjourn the Committee under any Order relating to the sittings of the Committee until the proceedings have been brought to a conclusion.

(2) No Motion shall be made in the Standing Committee relating to the sitting of the Committee except by a member of the Government and the Chairman shall permit a brief explanatory statement from the Member who makes, and from a Member who opposes, the Motion, and shall then put the Question thereon.

4. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which Clauses, Schedules, new Clauses and new Schedules are taken in the Standing Committee but the Resolutions of the Business Sub-Committee may include alterations in that order.

Conclusion of proceedings in Committee

5. On the conclusion of the proceedings in any Committee on the Bill the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.

Dilatory Motions

6. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be made in the Standing Committee or on an allotted day except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Motion under Standing Order No. 20: extra time

7. If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Private business

8. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall,

instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Conclusion of proceedings

9.—(1) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or the Business Sub-Committee and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment or Motion is made by a Member of the Government;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded; and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(3) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time;

(b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(4) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

10.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made in the House by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order (including anything which might have been the subject of a report of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee) shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion moved at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

11. Nothing in this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order or Resolution applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order or Resolution, or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Recommittal

12.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on Consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings, at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of recommittal.

(2) On an allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation

13. In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day or is set down for consideration on that day;

"the Bill" means the Local Government Finance Bill;

"Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee" means a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee as agreed to by the Standing Committee;

"Resolution of the Business Committee" means a Resolution of the Business Committee as agreed to by the House.

Aircraft (Near Miss)

6.58 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has come to my knowledge in the past 10 minutes or quarter of an hour that there has been a reported near miss off the east coast of Aberdeen over the North sea. It was between a Royal Air Force F4 Phantom aircraft and a Bristow helicopter carrying 30 passengers. The difficulty is that the Ministry of Defence is refusing to give any information, on the ground that it has to wait to see whether the Bristow helicopter pilot reports the matter to the Civil Aviation Authority as a possible near miss. I understand that that has now been done.

I wonder whether you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have received any request for permission to make a statement from the Secretary of State for Transport, who is present —I apologise for not having given prior notice, but the matter has only just come to my attention—or from the Secretary of State for Defence, to whom I have spoken by telephone.

The problem is that during Transport Question Time this afternoon we had a fairly vigorous and vociferous exchange about air traffic control and passenger safety in general. I am astounded to learn that since Question Time there has been an announcement that there are to be severe restrictions on traffic into Heathrow during the summer because of the serious problem.

We are entitled to raise such issues when accidents and near misses of that kind occur, yet the Minister does not divulge such information at Question Time, when he must be aware of it. I do not know how close the aircraft passed. According to one report, they were within half a mile of each other. A Phantom F4 in a steep dive creates a great deal of turbulence and could well upset the flight of a helicopter. I hope that a statement will be made, if not tonight, then certainly tomorrow, because matters are getting seriously out of hand.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): I have listened to the comments of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes). I cannot comment at the moment, but I shall make inquiries of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and Defence and then contact the hon. Gentleman later this evening to decide how best to proceed.

Orders of the Day

Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill

As amended (in the Select Committee and on re-committal in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

CONSTRUCTION OF THE SCHEDULED WORKS

7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Peter Bottomley): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, leave out lines 14 to 16.

The purpose of the amendment is to remove from the Bill a requirement that the bridge should be designed so that wind shields are or could be fitted to reduce the effect of wind on vehicles on the bridge to not more than that on vehicles on the approach roads to the present crossing.

The House and the Government are grateful to the Select Committee for the thorough examination of wind shielding and other issues put to it through 20 days of hearings in the autumn. The Government's response to the Select Committee covers disquiet at the way the case was presented on the question of wind shielding. It explains that we are looking at that question and the lessons to be learned from it. I hope that we can now concentrate on the substance of the amendment.

A special tribute is due to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman), who sat through every minute of the hearings. Some of what I shall say will be all too familiar to him and his colleagues. I shall describe the new work commenced since the Committee's hearings as a direct result of the Committee's work and the petitioners' cases.

At paragraph 14 of its special report, the Committee referred to the difficulty that it faced in assessing evidence of a highly technical nature on which experts disagreed fundamentally. That is not surprising. The problem is not new. It arose in connection with the Channel fixed link proposals.

The methods used to calculate the frequency at which winds blow are not claimed to have a high degree of accuracy. Although the methods advocated by Dr. Cook of the Building Research Establishment for the purpose of structural design are very good for forecasting maximum speeds—he says that they are within 5 per cent.—the estimate of the number of hours in a year during which a gust exceeding a given speed will occur has a margin of error of up to 40 per cent. It is not surprising that there are disagreements.

This issue is really about traffic management. It may involve abstruse structural engineering and meteorological theory, but it is fundamentally about the management of traffic in high winds which, in the south-east of this country, are fortunately rare.

We have considered the experiences at certain windy sites in Great Britain. There are three places which have experienced continuing problems—the bridges across the Severn, the Forth and the Humber. At other places, there are sometimes speed restrictions and the odd closure from time to time. An overall strategy does not deal with the problem. The relevant authorities solve the problem at

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

each location. Restrictions imposed range from speed limits through lane restrictions to closure to wind-susceptible vehicles—high-sided vehicles, caravans and the like. Complete closure is very rare. The Severn bridge has been closed completely three times in 21 years. The Forth and Humber bridges do not close.

From the inquiries that we have made during and since the Select Committee hearings, there is a consensus about the wind speeds which cause difficulties to traffic. All those to whom we have spoken in this country with experience of controlling traffic at windy places say that restrictions are considered on wind-susceptible vehicles when gusts of wind reach 50 miles per hour. Some authorities consider restricting the number of lanes in use usually at gusts of about 40 miles per hour, so that vehicles are not blown sideways into others in the adjoining lane. Whether those restrictions are imposed depends on the direction of the wind and traffic behaviour at the time. If the wind is not troubling the traffic, the restrictions are not imposed. The decision is very much one for the man on the spot. In the case of Dartford, that will be the crossing manager, advised by the police. The contract with DRCC—the Dartford River Crossing Company—stipulates that the police decision on this is final.

How often will it happen at Dartford? That is impossible to say with certainty. Some estimates have been made. Annex A of the response shows the results of applying the methods that the petitioners used to calculate how often the wind blows at certain speeds at various sites throughout the country and how often it has been necessary to impose restrictions.

The Meteorological Office has checked the estimates for Dartford against data from four anemometer sites in the Thames estuary. Our estimates for Dartford are of the same order as the Meteorological Office data. We are content about the estimates obtained by the forecasting method. If anything, they could be on the high side.

The annex indicates, as one would expect, that the higher speeds are experienced much less frequently than the lower ones. It indicates that the authorities have not thought it necessary to impose restrictions on wind-susceptible vehicles until gusts of about 50 miles per hour are reached. This appears not to vary with the density of traffic.

There are locations on the list which carry as much, if not more, traffic than this bridge will. One is the Thelwall viaduct.

We believe that the wind speeds at which restrictions have to be introduced—threshold speeds—recommended to the Select Committee by the petitioners—35 miles per hour for lane restrictions and 45 miles per hour for closure to wind-susceptible vehicles — do not accord with experience.

We do not believe that the estimate of hours at which gusts reach a certain speed necessarily translate into hours of restriction. The nearest bridge sites in the list to Dartford are Orwell and Medway. There has been very little trouble there.

It is reasonable to expect that things will be much the same at Dartford. We draw attention in the response to the Mar Dyke viaduct, immediately north of the present tunnels. The petitioners' forcasting method indicates that we might have expected traffic restrictions there. There have been none.

There is a feature of suspended bridges which makes them different from other roads—the presence of pylons or towers which hold up the cables. Mr. Brian Smith of Flint and Neill gave evidence to the Select Committee. He explained to the Committee that, at the Severn bridge, the towers caused problems in high winds because, as vehicles are masked by them from the wind, drivers correct steering only to emerge suddenly into the wind again. I can vouch for that. When I was at the Severn bridge the other day, it was one of the windiest days of the year. I stepped out from behind a tower to be struck by a wind 20 knots faster than it had been in shelter. An official who did the same nearly lost his spectacles. Just over half the incidents at the Severn bridge in the years 1984 to 1986 could be related to that effect.

There is a good case for graded shielding adjacent to the towers at Dartford. We have been told, since the proceedings of the Select Committee, that a similar solution has been adopted at the Little Belt bridge in Denmark with success. This shielding is relatively cheap, about £300,000 and will cause no redesign problems. It will be provided.

Eliminating to a large degree the effects of the towers will make the bridge more like an ordinary exposed stretch of road. It is right and fair to say that the persistency of the county councils led the bridge designers to come up with this idea. It is also being considered for the present Severn bridge. At Dartford, there will be some protection all the way along the bridge from the parapet which will be a metre high above the level of the road surface with 30 per cent. porosity.

That is very different from the Severn bridge where the top of the parapet, below the level of the road surface because of the way in which the bridge is constructed, gives no protection to traffic from wind. If that feature reduces the wind speed at road surface level, even by a little, it will add protection to traffic.

Procedures will be needed for diverting traffic through the tunnels in case of a serious accident or major maintenance, not just because of wind. We are confident that, without causing massive delays, it will be possible to segregate wind-susceptible vehicles from others, as it is at the Severn and other bridges and to divert them.

At Dartford, they will not face a detour of many miles. They will go along a slip road into the eastern lane of the east tunnel in which there will be two-way working on those occasions. There is no evidence that that practice is unsafe. Two-way working in the tunnels is normal practice when one of the Dartford tunnels is closed for maintenance.

Up to 1980, there was only one tunnel which operated with two-way traffic for 17 years, during which 140 million vehicles used the tunnel. Motorists will be informed by signs further back along the M25 when restrictions are in force. Nearer the tunnel, there will be gantry signs showing which lanes are closed. Such signs are common on the motorway network. If wind-susceptible traffic is being diverted, special signs will be switched on. There will be manual supervision of the entire process by the people who operate the crossing. There will not be interviewing of drivers, as there is at the Severn bridge, and any vehicle which appears to be wind-susceptible will be directed off the bridge. On the Kent side, it is practicable to ensure that traffic mixes again safely.

It will be possible to divert all the bridge traffic into the east tunnel if the bridge has to close. It will be for the

crossing manager to decide which of those facilities he would use on any occasion. At night, for example, with light traffic, it might be simpler to close the bridge and divert all traffic.

The total crossing offers great flexibility. The bridge provides a fallback if there are problems in the tunnels and the present tunnel management, the police and motoring organisations regard the use of the tunnels as a perfectly practicable and acceptable way in which to deal with problems on the bridge. Some details remain to be settled, and we shall speak again to them and to local highway authorities. It is not possible to do this at any other crossing. Everywhere else, a long diversion is necessary if the bridge cannot be used. That is one of the reasons why the Government are considering wind-shielding on the second Severn crossing.

The Select Committee heard evidence from the petitioners to the effect that the present bridge design could be adapted for £5 million to £6 million and that there will be no more than a few weeks' delay in design. The nature of the adaptation proposed was, in our view, questionable. Substantial last-minute alterations should not be made to a major bridge design without taking great care. That view is now confirmed independently by a Danish designer — Mr. Aksel Frandsen — who has no connection with the Department or DRCC. The full report is in the Library. There is a brief summary of it in the response.

He confirmed that if there is to be full wind-shielding of the kind proposed by the petitioners, there must be a fundamental redesign of the bridge deck. He also confirmed that the delay estimated by DRCC—18 to 21 months — for redesign and extra construction time is realistic, although two or three months might be shaved off with luck. The estimated cost of full shielding varies between £15·25 million and £18·75 million, depending on the design of the bridge in relation to the present toll booths. Nobody can be sure of the exact cost at this stage, but it must be of this order.

Whether the lower or the higher of the two estimates of cost increase is taken, there would have to be amendments to the toll regime provided in the Bill, because it would no longer satisfy the cash flow conditions stipulated. In simple terms, DRCC would not have enough cash in the early years of operation to service its debts to those who are to finance construction of the bridge. To restore the current expectation that tolls would cease after 14 or 15 years and continue for a maximum of 20 years, an increase of about 6 per cent. in the real level tolls would be required.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): How can the Minister calculate that the difference between income and expenditure in the early years will be too tight for the toll regime when DRCC could not give the Select Committee any estimate of its income in the early years or for any given year? Does he have information which has been produced since the Select Committee met, or was there information available which DRCC did not make available to the Select Committee?

Mr. Bottomley: It is generally accepted that calculations were made to get to the 14 or 15-year estimate in the original proposal. I imagine that that was accepted by the Select Committee.

Dr. Reid: I think that the Minister said that the differential would be tight in the early years. I am not talking about the 15-year sum. I am asking how he can tell the House that, in any one of the early years, the income would be insufficient to meet the DRCC's requirements if that company cannot give us its estimate of income in any of those early years.

7.15 pm

Mr. Bottomley: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman has gone through more of this than I have, at least in the Select Committee—I have had it somewhat at second-hand. If we take as the base line the calculation on the original estimated cost and take the flow of revenue before the bridge is open as a given level and add, say, £16 million to the cost of providing the bridge before there can be extra capacity, it is quite clear that the difference between interest payments and revenue must provide a great effect. I do not know whether I put it sufficiently clearly to explain it, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman has another point in mind.

Dr. Reid: No, I have not. I am asking the Minister a simple question. If he does not know the income for any of those early years, how can he tell me whether the bridge will run at a profit, at a loss or how tight it will be? If we do not have that fact in the equation, we cannot assert what the Minister asserted. If, however, the Minister has the information necessary to make that assertion, he must have information which was unavailable to DRCC when the Select Committee met, because the company refused to give us that information.

Mr. Bottomley: I think that the hon. Gentleman may be pushing the point in rather more detail than the debate needs.

Dr. Reid: It is a crucial question, is it not?

Mr. Bottomley: It has been asserted that tolls would have to rise by 6 per cent. in real terms. Whether that is 5·5 per cent. or 6·5 per cent. is not at this point directly significant. The fact that there would have to be extra income to fund the extra spending should be accepted on both sides of the House.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): The general proposition, that if more money is spent more money must be collected and therefore the toll regime may have to be re-examined, is common sense and clear. What puzzles us is that the Minister asserted that, in the early years of the crossing, the toll regime would be too tight to warrent the additional expenditure. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) is trying to find out why that information was not available to the Select Committee.

Mr. Bottomley: I hesitate to repeat myself, but the level of income does not affect the assertion that an extra, say, £16 million of costs adds significantly to the capital cost of providing the bridge. In the early years, the debt rises dramatically, as has happened with several other bridges funded by tolls. In the later years, it is less relevant because, if the early years are under control, the later years look after themselves.

To what extent DRCC was able to say it did or did not know precisely what the revenue would be depends on the amount of traffic. If traffic rose at 17 per cent. a year, it is possible to calculate, at any given level of toll, what the

[Mr. Bottomley]

income will be. It is also possible to estimate what change must be made to the debts that need servicing by looking at the capital cost. It seems to me as simple as that at that level of analysis. I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman needs to illustrate a case, if he accepts the suggestion that an increased capital sum would be needed for redesign and for wind-shielding, he will be able to argue that in a speech and I shall try to respond to it, but I think that we have probably taken the matter as far as we can at this stage.

It is unlikely to be possible to amend the Bill to provide for this increase without readvertising the amendments and inviting petitions in respect of them. We would have to question whether such a solution offered the best value for money. The Select Committee considered the costs of and the benefits to be gained from wind-shielding. The petitioners carried out some cost-benefit analysis. We have, too.

In our latest calculations, we assume that the estimates of wind forecast in the annex to this response will be borne out in practice and that restrictions would be imposed at the same wind speeds as they are at the Severn. We have carried out a careful analysis of the delays to traffic that that would cause during the next 30 years before and after tolls come to an end. The result was strongly negative, indicating that full wind-shielding was not justified on economic grounds. One of the reasons for that was the substantial cost to traffic in delays while the redesign took place. The capital cost did not match the savings either.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): How recent was the investigation, and who carried it out?

Mr. Bottomley: I think that I might wait until I have heard the rest of my hon. Friend's speech before answering that question.

Members of the Select Committee will be aware that this is not an exact science. Widely differing views were put to the Select Committee and, understandably enough, it made its decision. During the past two months, the Government have had the benefit of thinking through these matters again. In the light of the Select Committee's hearings and taking further advice, the Government have come to a judgment different from that of the majority of the Select Committee and have been confirmed in their view by evidence that is now available. Given all the evidence, we cannot justify the extra cost and delay for the rare occasions on which restrictions will be necessary.

I am content to be held responsible for this decision. I carry the can. We are asking the House to accept the amendment not simply because of the delay and the cost, or to assist the policy of private financing, or because we are the friends of anyone, but because it is right.

Mr. Robert Hughes: We see before us a fascinating example of what happens to Government buiness that is mixed up with the hybrid Bill procedure, but a clause stand part debate might be a more appropriate time at which to discuss whether the procedure is a good one.

Let me first associate myself with the tribute paid to hon. Members who served on the Select Committee—both for their perseverence in the many hours through which they sat and for their close attention to detail. It is clear from an examination of the minutes of evidence that the decision to add the words that the amendment seeks to remove was not made capriciously. The Select Committee members did not do it because they felt a bit upset about getting up early after a bad night; they did it because they had examined the evidence seriously, and believed that there was a serious point to be made.

To be fair, the Minister has conceded that the Select Committee arrived at its decision having weighed the evidence in the balance. It must be difficult, with such technical matters, to decide which experts are giving the best advice. Before we consider that, however, the Minister must answer one or two questions.

We can argue about the quantity and severity of the problems on the Severn bridge, but it is a fact that problems have been caused by lane closures and the restriction of movement by high-sided vehicles because of wind pressures. Given those problems, it is astonishing that, when it was decided to go ahead with the crossing, the effect of wind turbulence on traffic never entered the Department's mind. Apparently the design brief contained no recommendation for an analysis or appreciation of those effects, although everyone knows that wind turbulence is caused by high-sided towers or blocks.

The Minister has described his recent experience at the Severn, when he stepped from behind a pillar and was nearly blown off his feet and either he or one of his officials nearly lost his spectacles. As is no doubt common knowledge among architects, wind breaks sometimes have to be erected in high-rise housing blocks where people walk out of the door and are nearly blown off their feet. There is considerable debate about wind turbulence in technical journals: surely the designers of bridges must know about its effects.

After the hours of debate in the Select Committee, and the responses that it received, it is not good enough for the Minister to tell us merely that the Select Committee has a point, and that the Government will meet that point just so far by introducing partial wind-shielding. That means that drivers of high-sided vehicles would gradually find the pressure on the sides of their vehicles increasing, and be able to control it, without being suddenly blown off course by a blast of wind. The Minister must tell us first why the initial design brief did not examine the problem, and secondly why he is turning down the idea of full wind-shielding.

Mr. Dicks: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that a spokesman for Mott, Hay and Anderson, agents to the Government, said that wind-shielding was just a matter of weather forecasting? That was the emphasis that he placed on the need for a close examination of the problem.

Mr. Hughes: I accept that that was what was said. In that context, the paragraph in the Select Committee report which stated that the Committee was extremely unhappy about the way in which the evidence was presented has even more point.

We must consider the short-term and the long-term future of the bridge. I fully accept the point that I think the Minister is making: the need for the river crossing is urgent and it is long overdue. The present two tunnels cannot cope any longer, and something must be done to relieve the congestion. On the other hand, if the Minister has got it wrong and the bridge will be closed to high-sided vehicles more frequently than he would like to think, so that vehicles must go back down the twin tunnels—one of which, presumably, will have to be closed to traffic

going in one direction, so that traffic can move in the other direction — how much delay and congestion will that cause? In a sense, it is a question of what is acceptable.

There is an old saying used by fishermen, and indeed seamen of all kinds: why spoil the ship for a hap'orth of tar? Is it reasonable to accept restrictions, given the problems that might be caused in the future? We are not speaking about five, 10 or even 20 years from now. We should consider the forecasts of increased traffic being generated in London, and the fact that every road improvement scheme seems to generate its own traffic over and above any official forecasts. It is almost a law of nature that any such forecast can be multiplied by *x*. The traffic generates itself. If the Select Committee's advice is not taken, extra congestion may build up to reach the proportions that are currently generated in the area, possibly for longer than the Minister would suggest.

I appreciate that, when it comes to accepting the advice of experts, in a sense you pays your money and you takes your choice, but a risk is being taken. I do not refer to the safety of the bridge; the safety of the traffic is at issue. The number of days for which the bridge will be closed will affect the amount of disruption that is caused.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): The projected number of hours of lane closure for the east London river crossing, only eight miles up river, is 25 hours a year. Why does the hon. Gentleman think that the projection for the Dartford-Thurrock crossing of 24 hours a year is likely to be inaccurate?

Mr. Hughes: I believe that long periods were suggested. One figure suggested was 17 hours of lane restrictions a week, which I think translates to 880 hours a year. Other evidence suggests a figure of 550 hours a year, or 10 or 11 hours a week. That might take place in the middle of the night when there is not much traffic around anyway. If there are 17 hours of lane restrictions a week — only time will tell whether that is accurate — hon. Members who were so vociferous in their arguments against wind-shielding may find themselves under heavy pressure from their constituents, who have remained quiet so far because they have not thought it necessary to make a fuss.

Mr. Janman: I asked the hon. Gentleman why he felt that, given the projection of 25 hours of lane closures a year at the east London river crossing only eight miles away, there was any reason to believe that the projection of only 24 hours of lane closures a year at Dartford was inaccurate. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the consultancy firm that projected the 500 hours of lane closures a year at the Dartford-Thurrock crossing projected half that number for a bridge across the Channel?

7.30 pm

Mr. Hughes: I shall not be diverted into a debate about what would happen with a bridge across the Channel. Had that company won the design and provided for no wind-shielding, there would have been one hell of a row, as we all know.

The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) asked why I should reject the expert advice that there would be 25 hours of lane closures a year at the east London river crossing compared with 24 hours a year at Dartford. I suspect that when we deal with the east London river crossing in detail we shall have the same argument because different experts will come forward with different views.

Dr. Reid: As an illustration, does my hon. Friend accept that the Government's projections for a cross-Channel bridge, which was of similar height and was to cross an exposed channel, referred to lane restrictions which turned out to be less than their predictions for the Dartford-Thurrock crossing?

Mr. Hughes: I accept my hon. Friend's point, but I do not want to be diverted to a debate on the Channel crossing.

There are many views on the exact number of hours of lane closures. I even concede a point which, I recollect, was not made by counsel in closing speeches. Even if there were a maximum of 17 hours of lane closures a week, much of that might be in the middle of the night, when there was not much traffic anyway, so I am almost giving half a point to the hon. Member for Thurrock. I should have thought that, if there were 17 hours of lane closures a week, that should be taken seriously. The Government have done so. That is why they have said that they do not want the words in the Bill. I hope that the Minister said that they will provide partial wind-shielding. At one stage he almost said that the Government would consider doing that. We must get it right.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Partial wind-shielding will be provided.

Mr. Hughes: It will be, provided the House does not reject the Government amendment.

We must consider whether to accept expert advice. All members of the Committee suggested that wind-shielding could be provided by light plastic windshields of sufficient strength to do the job without adding to the weight of the bridge. I am inclined to accept the view that, if wind-shielding is provided—whatever the materials—redesign will be needed because of the effect on the bridge's stability. One cannot get away with saying that wind-shielding can be provided for the whole length of the bridge without affecting the design. If we believe that the wind will affect high-sided vehicles, causing them to veer, it is obvious that wind-shielding will lead to bending stress on the bridge, which must be considered in redesign. I am prepared to accept that if there is to be full wind-shielding there must be a full redesign.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) will pursue the point of the early years of a toll regime versus the later years. I accept that if more capital, and therefore more borrowing, are required, resulting in greater costs, there will have to be a new toll regime. I do not understand why that bothers the Minister. If the product is better and the customer is not diverted as often as he could be, he might be perfectly happy to pay an increased toll for the better service. I do not think that it makes any difference whether the tolls are collected over 20 or 25 years so long as the balance is right.

The Bill says that the crossing has 20 years to get its money back with tolls. If the money is recovered within 15 years, ownership of the bridge reverts to the Department of Transport. If at the end of 20 years the tolls have not paid for the cost of the bridge, it still reverts to the Department of Transport, and the banks or whoever put up the money have to stand the loss. It is a risk. If we overload the cost of the bridge, we should give the company another five years to get its money back or allow it to impose a higher toll to get its money back within the same period. Risk capital is involved.

[Mr. Hughes]

The Minister is in a dilemma. He wants the bridge to be built by risk capital, but he is frightened lest he scare the risk capital away.

Mr. Janman: Although the cost element is important, far more important is the delay, as the hon. Gentleman accurately stated. Does he think it worth delaying a major project, which is urgently needed, for 15 to 18 months simply because there will be 24 hours of lane closures a year, much of it in the dead of night when there is hardly any traffic?

Mr. Hughes: I shall answer that question in my last sentences.

If the toll regime must be changed, that can readily be done. There is the choice whether to increase tolls or give the company a longer period in which to get its money back. We must decide one way or the other. It comes down to whether a delay—a delay of 18 to 21 months may be reasonable; I do not know—is worth having to get the project right. The answer is yes.

I suspect that, if the normal planning procedures had been followed, the bridge would not have been built for another 14 years. The Government have chosen to cut corners by having this legislation considered under the hybrid Bill procedure. They should not cut corners to the extent of arbitrarily deciding that 18 months is too long to wait to get the job right and to ensure that there is not great traffic disruption. It is always difficult to forecast. I suppose that I am safe to forecast that I shall not be a Member in 20 years' time. I have no intention of emulating my predecessor, who stayed here until he was 83, which in my case would be much more than 20 years more in the House.

I am willing to forecast that if the bridge is built according to the design put forward by the Minister, there will be so much disruption and concern that within 15 to 20 years—possibly even sooner—there will be demands for partial wind-shielding to be converted into full wind-shielding, however that is done. Perhaps — I do not know whether I am making a defence for the Minister—bridge design will have advanced in 50 years' time and that will be a possibility.

We have no Whip present. I do not know whether the Minister can say the same for the Government; the danger is that Government business is whipped. Having seen the evidence, and having discussed and thought about it, I do not believe that we should support the Government's amendment. We should do what the Select Committee did and insist on full wind-shielding.

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I am grateful for being called because I was Chairman of the Select Committee that examined the Bill. My hon. Friend the Minister has reminded us that it met for more than 20 sitting days. According to my calculations, it was in session for 111 hours. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's words of approbation, and I should like to say how much I appreciated the assistance of my hon. Friends the Members for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), for Chorley (Mr. Dover) and for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) and the hon. Members for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) and for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway). I note that all the members of the Committee are in their places tonight.

To help the House, I shall make one or two points to show the problems that the Committee faced. As has been said, there was complete disagreement on the basic elements leading to the judgment whether the bridge should have wind-shielding. There was complete disagreement among the experts who were called by the promoters and petitioners. Somebody might say, "You must be a rather naive person if you feel that experts will not disagree." The other Members of the Committee will support me when I say that the disagreement was so fundamental and complete that it caused us great concern.

The disagreement was in three sectors. Although many years ago I qualified as an architect, I am a complete layman in the technical details of bridge design. There was disagreement about the frequency of high winds. There was a 50 per cent. disagreement between the two expert witnesses called by the petitioners. There was more than a 50 per cent. disagreement on the frequency of high winds between the most conservative estimate of the petitioners and the statutes that were given by the promoters. The leading expert witness called by the petitioners — the prestigious Essex and Kent county councils—was none other than Dr. Nicholas Cook, who is the senior principal scientific officer and wind engineering section head at the Department of the Environment's Building Research Establishment. The petitioners therefore called the leading Government expert.

There was complete disagreement about what the delay would be before the bridge was completed. As my hon. Friend the Minister and the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) said, the petitioners said that the delay would be only six weeks, and the promoters said that it would be about 15 to 18 months. As to the extra cost — my hon. Friend the Minister reminded us of the figures—the petitioners said that it would be about £5·4 million and that there would be no need for a fundamental redesign of the bridge. The promoters said that it would cost between £15,250,000 and £18,750,000 and that it would involve a fundamental redesign of the bridge.

I do not think that the Committee was helped by one or two aspects of the promoters' case—the promoters being the Government and the concessionaires. The promoters were reluctant to give information about the design of the bridge when it was requested by the Committee.

The promoters—I want to put their case as fairly as I can and I hope that, as Chairman of the Committee, I am being impeccably neutral — claimed commercial confidentiality, and they may have been right. However, that begs two questions. The lesser question is, at what point does commercial confidentiality not need to be kept? They had been appointed to build the bridge. For how long do they need to keep that commercial confidentiality, which presumably would go as soon as construction of the bridge began?

7.45 pm

The more important question that one should ask—and it is right that the Chairman of the Committee should do so — is, if the promoters are using parliamentary procedures—it is the Select Committee's job to hear the evidence of the petitioners—surely we are entitled, for the benefit of the public, to demand information so that the matter can be properly examined.

Given the scale and technical nature of the petitioners' case, I believe that we should have been given other

additional information—not only the information about the design of the bridge—by the promoters. I shall give one example. We did not have annex A, which was attached to the Minister's response and which gave information of wind speeds at 13 major road bridges in Britain and the details of the traffic restrictions that are imposed on them. While a little of that information dribbled out over the 15 days, it would have been helpful to have that table.

Two matters have become apparent to me, and members of the Committee can disagree with me if they wish. I believe that, because of the detail and complexity of the technical evidence, we should have had, from the outset, a technical adviser or specialist who could have guided us and saved a little time. The time that the Committee took had nothing to do with the competence of its Chairman, but everything to do with the pace set by the petitioners' counsel, who I gather was on a rather larger salary than the combined salaries of the Committee. Surely we should have had, from the outset, that technical advice, which the more general departmental Select Committees can call upon. I leave that thought as a possible change that might be made in future procedures.

The fact that the experts would disagree profoundly must have been realised before the Committee met. Even though we took the decision to hear the petitioners' case on wind-shielding on 28 October—at first the promoters said that we had no locus to do so, so we had to take evidence on that — there were six weeks between us making our decision and the end of the Committee proceedings. The promoters were slow to respond, at least.

At best — I must say this to my hon. Friend the Minister — the independent advice that my hon. Friend has since acquired should have been instigated shortly after 28 October at the latest. It is only two months since the Committee reported. Given the time scale of six weeks between 28 October and the last sitting of the Committee, the promoters could have been more ready and willing to provide us with the information that we needed.

Whatever the merits or otherwise of wind-shielding the bridge, it was little wonder that the Committee, by a majority of five to one, took the decision that it did, given these circumstances. As Chairman of the Select Committee, I did not vote. In the parliamentary tradition, I shall continue to adopt impeccable neutrality tonight. When I fall off the fence on to the bridge, whether or not it is wind-shielded, I hope that I shall fall on the right side of it and that it is a soft landing.

Dr. Reid: Much as the Minister would like it, I do not intend to attempt to condense 111 hours of evidence into a 10-minute speech. That is beyond even the abstractive powers of the various hon. Members who were asked to sit on the Committee. It should not be necessary to repeat what took 111 hours to weigh up in the 21 days on which we sat in judgment, but that is what the Government are asking us to do today. Although it was an arduous task to sit on the Committee for 21 days, I note as I look around the Strangers Gallery that there must be some people who are gluttons for punishment. There are one or two familiar faces. Such are the passions that the issue has aroused.

The Minister's contribution was no counterbalance to the tons of evidence that the Committee had to sift during 111 hours. Indeed, if we put on the scales of justice or of rationality the contribution of that 21 days, along with the Minister's case, which, with great respect, appeared to be an anecdote about how his official lost his spectacles on the Severn bridge, we would find the Government's case this time around as wanting as their previous case.

It may be of interest to hon. Members who have remained in the Chamber to know that I have no subjective interest in the matter. The Dartford-Thurrock crossing is not continually in the minds or on the lips of my constituents. It is not a matter of common discussion in the bars of Bellshill or on the streets of Shotts. I have no interest other than the public interest. It is obviously not of ideological interest to me or to my party, as hon. Members can see, judging from the Benches behind me. The proposed wind shield is not even to be constructed of steel, so, from that point of view, no one can accuse me of having a localised interest.

I ask the Minister and other hon. Members to accept that my interest is purely that of any hon. Member who is put on a Select Committee — that is, to pursue the public interest for the best possible reasons and to the fullest possible extent, to ensure that Parliament defends the interests of people outside the House who feel that their interests have not so far been served by the Government. That was the function, approach and philosophy of the Select Committee throughout its deliberations.

In their response to the Committee's report, the Government were fulsome in their praise. They referred to a long and arduous series of sittings spread over 21 days. They thanked us for our full and painstaking examination of the issues, but then said, "By the way, we reject every recommendation except one." That is the handy little recommendation, in which we happened to say that the presentation of the Government's case was abysmal. Of course it was abysmal, but the Government find it handy to accept that recommendation because, in so doing, they can say, "Really, it was nothing to do with the weight of the evidence, it was merely the presentation." The long-term injury for the Government is to mistake the shadow for the substance.

It is true that the presentation of the Government's case was extremely poor, but even if it had been much better, I am utterly convinced that the evidence would still have been in favour of the plaintiffs. The Chairman of the Committee referred to 111 hours and 21 days, of which not less than 15 days were spent on the wind shield issue alone. After 15 days of examination and cross-examination the Select Committee concluded by a majority of five to one in favour of the addition of a wind shield on the bridge.

Why should there have been a five to one majority? Why should an hon. Member such as myself, with no remote connection with the subject and with no subjective interest in the outcome, who supports the need for the crossing, as do other hon. Members, who appreciates the need to relieve as soon as possible traffic conditions and inconvenience in the area, who is aware of the long delays that motorists suffer at present, and who is fully cognisant of the Government's claim that wind-shielding would entail extra delays and costs in the construction programme, decide that there should be a wind shield on the bridge? Right hon. and hon. Members must decide that matter for themselves.

Despite all the resources at their command, the best legal brains that money could buy — apparently, the plaintiffs were more up-market with their QC—and with the assistance of not only the reservoir of talent that

[Dr. Reid]

resides in the Civil Service but the backing of a major financial and industrial concern and the expertise of the private sector, the Government utterly failed to provide the Select Committee with a case.

Mr. Janman: Is the hon. Gentleman willing to comment on the fact that the QC employed by the petitioners was certainly on a high salary and the projected rate increase in the county of Essex this year is 17·8 per cent.?

Dr. Reid: I cannot comment on rates. I can certainly say that if the QC was on an extremely high salary, and considering the way in which the evidence was presented, he deserved every penny of it. If the matter was judged purely in terms of convincing a Committee, he should have been paid 10 times the salary that the Government paid their QC.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I appreciate that members of the Select Committee will have their say, but it may be helpful if we accept that the way in which the Government presented their case is on trial, not the Select Committee and not any counsel for either side.

Dr. Reid: I accept that. I was merely responding to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman).

We have already paid tribute to the Chairman of the Committee. He conducted himself in an impeccable manner throughout the deliberations. He is not only an impeccable Chairman but an extremely polite man. He said that the presentation of the Government's case lacked something. He said:

"We felt there was a lack of readiness . . . by the Government . . . to make available necessary technical and financial information which would have greatly assisted the Committee".

That was the understatement of the year.

At times the Committee descended into Whitehall farce as the Government became enmeshed in an ever-thickening web of apparent obstruction, which any objective Member could only have concluded was intended to obfuscate the real issue of whether the evidence supported the case for wind-shielding. For example, the famous design plans have been referred to. It may be of interest to hon. Members to know that, when the Committee first referred to the issue, the Government's initial case was that the plaintiffs had no locus.

The Government presented their case, the Select Committee decided against them, and the plaintiffs presented their case. Remember that the Government's case was that there would be undue delays and cost, because any wind-shielding would require a fundamental redesign of the bridge. The problem was that the Government would not release the bridge designs to the plaintiffs or, indeed, to the Select Committee. Therefore, it became impossible to estimate whether the Government were telling the truth. If one does not have the designs, it is difficult how a wind shield will affect redesign. Faced with that, the Committee asked the Government for the reasons.

The first reason that we were given was commercial confidentiality. That rather perplexed the Committee, because, as far as we were aware, the bridge will be owned by the Government. If the bridge is owned by the Government, we presume that the designs are owned by the Government. So we overruled them on commercial confidentiality. But during the arguments on commercial confidentiality, the Government told us explicitly that there was a danger that the designs might fall into the hands of our foreign competitors—especially, and not surprisingly, the West Germans. But despite the threats from the German bogeyman across the Channel, we overruled the Government on that point.

8 pm

The Government then told us that even if confidentiality did not apply, it would be impossible to produce the designs because they did not exist. They said that it would take four to five weeks to put them together. That raised the obvious question: if the designs did not exist, how could the Government tell us that a wind shield would require a fundamental redesigning of the bridge? A simple question, one might think. Again, we overruled the Government and asked for the designs to be produced at short notice. We were then told that they could not be produced at short notice because the Government had to refer to the designer, the mysterious Dr. Homburg who —surprise, surprise—is a West German. Remember the people against whom we had to protect the designs' confidentiality? It appears that the designers were a team of West Germans.

Faced with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you might have excused the objective member of the Select Committee for thinking that something was going on. That example sums up all the obstructive tactics that were used. In retrospect, it is easy to see why the Government were so reluctant to produce the evidence. The weight of the testimony and the evidence completely undermined the Government's case.

It is astounding that one of the most telling contributions against the Government's case and in favour of wind-shielding came from Dr. Cook, a Government employee and one of their foremost experts in wind—outside the Chamber, at least—who had not even been consulted on the matter. No one had thought to lift the telephone and say to the Government's top export—*[Interruption.]* I will not reflect on his future. He may be an export at some stage. No one thought to telephone the top expert in wind and say to him, "We are building this great construction from Dartford to Thurrock. It is a fair old height and a massive size. Do you think we may have problems with wind?" We had the irony of the plaintiffs bringing their case against the Government and producing as one of their most telling witnesses an expert employed by the Government.

The essence of Dr. Cook's testimony was that, contrary to the Government's claim, the site of the Dartford-Thurrock crossing was wind-prone. The hon. Member for Thurrock asked earlier about the evidence in relation to a similar bridge nearby, but the existing basis of calculation of wind, which took into account general wind patterns, was not detailed enough to allow for localised conditions. That could mean that the Dartford-Thurrock crossing would be much more exposed to dangerous winds than a similar bridge, perhaps in the same general geographical area but not in the precise locality. That information could have been obtained by a simple telephone call.

I do not accept the limited wind-shielding that the Minister mentioned. It is a coincidence that out of the blue limited wind-shielding was added to the plans for the bridge within three days of the start of the Select Committee's deliberations. A discussion that had been

continuing for some months, with the plaintiffs asking for wind-shielding for more than a year previously, suddenly and miraculously came to a conclusion within 72 hours of the Committee's starting to ask questions about wind-shielding. It was a pre-emptive strike.

Nor can I accept that the wind shield would be a superfluous extra. As the Minister said, it is being actively considered for the second Severn crossing. I cannot accept that the Government——

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Limited wind-shielding is being considered for the existing Severn crossing. Wind-shielding is being considered for the second crossing. It might be helpful to establish that.

Dr. Reid: I thought that that was what I said.

I cannot accept the Government's report, which simply goes through every issue that the petitioners have mentioned and replies to them. It is almost as though the members of the Committee were sitting in a time warp for 21 days. If all that will happen is that the petitioners' questions will be answered in the House, ignoring completely the decisions of the Select Committee, it might as well not have sat. The Government employed all the arguments, bar one, in testimony before the Committee. They acted as defence counsel during the trial, but when the jury found against them, they sacked the jury and said, "We do not like the decision. We will not only be defence counsel, but we shall set ourselves up as jury, judge and final court of appeal."

That not only undermines the Government's case on this crossing but seriously undermines the entire system of Select Committees. Of course, as the Minister will say, the Government are not obliged to accept the decisions of Select Committees. But they are obliged to give more weight to the Select Committee's deliberations than they appear from their response to have done.

The Minister said that the issue is one of traffic management. But that is the point of contention. The Government cannot solve a problem merely by reiterating the assertion on which they based their principal argument. The Committee, having heard the evidence, decided that it was not merely a question of traffic management. The issue before the House is whether high winds will cause the closure of the bridge or the restriction of lanes so frequently as to undermine the reason for constructing the crossing.

Mr. Janman *indicated assent.*

Dr. Reid: I see the hon. Gentleman nodding. I do not know where he got the estimate of 24 hours. It may horrify him to know that the average estimate of the plaintiffs, which was lower than Dr. Cook's estimate, was 550 hours a year of possible lane restrictions and closures. If the objective is to alleviate traffic problems between Dartford and Thurrock, the hon. Gentleman must ask himself whether, in the eagerness to construct the crossing, the company will not be constructing a white elephant.

I do not accept the argument on costs. The Minister said—he had no evidence to back his assertion, because I asked him, as I asked the Dartford River Crossing Company—that it would be impossible to encompass within the existing toll regime the additional cost of about £15 million to £30 million. He contended that, in the early years, the income would be insufficient, given the extra that would be necessary to pay the interest.

I make two comments on that assertion. First, the Dartford River Crossing Company was asked specifically by me and others to provide an estimate of its income for the early years. If a company cannot provide an estimate of income, it cannot say that that income will be insufficient to meet extra costs. It could not provide such an estimate, and nor could the Minister tonight. He said that if one adds £18 million to an existing bill, it is bound to be more at the end of the day. We are all grateful for that intellectual insight. It is one which the Committee would accept.

Even adding the £18 million and its interest to the existing moneys that have to be collected in tolls—we discussed that evidence in Committee—there is still sufficient leeway without any vast increase within the 20-year toll regime to collect that additional money. On present estimates, without taking into account the wind-shielding, the cost could be recouped in 14, 15 or 16 years. With the additional money it would be a bit of a tight squeeze, but it could be recouped within the 20-year toll regime. In other words, the global sum could be recouped without any major changes in the term of the toll regime.

The question is simple. Is it worth delaying the project for 18 months and paying an extra £15 million to render efficient for the purposes for which it is created a bridge that may last for well over a century? We are not talking about 24 hours a year delay, but 550 or possibly 880 hours. I contend, and the Select Committee contends, that 18 months delay and £15 million are justified for a bridge that will last over a century.

The Minister said that the Government had reconsidered the matter since the Select Committee reported, but I have seen no evidence of that. Indeed, from his response it is clear that, far from having reconsidered the matter, the Government have stuck obstinately to the original decision at the time of the initial tender. I do not know whether it is collective loyalty to the Department and decisions that have already been taken; whether it is sheer embarrassment; whether they are utterly and sincerely convinced that we, as well as their experts and the weight of evidence, are wrong; whether it is from friendship or loyalty to Trafalgar House; or whether it is because the contract has already been awarded.

Parliament, in the shape of the Select Committee, has served the plaintiffs, the public and future users of the Dartford-Thurrock crossing well. Unfortunately, the Government have served them ill. I am sure that the Minister has a marvellous future before him and I agree with one of his statements. He said that he would carry the can. He will indeed. I hope for his sake that we are wrong, because if we are correct—and I believe that we are—it will not be a can that he will carry during his career but a large albatross around his neck.

Mr. Dicks: First, I declare an interest. In 1985 I had an interest in Taylor Woodrow. When I served on the Select Committee I was not aware that Taylor Woodrow had made a bid for the original Dartford crossing, but my interest is registered in the section that deals with Members' interests, and has been since 1985. I was appointed to the Committee by the Committee of Selection, which must have been aware of that background.

I was the only member of the Committee who at the outset felt that the Government's case was correct and that the petitioners had no locus. I felt that we should not listen

[Mr. Dicks]

to the case put by Kent and Essex county councils. How wrong I was. I am pleased to say that, and that my colleagues who decided that we should hear their case were right.

All of us, without exception, want to see this bridge in place, and we were all anxious to deal with the matter as quickly as possible. Had there been an obvious way to do so, we would have taken it, so before anybody says that we set out on this long voyage deliberately to have fun and games at the Government's expense, let me assure them that the opposite was the case. We had hoped to deal with the matter in a few days, but it took 21 days and almost 112 hours.

If one were malicious, one would say that the Government's presentation contains lies, and damned lies, but that would be most unfair. Yet, having noted the lack of details in the presentation, I would not be keen to have the Department of Transport, Mott, Hay and Anderson and Trafalgar House build a bridge with my grandson's Lego.

I have listened to try to find out where the truth lies, but I am left with a great deal of scepticism and anxiety, although it is private money. We are all aware of what is going on. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) described well how we had asked for information, but it was not forthcoming, for the various reasons that he set out, until we pressed for it. That was just one of about half a dozen instances that have given rise to my scepticism. I accept that my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) quite properly took a different view, but the longer the Committee sat, the more sceptical most of us became. We were shown evidence and given views which were subsequently changed. We were not absolutely sure what was happening.

8.15 pm

I was concerned that we did not have access to Herr Helmut Homburg—that is a joke in itself. In his profile it said that the laws in Germany during the 1930s were changed to enable him to start his rising career as a bridge builder. We were not able to invite to the Select Committee the man who knew all the technical details and has special information that the Select Committee should have; nor could we question him and find out his thinking. Only by exerting pressure did we manage to persuade the Department to send a telex to Germany asking him what he thought about wind shields. His four or five line reply was that he did not want them "on my bridge". We thought that it was the Government's bridge.

I am a little uneasy about talking about the quality of the people working for the Government, Mott, Hay and Anderson, and Trafalgar House. The project manager, who is a charming gentleman, sat for many hours giving us the benefit of his wisdom. My colleagues discovered his background: he has limited experience, primarily from highway maintenance, he has never built a bridge, and he has no experience of the impact of wind on a bridge. He said that from walking around Dartford and perhaps crossing the Severn bridge he felt in his bones that the position was not too bad. He had a feeling inside him. We are talking a £82 million project. We asked him why he had not approached Dr. Cook, a Government employee with great expertise, for help at the beginning. He had never thought about it. Dr. Cook works in a Department and is paid by the Government.

Mr. Janman: Does my hon. Friend think that that may have something to do with the fact that there is no major estuarial crossing in the world with full wind-shielding?

Mr. Dicks: With great respect to my hon. Friend, not at all. If one is to build a bridge, one should receive the best and most comprehensive advice possible. Essex and Kent county councils brought a witness who was a wind expert —not someone they found, but a man in a Government office. Yet central Government did not bother to ask one of their employees whose salary they pay. Nothing could be more stupid and unthinking.

The project manager—nice chap that he is, indeed a charming man—was not qualified. He did not have the expertise, background or specialisation to handle this project. One wonders how on earth he got the job.

I shall not stop there. I come now to the representatives of the agents. Although the contracts were up for tender for the job, no one was up for tender to be the agents. Why did Mott, Hay and Anderson get the job? The company did another job for the Department of Transport some time ago, so perhaps the Department thought that it was good and would have it back again. There was no competition, and it seemed to me—I am not an expert —that the Department had had a good job done by the company in the past and decided that it would bring it along and use it because it seemed pretty good.

To judge from what we heard from the representative, his evidence was flawed, to say the least. He was unfamiliar with wind-shield techniques and could not distinguish one type from another. He turned to Dr. Cook for advice, but did not appear to like it or bother to follow it up. His attitude to wind expertise, about which he knew nothing, was cavalier and throwaway. He described it as nothing more than weather forecasting. If a leading member of the Government's agents plays down the importance of wind on a bridge, be it the Severn bridge or the Dartford-Thurrock crossing, in such a cavalier manner, it makes one wonder how they came to be the Government's agents and how that man came to be in charge of the presentation.

In order to be fair to the three parties concerned, let us turn to Trafalgar House. It decided to bring along an accountant. He told us about his qualifications as a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, so we had hoped for some expertise from him. We asked if he had brought any figures along and he replied that he had not. We asked him how, if there was a delay, he would raise the money. He answered that he did not know how long that would take—possibly six months. We thought he was an accountant, but it turned out that he was not really one. He sounded like a Back-Bench Conservative Member doing what he was told when he was told to do it.

We put in our report and the Government examined it. Chapter 17 of the response says:

"The Government, as promoters of the Bill, assisted by the concessionnaires, presented the case in the way they thought most helpful to the Committee."

Lies, damned lies and statements in the Minister's reply. There is no other way of putting it. If that was what the Government thought was the most helpful way, God help us if they wanted to be obstructive.

"This reflected the obligation the Government felt to safeguard information which the concessionnaires considered would be of commercial value to a competitor."

The only information that the Government wanted to safeguard in their presentation to us was the information that would help us come to a full and proper conclusion in our deliberations. I do not hesitate to say that, and I shall not backtrack on it.

We heard from the Minister in the report, and we heard it again today, that further investigations have led the Government to believe that the Committee was wrong. We sat for 111 hours—21 days. The Standing Committee—God bless the Members and their cotton socks—sat for two hours——

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): Less than one.

Mr. Dicks: In that case, I do not bless their cotton socks.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): It is perhaps worth while telling the hon. Gentleman that he will strengthen his case if he realises that one of the reasons why the Standing Committee sat for less than an hour was that we did not have the Government's replies to the important points raised in the Select Committee, so there was no point in delaying the Committee at that stage.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We also did not have my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks).

Mr. Dicks: It was a clever move on the part of the Government to keep everyone in the dark until the Standing Committee had risen, and then to deliver their response. The Department of Transport, as we discovered during our deliberations, over-estimated the toll income on bridges in the north—it got that wrong—and under-estimated traffic on the M25—it got that wrong, too. But it was clever enough to ensure that the information needed by hon. Members to make our case conveniently arrived after the Standing Committee has risen.

I wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport on 19 December asking for a full inquiry into how the contract was awarded and how it had progressed ever since. Something about it smelt wrong. I have received an acknowledgment, but yet again there was no answer to the points that I raised, except that the Minister indirectly replied to the Select Committee that the Government had to be careful about these issues because of commercial confidentiality. With great respect to my hon. Friend—I have a high regard for his ability and for what he says and does — that is absolute bunkum. There is nothing to prevent the Government answering the questions that we raised about the way the matter has been handled. It is wrong to use confidentially in this way. The Minister, I, my hon. Friends and, I am sure, the people in the Department of Transport, know that.

The Select Committee sat through all those hours and was painstaking about its questions. We argued among ourselves and delayed each other by asking so many questions. The Chairman was kind and patient, although once or twice he told some of us off. How can the Government listen to what we say and then, in a few days, reject virtually everything that criticised them, except for one bit, as the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) pointed out? There is something wrong with the way in which the whole thing has been handled. To say in the report, as the Government do, that they hope that an inquiry into the points raised will ensure that the presentation is better next time is not good enough.

I want to know why the goal posts were moved half way through the tendering process. I want to know how Mott, Hay and Anderson obtained the agent's post. Why is the project manager someone who should not be doing the job? Why did the man from Mott, Hay and Anderson know nothing about wind problems on the bridge? Why did the accountant not bring facts and figures with him? If that is the quality of person that the Government use in the Department of Transport, is it any wonder that they underestimate traffic on the M25 and overestimate tolls in the north of England? There is something wrong in the state of Denmark.

I beg the Minister not only to learn lessons for the future, but to tell us what has been going on, why and who has been doing it. Where is the Government's latest information coming from, and who gives it to them? If it is coming from the same incompetent crew that has been advising the Government thus far, they can forget the advice as worthless.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I am sorry that my voice is hoarse tonight; it is in poor form because it was in too good form on Saturday at Cardiff Arms park.

I want to raise certain points that have not so far been covered. When my hon. Friends and I were first asked to serve on the Select Committee, we were all rather green, having been elected only in 1987. We were unfamiliar with some of the more arcane aspects of Commons procedure, so when the Whips approached us and told us that it was a great honour to serve on a Select Committee we rushed back to tell our hon. Friends of the new intake that we have been asked to serve on a Select Committee scrutinising private business. They asked what we had done wrong. I am still trying to find out, but it was a long job and we sat patiently. So green were we that we did not realise that the Government are allowed to score goals after the Select Committee has finished. I am glad that did not happen last Saturday. We scored a drop goal in injury time, but not after the whole match was over, which is essentially what the Government have done.

We can all share some sense of grievance at the fact that the Government have pretended that the Select Committee never met. They have said that they will accept the point about presentation and the fact that they did not put their case well. However, that merely strengthens their resolve to ram their original conclusions down the throats of hon. Members. They claim that all that was wrong was that they made a few mix-ups and did not get their act together in time to have everything ready for the Committee. Perhaps they rushed things a little and did not put the best face on what was really a strong case. All that does not please those of us who served on the Select Committee. The health of the Select Committee procedure for private or hybrid business in which there is a strong Government interest must depend on the Government showing some respect for the conclusions reached by Select Committees. They have not done so on this occasion. They have accepted the bit that does not involve any change in making up their mind and reaching conclusions. They have said that they are sticking to their guns even though they were overturned in the Committee by a majority of five to one and took a fairly severe pasting in the Committee's final conclusions. We have to ask ourselves why that happened. It is not just a matter of presentation, because something fundamental was giving rise to disquiet the whole way through.

8.30 pm

We are not discussing the principle of privatisation—and the Opposition do not wish to raise that issue at this stage—and we are not considering privatisation of a key part of Britain's motorway infrastructure; we are debating whether the use of a design, build and finance contract for a key part of the M25 will give rise to any kind of substandard operation compared with what would have occurred if the Government had heeded to the Select Committee's conclusions.

The Select Committee met and considered the evidence in extenso. We were laymen, except for one member of the Committee who was an engineer, and we found in favour of the petitioners on some fairly fundamental points in relation to the bridge design. We expect some notice to be taken of that and will be most unhappy if it is not. We also expect some notice to be taken of the way in which we went about our work. We put our best efforts into it. We do not expect it to be dismissed as if it did not happen. That is extremely worrying for everyone involved in the work of the House of Commons as a whole.

This is a matter of concern not just for the seven of us on the Committee, who feel fairly aggrieved because the work that we put in may not have been noted in the way that one would expect, but for every hon. Member who will have to consider how the House is supposed to deal with the hybrid Bill procedure which combines Government and private interests. Are we supposed to pretend that the Committee goes through a charade of sitting for 122 hours because its Members have nothing better to do? Is it intended to be a real part of the examination of evidence which allows the Committee to draw conclusions?

It is most unfortunate, when private companies and the Government combine on docks, harbours, roads and bridges and use the hydrid Bill procedure more and more, that the Goverment do not recognise that the essential countervailing part of that is that they must take notice of the conclusions reached by Select Committees, even when those conclusions run counter to the case made by the Government. There must be times when the Government are willing to accept the principle that, even though a Select Committee has found against them and it will cost them time, money and renegotiation, Select Committees are there to do a job.

The Committee considered this case the first time that the Government wanted to use a design, build and finance procedure. We heard evidence that it would take additional time and money, but the Government said that they were unwilling to accept that conclusion. They said that the only conclusion they would accept was the one that involved the Government giving themselves a small caning on the backside for not putting the facts and figures together very well and for second-rate presentation. That is not good enough and will bring the Select Committee procedure on hybrid Bills into disrepute.

As I have said, it is an attack not only on the seven members of the Committee but on the whole Select Committee procedure for dealing with hybrid Bills. We all have an interest in seeing that that procedure is properly protected and is not used simply as a doormat by the Government. We must all make a stand to see that Select Committees are used properly and treated with respect, even when they draw conclusions that are inconvenient for the Government and for their concessionaires. The Government cannot ride roughshod over Select Committees.

I should like to make a few points on finance and windshielding. These matters are important. When I started to serve on the Committee I took the view, based on gut feeling similar to that felt by some of the professional engineers involved in the design of the bridge, that near the Severn bridge on the west coast where I come from is a very windy area. The east coast is not as windy. Therefore, the many hours during which one would expect to see traffic restricted or diverted from the Severn bridge would not occur on the east coast because the winds in London are not like those in south Wales. I took a macho view.

The Minister has said that the Severn bridge has been closed only three times in the past 21 years. He did not say that the closures were all in the last two years. We have a Select Committee but we do not want select evidence from the Minister. The evidence must be treated in more than one way, and not just in the way favourable to the Government's case. We have to look at it objectively, because, when the bridge is constructed, it will be in place for a long time.

The key evidence against the Government was presented by their own employee. He was their top expert not just on winds, but on their effects on structures, which is the key factor in Dr. Cook's expertise, which was never challenged by anybody on the promoters' — the Government's—side. It was to the effect that, because the Dartford crossing would be in a particular alignment across the Thames and high above the river, the wind impact on vehicles crossing it in the one-way mode, which would be the norm, would be virtually as great—well within the margin of error—as the wind impact on traffic on the Severn bridge. I am more familiar with that bridge as I use it once or twice a month. Our experience as laymen that the west coast is windier than the east coast is not necessarily relevant according to the Government's top wind expert, who was called by the petitioners and not by the promoters. That evidence was never challenged.

We come back to the fundamental point, that, if the Government want to make a success and build confidence in this design, build and finance form of privatisation that they are setting out to use for the motorway system, they have to show that they are not cutting corners in order to make it a financial success for the promoters but of doubtful benefit to road users.

Let us deal with road users. I speak frankly as someone from the Celtic fringe who, like my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) has no direct traffic constituency connection to the Dartford-Thurrock crossing. We simply have the ability to consider how important this bridge is relative to the roads and bridges in our areas.

It takes a bit of swallowing of pride to admit to the volume of traffic that will use this road, even though it is not technically classified as a motorway, so that motor bikes, learner drivers, and so on, will be able to use it. The evidence given to us shows that in terms of traffic volume it is about twice as important as the Severn bridge. It will carry a colossal volume of traffic. About 40 or 50 per cent. of traffic will be local, from Essex and Kent, and this is probably the most important short length of motorway anywhere in Britain.

When the Channel tunnel is opened in 1992-93 and when we have full and free trade under the single internal

market regulations—assuming that they come about in 1992—there will be a colossal volume of strategically important traffic travelling from France, Spain and Germany, the Benelux countries, not just to Kent or Essex, but to the midlands and to the north. That traffic will cross that length of motorway over the Thames. Therefore, it is perhaps the single most important two or three miles in the British motorway system. It is vital that it should be right and that there should be no unnecessary restrictions.

In many ways it will be the road transport jugular vein of Britain. For that reason, if there are ways of making sure that the traffic flows smoothly, we must take them, even if that costs the concessionaires a little extra money or results in a delay in their getting their money back of from 14 to 20 years or conceivably a loss of risk capital. They are in the risk business and that is the risk that they have to take. I do not wish that on the concessionaires, but that is the type of business that they are in. They are not operating on a cost-plus basis. They entered into it on a partly risk-bearing basis and they knew that before the Select Committee stage.

It is totally wrong for us to say that they may bear some risks, but we must eliminate those risks if they involve additional costs that they do not like. The Government cannot say that if the concessionaires do not like it, they will put it right, but if the Select Committee does not like it, they will ignore it. That is the wrong attitude in terms of the public interest in traffic flow and the importance of the M25 Thames crossing to the road system of Britain starting in 1993.

The evidence from the Severn bridge is clear, but there will be problems on the M25 Thames crossing, with the weight of lorry traffic which is particularly susceptible to high winds and which will carry key items of export freight from Scotland, the north and the midlands to the continent. It is vital that the bridge is right. It should not be a skimped, second-rate, cut-price bridge in order to ensure that the design, build and finance contract gets off to a good start in the view of the concessionaires and not in the view of the users of the bridge.

Mr. Dover: I am the only hon. Member who was on the Select Committee and the Standing Committee. I am also a civil engineer, without any financial interest in a building or civil engineering firm, although until the end of 1986 I was Wimpey's parliamentary consultant in the House.

In his opening speech and in response to the Select Committee, the Minister spoke about the so-called independent report from a Danish engineer. I have that report, and I do not consider that it is independent. The Cleveland Bridge and Engineering Company Ltd. together with COWI Consult, a Danish engineering firm, made a bid for the third Bosphorus bridge in Turkey. I compliment Trafalgar House on its massive export orders around the world and on its superb first Bosphorus bridge. I regret that it did not build the second one, and I hope that it will land the contract for the third.

Those firms—Cleveland Bridge, part of Trafalgar House and the Dartford River Crossing Company—are in league with the Danish firm in putting in a very large tender for the third Bosphorus crossing. Dartford River Crossing Company briefed the engineers. The Government played no part in that, nor have their advisers, Maunsell and Kent and Essex county councils. They have since been asked to do nothing further and they have not been consulted since the end of the Select Committee's consideration.

There were only two days of briefing with Dartford River Crossing personnel. One of the items that Dartford River Crossing asked the experts to judge was

"verification of Dr. Homburg's reputation as a major bridge designer."

It seems strange, at that late stage for the bridge promoter to wonder about the credentials of its own so-called world expert in design. Later in the report there are rather dubious comments about whether the Severn crossing model can be likened to any Dartford model. I understand from Maunsell that the geometry was very similar, but the Danish engineer dismissed any similarity between the two projects.

The Select Committee spent some time considering whether Dartford or Severn had wind-shielding problems. We have heard from the Minister that full wind-shielding is under consideration for the second Severn bridge crossing. Indeed, much of the evidence to the Select Committee made great play of the fact that there was no bridge in the world with full wind-shielding.

We have heard that argument tonight. It is not a real argument, because the Government are rightly considering it for the second Severn bridge crossing. Indeed, the bridge referred to in the report, the Little Belt bridge in Denmark designed by the Danish engineer without wind-shielding, now has wind-shielding around its towers.

Civil engineering is a progressive art and one learns by one's mistakes or one's lack of understanding and takes suitable measures. The report states that a plastic wind shield membrane would be unsuitable. If that is so, and if the expected life is 20 years or less, why has the Department of Transport agreed to have it on a bridge on the River Tees where there is to be 16,000 sq m of glass reinforced plastic fitted?

I applaud the Department's foresight in covering the structural members that are deteriorating, and making sure that no further deterioration takes place. The plastic fairing and membranes help enormously.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Is my hon. Friend asking us to compare weather-shielding with wind-shielding?

8.45 pm

Mr. Dover: I will be dealing with wind-shielding in a few moments. Perhaps weather-shielding was what the Minister had in mind at the Tees. I shall explain why I am talking about wind-shielding and the structural significance of the member itself.

The report made great play of the fact that plastic is not really a suitable member. That is wrong because it can have, and will have on the Tees, a life of 30 years, which is the maximum period that an agreement certificate requires of any member in maximum exposure conditions.

The report goes on to say that the plastic material will in some way have to integrate with the steel of the bridge and that the membrane could be in aluminium or stainless steel and has to follow all the movement of the bridge. That is not true. I have checked with Maunsell, which has a different opinion from Mott, Hay and Anderson. It has given its opinion of the report, which is generally available. It says that the paragraph referring to plastic materials and movement, or the joint structural behaviour of that with the steel of the bridge is

"wholly and totally a wrong assessment."

[Mr. Dover]

The Select Committee heard a lot of evidence about the time delay.

Mr. Bottomley: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend, but it is rather important. Was he talking about the membrane or was he referring to the plastic members of the bridge as load carrying or as covering for weather protection for existing members of the bridge?

Mr. Dover: We are not talking about weather protection as on the Tees bridge. We are talking about wind-shielding, with the fairing membrane making sure that the wind does not impose too much wind load on the bridge but moves past it and that whatever wind pressure is put on the bridge is taken on the main structure which is able to resist it in a more effective way than if the fairing membrane was not there.

Mr. Bottomley: Then the Tees example is not an effective comparison.

Mr. Dover: I accept that, if the Minister is saying that it is purely weather protection.

Mr. Bottomley: It would be helpful to know what my hon. Friend is asserting, so that I can respond to him.

Mr. Dover: I mentioned the Tees bridge originally because there are assertions that the life of a plastic membrane, as there will be at Tees, is 20 years or less. The Minister will find that it will be 30 years or more at Tees and the Department of Transport would not have allowed weather-shielding to be a plastic membrane if they thought otherwise.

The Danish expert was told by Dartford River Crossing that the delay would be about 21 months. He immediately made the point in his report that a saving of five months could be made, bringing that delay down to some 16 months. I was reluctant and a little sad to hear tonight that the Government immediately put that up to 18 to 21 months, whereas Maunsell and their advisers Essex and Kent county councils reckoned on a delay of some six months.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): How can my hon. Friend convince the House that either Kent or Essex can make a better assessment of the likely delay involved in the redesign of the bridge than the company that has the contract? The opinion of those who will have to redesign the bridge — the work will be done in Darlington — is that it will take 15 to 21 months. How can Essex county council have a superior view?

Mr. Dover: If my hon. Friend studied the Select Committee proceedings, he would see that time was spent on analysing in great detail bar charts, some showing critical path networks through those programmes and Maunsell, Kent and Essex put their points of view, and the promoters of the bridge put their points of view. It was clear to the members of the Committee that there were time savings, and that speedier routes could be followed. The Danish expert said immediately that a saving of five months could be made, but the Government have said that they will forget that, and that they reckon that the delay will be 18 to 21 months. It is possible to redesign the bridge in terms of an overall trapezoidal box, as the report suggests, but the report is not truly independent. It would be possible to redesign it with minimum changes, perhaps adding one or two extra longitudinal members, and that was accepted in the Select Committee.

In the Government's response, and tonight, we have heard about an extra cost of £15 million to £18 million. It is odd that the Danish engineer was not asked to quantify the extra cost associated with the addition of wind-shielding. Tonight, for the first time, we have heard a cost-benefit analysis from the Government. We have had one from Maunsell saying that the cost-benefit is £20 million to £30 million, whereas the range of costs is £5 million to £15 million or £18 million. The users of the crossing will provide £16 million of net profit each year. If there is an override cost of £16 million or £18 million, that will be swallowed up by one years' extra toll income. There is a buffer period of five years' tolls at the end of the envisaged construction period for the facility.

The Select Committee heard that the Government's man in charge — the project director — used his sixth sense to judge that wind-shielding was not needed. We have heard that full wind-shielding is under consideration for the second Severn bridge, and I welcome that. We have read in the report from the Danish engineer that there is limited wind-shielding, as the Government intend, around the towers, and that will certainly stop the dramatic effect that drivers will feel as they pass those towers.

However, I wish the House to concentrate on the four lanes of traffic heading south at about 50 mph and slowing down towards the toll on the southern side of the bridge. Until they reach the crest, they will have been protected from the prevailing south-west wind, but when they hit the crest, they will hit that wind full on, because they will be dropping from a rising gradient to a falling gradient. The design gradients on the bridge are the maximum permitted for a 50 mph speed range.

In other words, there is a dramatic change and, along with that, a dramatic wind, but the Government are not having any wind-shielding at that point. My hon. Friend the Minister said that he will gladly carry the can, but I hope that he will think more carefully about the issue. It is a matter of the wind direction and the direction of the traffic. My hon. Friend mentioned the Orwell bridge, but there is already a solid barrier there which is some 1·2 m high and made of concrete. No wonder there has been no closure of that bridge through wind.

I say this with great regret, but I could not possibly support the amendment. The Select Committee thought carefully, and heard the evidence, but the Government have not gone out for independent advice to see whether one set of experts or the other is correct. All we have is the promoter seeking a further source of advice from a group with which he is already in league. I wish them all success in their third Bosphorus crossing tender.

I shall end by quoting from an article by the county engineers of Essex and Kent, areas in which half the drivers using the crossing will originate or have their destinations, so the views of these people are a vital consideration. They say:

> "The public at large must have complete confidence in this first privately financed design and build estuarial crossing . . . Traffic difficulties at Dartford in future due to wind conditions would neither be forgotten nor forgiven by the public we all serve."

I feel that the Government are making a mistake by turning down the recommendations of the Select Committee. Wind-shielding should be added to the bridge.

Mr. Janman: I welcome the Bill's quick return to the House and for the same reason as I welcomed its Second Reading. I also welcome the amendment deleting the unproven requirement for the wind-shielding. Although I withdrew it, I tabled a similar amendment in Committee. I support the Government, and not as a Government Back-Bench poodle, as was intimated by my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks).

Mr. Dicks: I said that it sometimes seemed that way, although I could have been mistaken. I was not referring to the Bill that we are discussing, so my hon. Friend should put his quotation in context.

Mr. Janman: I stand as a Member whose constituency is immediately adjacent to the crossing and as somebody who is therefore extremely concerned whether the design of the bridge has been got right. With respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington, the number of drivers crossing the bridge daily who will emanate from my constituency will outnumber by a large factor the number of people crossing the bridge who will emanate from Hayes and Harlington. Therefore, I have a great interest in making sure that the Government get the design right. The team working on this project from DRCC and the Trafalgar House group was experienced and expert. The comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) about the worldwide experience of Trafalgar House in designing bridges shows that it is unlikely that a company of such prestige and professionalism would come to a conclusion that is faulty in the way that my hon. Friend suggested.

The second Severn crossing is only just being considered and no decision about wind-shielding on that crossing has yet been reached. It may be decided that it is not required even in that particular location, which is much more susceptible to wind than the Thames between Dartford and Thurrock. Until that decision is made, it is safe to say that there is no major estuarial crossing in the world with full wind-shielding. The only instance of full wind-shielding in Europe can be seen on the Europa bridge across the Still valley in Austria. That bridge is sited at an elevation of 2,500 ft and that is quite a different location from the Thames between the Essex and Kent plains in my constituency.

The petitioners have based much of their case for extra wind-shielding on experience with the Severn bridge. Some of the Severn bridge's problems are caused by wind, but many are caused by its design. It is far more susceptible to a variety of problems, some caused by wind, than almost any other bridge in the United Kingdom. Why did the petitioners not consider the Humber bridge, the Forth bridge or any other major bridge in the United Kingdom? Obviously, it was not in their interests to do so. I believe that Maunsell, which advised Essex and Kent county councils, has a patent on full wind-shielding. I will take that back if I am wrong. Of course, Maunsell therefore has an interest to ensure that the bridge has full wind-shielding.

Mr. Morgan: I want to explain that Maunsell has also been chosen by the Department of Transport to be the consultant engineers for the second Severn crossing.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Hon. Members on both sides of the House should realise that the geometry of Dartford differs from the proposed second Severn crossing and one cannot use one of those crossings as a surrogate for the other. It is also worth noting that, while the Department responsibly considers wind-shielding on the second Severn crossing, it would be ludicrous if it did not, for any good reason, aim to do the same for the Dartford crossing. The Department should be allowed some credit for being responsible for commissioning the work on the second Severn crossing.

9 pm

Mr. Janman: The point that I am trying to make is that the firm of consulting engineers chosen by Essex and Kent has a vested interest in ensuring that full wind-shielding is installed on the bridge because it has a patent on a full wind-shielding design.

Let us consider the comparison that was made between the Dartford-Thurrock crossing and the Severn bridge. It has already been said that the Severn bridge has been closed completely only three times in its 21-year life. I believe that the laboratory where Dr. Cook worked produced projections before the Severn bridge was built about the number of hours of lane closures due to wind —although I must state that I do not know whether Dr. Cook was involved in those projections. I believe that I am right to state—no doubt my hon. Friend the Minister will correct me if I am wrong—that the projections were out by at least a factor of two. There have been fewer hours of lane closures on the Severn bridge than the laboratory to which hon. Members have referred projected.

The statistics show that there is an average of 168 hours per annum of lane closure on the existing Severn crossing. Some of the projections offered by the petitioners to the Select Committee on Transport estimated that the influence of wind at Dartford would be five times greater than actually occurs at the Severn bridge, when current British standards show that maximum gust wind speeds at Dartford are about 15 per cent. lower than on the Severn bridge. The petitioners used very low wind thresholds as the base for their predictions of wind effect at Dartford.

However, the number of hours when the wind exceeds specific thresholds was calculated by the Dartford River Crossing Company for both the Dartford and Severn bridges using Meteorological Office records corrected for bridge heights and locations. The records show that the "hours of wind"—that is, the number of hours when the wind would reach a gust speed that would cause lane closures—for Dartford are no more than 25 per cent. of the Severn bridge figures for the same threshold speeds.

Taking other special factors into account, such as the particular design of the bridge and the fact that the traffic flows only one way, everyone concerned with the project has concluded, quite rightly I believe, that the number of hours of lane closure on the Thurrock-Dartford crossing would be as few as 24 per annum. When my hon. Friend the Minister replies, I hope that he will clarify whether the figure of 24 hours does or does not include the effect of localised wind-shielding and whether, if it does not, the figure of 24 hours could be reduced even further with the addition of such localised wind-shielding.

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman has made considerable play of the 24-hour figure about which, according to him, everyone involved in the project agrees. Given the discrepancy between 24 hours and 880 hours—the figure produced by the Government's top expert on the effect of wind on structures — will he name one expert who

[Dr. Reid]

supports the 24-hour figure who has the same background, expertise and reputation as Dr. Cook? There is an awful discrepancy between 24 hours and 880 hours. If we are to judge fairly on this, will he name one expert whose reputation is as formidable as Dr. Cook's to back up his 24-hour figure, if possible without reference to any of his hon. Friends?

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It may be helpful to the House if I explain that we are not playing a game. We are considering a serious issue to which the Select Committee devoted nearly 21 days.

Mr. Morgan: Is that a point for the Government's side?

Mr. Bottomley: I hope that this is of assistance to the House. I open my mouth to make points not just for my side. It is fair to say that Dr. Cook presented data on wind speeds and occurrences. He did not get involved in the argument about whether wind shields were necessary.

Mr. Janman: It has also been accepted that at the east London river crossing, only eight miles up river and in similar territory, there will be 25 hours of lane closure per year. It strikes me that, there being only a difference of one hour between those two crossings, one could logically come to the conclusion that 24 hours of lane closure is correct. The Government, the Department of Transport, the consultants acting on behalf of the Government, the Dartford River Crossing Company and the Trafalgar House group, all of which have individuals whose judgment I respect and value, have come to the conclusion that there will be only 24 hours of lane closures per year at the new crossing as a result of the gust speeds that will operate in this geographic location and their effect on vehicles travelling across. It is interesting——

Mr. Robert Hughes: I should like to make one point to the hon. Gentleman. He has cast some doubt on the integrity of the firm of consultants that advised about wind-shielding on the ground that it is trying to sell its systems to Trafalgar House and therefore cannot be objective. The hon. Gentleman should have a care about casting doubt on people's reputations, especially as he appears to be quoting from a brief that he received from Thurrock borough council. It is the council that is making those allegations and it is opposed to the system. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will try to deal with the matter on its merits and not throw mud about.

Mr. Janman: With respect, I said that the company had a patent on the design. I did not at any time say that it was trying to sell it. I am not quoting from a brief provided by my local council, which I should remind the hon. Gentleman is a Labour-controlled local authority. If he is casting doubt on its integrity, perhaps the current political control has something to do with that.

It has been revealed in the debate that most of the wind-related incidents on the existing Severn bridge occur near the towers of the bridge. Therefore, it is important that there should be some form of wind-shielding at the towers. That is exactly what the localised wind-shielding will provide. In my view, it will cater adequately for any wind-shielding that is required.

We have to decide tonight whether it is worth the extra cost to the motorist and the extra delays. I do not think that it matters whether the delay is 15, 18 or 21 months; we are talking about a long delay in a project that is required urgently. As my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) pointed out, that sort of delay could jeopardise jobs in the north-east of England, which is where Opposition Members are always saying that we need more jobs.

For 24 hours of lane closure per year, of which, statistically, at least half will be at night when the real challenges of traffic control will not apply, are we prepared to have that long delay and jeopardise jobs in the north-east? Perhaps what has happened, to use a rugby analogy, is that the Select Committee has scored the first try, but I think that after reassessing the evidence, which the Government have done, we will see that the winning argument is that against wind-shielding, not the argument in favour.

I certainly welcome the Bill on Report and Third Reading and I welcome and support the amendment. My constituents are intimately involved in the bridge and are keen to see it built as soon as possible. They certainly do not want to drive across a bridge that is dangerous. They welcome the Government's reassessment and their conclusion.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I come as a non-member of the Select Committee to listen to the debate because it is important that we should keep an eye on these matters and not leave discussions to Committee Members.

I have heard the arguments and read some of the report, and I am alarmed to see that, in paragraph 6 of its report, the Select Committee stated:

"Over the course of 15 days, we heard a substantial amount of evidence on the desirability or otherwise of adding windshielding to the bridge."

The Committee's conclusions were made on an entirely objective basis with no party political involvement. That objective assessment of the evidence was made after long and boring proceedings, with counsel for both sides appearing to be paid by the hour and making every hour as lucrative as possible—that is the general reputation of such Committees—yet the Committee's conclusions were case aside so lightly by the Government

I also read the Government report, and I hope that the Minister will answer my questions. In paragraph 6 of its report the Select Committee stated:

"We acknowledge that a requirement to add windshielding to the design at this stage would cause some delay to and increase the cost of construction. We believe, however, that these disadvantages should be set against the significant reduction in the number of occasions when restrictions on vehicles using the bridge would have to be imposed owing to high winds. We concluded that the benefits to be gained from windshielding are sufficient to compensate for the delay and increased cost in building the bridge. We have agreed by a majority of five to one to amend the Bill accordingly."

That was a hefty majority of the Committee. The House will accept that the Committee was considering the matter objectively. People suspect that perhaps the Government have not been quite so objective. The Minister will be able to tell us whether, as a result of those published conclusions in the special report of the Select Committee, there have been any representations from Trafalgar House, any communications, meetings with civil servants or the Minister, exchanges of letters or protests from the concessionaires, who would not like to see the cost of bridge construction increased in that way.

Has there been any pressure, or has the Department taken an entirely objective position and decided that the

additional cost is simply not worth the candle of the reduced number of potential closures on the bridge because of high winds?

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I remember one conversation with a senior member of the Dartford River Crossing Company. I suspect that there have been letters, and there have certainly been meetings, because we have put a substantial amount of pressure on DRCC to obtain the information on which we could make an objective judgment. I stand by the words in my opening speech.

Mr. Cryer: When a Minister tries to make an objective judgment on subjective information from people who are interested parties, it is a difficult process. I understand the Minister's problem, but, in Parliament, we have to consider the circumstances and decide whether they are satisfactory.

There are two sides to the matter. On the one hand, hon. Members who are not involved on a constituency basis and have no axe to grind have to go through a boring procedure because they are asked to do so and have to make the best of the circumstances. On the other hand, the Minister, cosseted by civil servants behind closed doors, receives evidence from people with a clear financial vested interest. The difficulties in making an objective decision are far greater for the Minister than for the Committee.

We set up these Committees to do a job in the public interest. The Committee may just as well not have sat, for all the value that the Government have placed on its deliberations. It is not just a case of the Labour Opposition saying that the Government are taking a ham-fisted approach, as there has been virulent criticism from a Conservative Member. This is an important matter. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) said — he is a Rugby Union enthusiast, with some justification to judge from recent events—the House will have to consider the issue. With a Government who have a majority of 100, the House has to reassess its position in regard to an elected dictatorship. If we have Select Committees spending hours examining evidence that is then discarded, the House will have to consider whether it is worth while pursuing such procedure for legislation such as this.

The inability of the Government and the concessionaires to present adequate evidence was all concealed behind a cloak of commerial confidentiality. That cloak is used far too frequently. Departments can shield pretty well what they want. By and large, it is not Ministers who classify documents, "Commercial in Confidence". The documents arrive on their desks stamped by a civil servant. Until we are clear about the relationship between Trafalgar House and the Civil Service, we are not clear about the influences that produce category.

9.15 pm

I do not accept the argument in the Government's resonse that there was sufficient justification on grounds of commercial confidentiality to inhibit them from presenting a full and comprehensive answer to the detailed questions which the Committee properly asked. In paragraph 17, the Government say:

> "The Government, as promoters of the Bill, assisted by the concessionaires, presented the case in the way they thought most helpful to the Committee."

That patently was not the case — the Committee complained. The Government are to have an inquiry. They say:

> "The Secretary of State has already begun an enquiry into the way in which the case was handled and will ensure that this enquiry includes consideration of ways in which difficulties might be avoided on any future occasion."

That is the sort of platitudinous nonsense that Governments turn out to suit any occasion. We shall get a platitudinous report in which the Government say that a little more information could have been presented a little earlier. The Secretary of State will look at it and it will gather dust until the next point of disagreement.

The Government are too closed a society. Government Departments use the excuse of secrecy to do what they like. It is simply not good enough to have such a response to people who were elected here to do a job which they do not much like doing but which they do with reasonable spirit. In a spirit of inquiry, they produced a report for public consumption. They were fobbed off with childish answers. It does the Minister and the Department no good at all to produce a response of such poor calibre.

The case that the Select Committee made has not yet been answered. I look forward to the Minister's winding-up speech. He has received strong criticism from both sides of the House and from members of the Committee. There is a strong case for retaining the Committee's recommendation. I hope that there is a vote on the Government amendment. In view of the Minister's comments, I suspect that the Government have kept sufficient Members here to see the amendment through. The matter will not be decided in quite as objective a way as has been suggested. It is lamentable that the Government's case has been put forward on such an ordinary level. They have produced no answers of any substance.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): We spent 21 days of our lives listening to evidence, much of it highly complex and technical. At times, indeed, it became positively surrealistic to listen to long and worthy arguments about vortex-shedding, flutter and all sorts of other strange things of which I have never heard in my life. My hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr Chapman) was a delight as Chairman: indeed, it was his chairmanship that made some of the lengthier and more boring sections of the inquiry bearable.

It had its lighter moments, however. Mention has been made of the substantial fees paid to counsel on both sides. The House sat all through one Tuesday evening, and, when we assembled on Wednesday morning, we had to remind counsel that the day was still Tuesday, and that Tuesday's refresher would have to do for Wednesday as well. There were one or two unhappy faces on the other side of the table! However, it has to be said that those moments were brief and all too infrequent.

The sitting became a battle of wits between the rapier cross-examination of the petitioners' counsel, Mr. Conrad Dehn, and the somewhat more pedestrian efforts of the Government's counsel and between the articulate and highly credible evidence of the petitioners' principal witness, Mr. Churchman, and some of the more halting contributions on behalf of the Government and the concessionaires.

Ultimately, it came down to whether we accepted the petitioners' contention that restrictions would have to be put on the bridge for, variously, 500 or 800 hours a year.

[Mr. James Couchman]

In their rebuttal of the Select Committee's evidence, the Government have produced in appendix A facts and figures which I wish to goodness we had had when the Committee sat. If I had been able to see that the Severn bridge had been closed only three times in its 20-year history, that the average for lane closures between 1984 and 1986 was only 168 hours a year and that restrictions on wind-susceptible vehicles were only 60 hours a year, it would have been easier to cut through the enormous verbiage to which we were subjected.

I am also taken with the Government's instance of the Mar Dyke, on the crossing approaches of the M25, just north of the Dartford-Thurrock crossing. There, we are told, the forecast suggests that gusts of 50 mph, the conventionally accepted threshold for consideration of the closure of a bridge to wind-susceptible vehicles, occur for just 11 hours a year. We are told that, using the same forecasting methods — the petitioners' own wind forecasting method, I believe, was used—the projection for Dartford bridge is some 37 hours a year. I use the name of Dartford bridge in the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman), who has other ideas about its naming. If the Mar Dyke viaduct offers such projections to a bridge just south of it, we have listened to an awful lot of words based on information produced by one side and not rebutted by the other.

I regret that the Government have had to rely for their rebuttal largely on the evidence produced by Aksel Frandsen, the distinguished Danish engineer from COWI Consult. I regret most the fact that this rebuttal has been produced with new evidence after the Select Committee and the Standing Committee finished their proceedings, so this evidence cannot be tested by cross-examination by the Committee or by the counsel who represented the petitioners and the Government. I find Mr. Aksel Frandsen's evidence persuasive, but that is likely to happen, because I was the one—as opposed to the five —who did not find the petitioners' case to have been made.

I sat through many hours in Committee. I represent a Kent constituency and my natural feeling would have been to support the petition submitted by my county and Essex, but I did not find the case to have been made. I was especially concerned by the threat of delays that would result from redesign work and the possible rehybridisation of the Bill. That becomes a real prospect if one reads carefully the evidence of Mr. Frandsen and of the Government.

It is clear—I think that this was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover)—that the gradients of the bridge are the maximum that can be permitted in these circumstances. If those gradients were to be retained and the bridge had to be completely redesigned to a trapezoidal box system, as opposed to an orthotropic steel deck, the toll booths at the southern end would have to be moved. That would involve more land and other people whose interests might be hurt by the Bill. That would clearly involve rehybridisation and the reselection of the Select Committee. I hope to have a good alibi so that I am not recommissioned to sit on the Select Committee, because 21 days was long enough.

I am content that the Government seek by way of this amendment to take wind-shielding out of the Bill. I am less content with the inelegant way in which it has had to be done. I am certain that, had the Government and the concessionaires presented a better case in Select Committee, we would not have come to the conclusions that we did. I think especially of Mr. Frandsen's evidence. Whether it is compromised by the fact that COWI Consult worked with Trafalgar House is by the by. That evidence would have been persuasive and we would not have found the petitioners' case to be made.

I shall support the Government. I dare say that other members of the Select Committee from both sides of the House will feel that, in the interests of consistency, they should vote against the amendment. We shall find out in the Lobbies who will prevail.

Mr. Fallon: I shall be brief, because the House wants to come to a decision. I begin by declaring an interest—not a financial interest, company involvement or an interest as a fan of any of the various sets of civil engineers mentioned during the debate, but a constituency interest. Much of the fabrication involved in the bridge will be carried out in Darlington. We look forward to some 350 man years of work in Darlington, involving some 20,000 tonnes of steel fabrication. That work will be done in Darlington and the steel will be produced either in the north-east or in Scotland. I should have liked to hear at least some recognition of the employment effects of the contract from hon. Members who have sought to impose the wind shield and the delay that is consequent upon it.

The rest of the country has an interest in the bridge. It is not simply a matter for Kent or Essex. Some areas of high unemployment will be involved in its construction. Regions north of Essex are looking forward to faster and more efficient links with the south and Europe.

I make that point because 1,000 men in Darlington are on short-time working. They are now facing a four-day week. The Select Committee has been making leisurely progress—it sat for three days a week as the lawyers sought to debate for hour after hour—and 1,000 of my constituents have been forced on to a four-day week while waiting for this project, which has been substantially delayed by the Select Committee's slow progress.

I want to be fair to the Select Committee, because I understand the problems involved. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) that I served on a Select Committee in the last Parliament that sat for twice as long as this one—the Select Committee on the Channel Tunnel Bill. I understand the burden that is imposed on hon. Members.

Nevertheless, it is right to point out that today's debate illustrates perfectly the impossible task that the Select Committee had. It is not the function of a Select Committee to design a bridge; we do not ask a Select Committee to do that. Nor can we ask a Select Committee to redesign a bridge on the basis of petitions and evidence from civil engineers and construction experts.

I suspect that it was because of the over-generosity of my hon. Friend for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) and the Committee in accepting the locus of the petitioners that it put itself in this impossible position. I think that that was a serious error of judgment.

The entire debate has been about an important issue of public policy — exactly how the bridge should be constructed, what the various delays involved are and how the traffic can be dealt with if the delays materialise. That point is not just a matter for the petitioners of Kent and Essex. It is a matter of public policy. It was wrong for the

Select Committee to take it on board. It should have been left to a Standing Committee to consider, along with the other issues of public policy that could have been brought before it.

Mr. Chapman: In fairness to the Select Committee, it should be said that in examining whether the petitioners had a locus we had to look at whether their interests would have been affected. Rightly or wrongly — perhaps my hon Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) thinks wrongly — we said that they did have an interest because of the consequences for their roads on both sides of the River Thames if the bridge was closed.

9.30 pm

Mr. Fallon: I accept that point, and I have read the proceedings of the Committee. I notice that the Select Committee was divided and that it voted on whether a locus had been established. I believe that the Select Committee was wrong. Of course a council on either side of the river might have an interest in whether traffic would be redirected, but that interest is not necessarily any greater than that of Durham county council, Darlington borough council, the rest of our road network from which much of the traffic might originate or those district or county councils to which the traffic might be directed. The Select Committee confused a particular interest with a wider general public interest that Kent and Essex have, but which they share with other local authorities throughout the country.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman concede that, if the Select Committee had not accepted the locus and had generated, albeit over a lengthy period, such an intense and interesting debate about wind-shielding, the Government would not have introduced partial wind-shielding? The Committee has done a service because apparently the bridge is now even better, although it is not entirely what the petitioners and some hon. Members wanted. Improvement has been effected because of the Select Committee's work. I tell the hon. Gentleman — I hope without being patronising — that that never would have arisen if the matter had been dealt with solely by a Standing Committee.

Mr. Fallon: I certainly accept that the Select Committee has done a service to the House in ensuring that the issue has been properly debated. Equally, the matter could have been before a Standing Committee. I am seeking to establish that the Select Committee put itself in an impossible position. It came to a divided conclusion.

Mr. Dicks: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Fallon: No, I shall not give way.

The Committee was divided in its conclusion on whether shielding was necessary. It voted on the issue. It is inevitable that one side of the Committee will be satisfied and that the other will be dissatisfied about whatever steps the Government take to deal with the matter. It is unfair to the House and wrong to expect a Select Committee to deal with the matter in that way.

The way in which the Committee considered the matter has lengthened the amount of time involved. The project has been considerably delayed. I hope that it will not be delayed much longer. It is instructive to note that a bridge was first considered by the House in 1930, when the tunnel was first planned. That was 58 years ago.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: This has been a curious debate, for at least one reason. The only voices that have been raised in aid of the Government, other than that of the Minister — I say this kindly to the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) — have been those of hon. Members who have a vested interest in the project or in the Government. I shall pass over the hon. Gentleman's PPS-ships.

Mr. Couchman: I devoted 21 days of my life to listening to the evidence, and I found the petitioners' case wanting. I have been consistent in finding that case wanting tonight. I shall certainly support the Government on that basis, not because I am a junior member of the most junior rung of the Government.

Mr. Lloyd: I accept the hon. Gentleman's juniority. It is well-deserved. I do not wish to engage in a personalised debate.

The hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) made it clear that he spoke for what he perceived to be the interests of his constituents, as indeed did the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman).

Those hon. Members who have come disinterested to the Chamber have spoken powerfully against the amendment and in favour of the status quo. It is rather curious and instructive to note the way in which, in his latter remarks, the hon. Member for Darlington managed to confuse the House and himself. He said that somehow it was heinous that the Select Committee should divide five to one, and that somehow that meant that there was a rift. The hon. Gentleman prefers the ministerial steamroller — the absolute certainty of the Minister telling him exactly how to behave — to the idea that we in a democratic society and in a democratic Parliament should have differences of opinion on matters that everyone concedes are of great complication. The Select Committee procedure allows it to examine in detail, over a considerable period, the arguments that were put forward, and to have a difference of opinion. Even within that difference of opinion, the way in which it voted on a cross-party basis was overwhelming.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) said, had it not been for the Select Committee, the concept of partial wind-shielding would not have arisen. The Minister indicated his assent to that earlier, and no doubt he will confirm it later. But the progress of the Bill through the House reflects no credit on the promoters or on the Department.

The Select Committee produced two volumes of detailed argument and evidence. I have not had the opportunity — hon. Members would not have expected it — to replicate all the deliberations of the Committee. The Minister has admitted that he has not had the direct experience of the members of the Select Committee. Like mine, his experience is second-hand. Yet the Government have produced a document which supposedly refutes the technical arguments that were made before the Select Committee.

The document contains information that was not made available to members of the Select Committee, and its production at this late stage is inadequate. It is not good enough that the Select Committee did not have information on wind speeds in other areas. It is not good enough that the Committee did not hear that evidence put to the test under cross-examination, as happened with all

[Mr. Lloyd]

the other evidence that it heard. It is not good enough that the Government had already made up their mind to oppose the Select Committee examining wind-shielding.

This evening, we have heard arguments about whether that examination was right or wrong. It is worth quoting from the minutes of evidence on page 853. On Thursday 15 December, the Chairman said:

"The Government challenged the right of the Petitioners to be heard on the subjects of windshielding and the toll regime. Concerning the latter, the Government contended that the Petitioners had no *locus standi* on this issue and also that any alteration to the proposed regime would be contrary to the principle of the Bill. We decided that the County Councils did not have a *locus standi* on this issue, so the Petitioners were not allowed to produce evidence on it."

But the Committee accepted that the two county councils had an interest in wind-shielding, and the ensuing prolonged debate has been of great importance to the House. There was no debate on the issue on Second Reading, because the evidence was not available at the time. But once the petitioners started to make their case to the Select Committee, it became obvious that powerful arguments had to be considered — powerful arguments that the Government wanted to sweep under the table.

The Minister should respond to that point because the Government, through their representatives, opposed the idea that wind-shielding should be discussed. Had it not been discussed, we should not have achieved what everyone accepts is the improvement of partial wind-shielding. That is a black mark on the Government's record and handling of the matter.

In Standing Committee, the Opposition made it clear that there was little point in pursuing the argument because we had received no new evidence from the Government. They had already made it clear that they intended to table an amendment on Report. But we did not know on what information the Government would base the amendment. We now have that evidence and the opportunity of this narrow debate, but we could have debated the matter more fully in Standing Committee had the information been available.

The Government made some play of the amount of time that the Bill has taken, but no one can argue that the two or three weeks that have elapsed between the proceedings in Standing Committee and now will greatly affect the role of the bridge in the traffic management of the south-east and the nation generally.

Dr. Reid: In response to what was said earlier by the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), does my hon. Friend accept that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) and I have male unemployment in our constituencies well in excess of that in Darlington? Is he aware that both of us have a steel interest and that, however remote, our subjective interest would be to push the Bill through as soon as possible? Do not those two facts make our case even stronger because, despite them, we feel that in the public interest there should be some delay and that wind-shielding should be added?

9.45 pm

Mr. Lloyd: I accept my hon. Friend's point. Despite what I said earlier about the hon. Member for Gillingham, all members of the Select Committee began and ended with clean hands. We were all disinterested and the process was conducted in the interests of general public and parliamentary scrutiny of an important Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North said, we want to see another crossing at this part of the Thames. It is important that it should be built.

But it is not right for Parliament to allow a crossing on any terms and conditions, or to accept whatever scheme is proposed by promoters in any circumstances simply because of delays of weeks or even months. There is an argument between the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) and the Minister about the nature of the delays. Even if they are as long as 18 months, it is not right for us to accept a second-rate bridge or an unacceptable bridge simply because we all accept the ultimate importance of another crossing at this point.

It is remarkable to have a procedure involving hon. Members, only at the end of it to reject everything that they do. That is what the Government have done, and no one should have any illusions about it. The Government have not taken on board the evidence that came before us or our recommendations; they have rejected them completely. There has been a partial attempt through limited wind-shielding to allay public fears, and that at least is a partial triumph for the Select Committee, but clearly, from the recommendations, that is not what it wanted. Nor is it what the public needs. There are real doubts and anxieties about wind-shielding. The Government should not casually dismiss the Select Committee process.

Hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber want this bridge. We are not divided along party political lines. Every hon. Member knows that the Government will have their payroll vote steamroller this Bill through, partly because the concept of design, build and finance projects is ideologically important to them. They want to make this first one a success. We are not here to debate that and I shall not detain the House, except to say that the Government's desire to make a success of the first of these new bridge-building projects is not an adequate reason to steamroller the procedures of the House and the work done by hon. Members on both sides where no party political division exists. The Chamber will become divided if the Government say that we must take evidence on trust and unexamined when the alternative evidence was examined thoroughly and carefully.

I cannot understand why the Minister should expect me to trust him as an individual. Ultimately, he is present as the arbiter of the experts that he marshals. He is here to convince the House that his expert's evidence has greater validity than that of the experts who paraded before the Select Committee. I do not say this unkindly, but I can have no greater confidence in his ability to represent his experts than I have in the five members of the Select Committee who listened with great attention hour after hour, day after day.

That is what divides the House. It is an issue of confidence in the procedure which has arrived at the decision to get rid of the full wind-shielding on the bridge, and whether it has adequately examined the facts. We say that it has not. The procedure that produced the report that recommended wind-shielding was as thorough as could take place under the parliamentary process. Because that procedure has been followed and the recommendation was overwhelmingly in favour of wind-shielding, I ask my hon. Friends to resist the amendment.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The

"majority recommendation by the parliamentary select committee on the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill to introduce wind shielding raises important questions of a constitutional philosophical and technical nature. First, the constitutional issue.

A hybrid Bill procedure was adopted for the privately financed bridge because it offers a much shorter preconstruction period than the conventional and somewhat discredited public inquiry route, and gives a chance of opening the structure early in the 1990s.

But if the hybrid route is to be more than just a rubber stamp, then Parliament's scrutiny must be thorough and its views influential. It is no good the promoter bleating that the alterations required by the select committee add costs and delays, or that such changes are tantamount to breaking faith with the agreement or changing the rules part way through. Just as with the 19th century railway Bills, the promoter must convince Parliament of its case, and must run the risk of failing. Privately financed construction should operate that way or not at all.

The second question concerns the nature of the project. Any Government interested in the efficient movement of people and freight has to be concerned about the vulnerability of a particular link to bad weather, while a private promoter might simply be interested in the effect any closure would have on commercial viability. Their conclusions need not be the same. The Select Committee on the Dartford crossing is correct to scrutinise this issue in the public interest.

The third and crucial question is whether the recommendation is right. Were the bridge an isolated crossing with no other routes nearby (such as at Severn) the answer might well be yes. But with the tunnel alternatives so close, it is hard to see how the committee can justify the extra cost and delay. On these grounds, the Government may be justified in overruling the committee.

Both private finance and the hybrid Bill have much to offer in construction, but only where the promoter shoulders risk and where the Parliamentary procedure has teeth. If they are to succeed, promoters must become more forthcoming and persuasive than at the Dartford hearings, and select committees need to be more technically literate, perhaps by employing advisors, so that they can judge better conflicting technical advice."

Those words come from the *New Civil Engineer* editorial after the Committee had reported, and I believe that the House thinks that they are all right.

There is the issue that Parliament cannot allow the Government to take it for granted, especially when a Select Committee has served as long and hard as did this one. The editorial went on to say that the Select Committee's recommendation was not necessarily right. When I was watching the Select Committee from afar, it was interesting to note that the technical press showed no interest. The issue was considered for seven weeks, yet the *New Civil Engineer* did not report it each week, the Institution of Civil Engineers did not organise seminars in the middle of it, and the construction journals showed no interest in it, and that was a sign to me that the issue did not grip the whole of the consulting world as it obviously did the counsel for the petitioners and promoters and members of the Select Committee. Having read, day by day the transcript—

Dr. Reid: Of *Private Eye*.

Mr. Bottomley: It is not too clear who the private eye was on that occasion.

Spokesmen on the Opposition Front Bench raised several issues. I do not accept all their strictures, and I suggest that they, the members of the Select Committee and other hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) have confidence in the way in which I normally approach issues. I am not regarded in the Department or in Parliament as the sort of person who accepts a brief and reads it out. That is not my way of approaching things, and I should be sorry if people thought it was. The hon. Member for Bradford, South——

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Minister has raised an important point. This is not a matter of personalities. There is no question of the Minister's competence or character here. As the Minister has said, he did not have the opportunity to go through the same long process as the members of the Select Committee. That makes an important difference.

Mr. Bottomley: I honestly wish that I had appeared before the Select Committee, because if I had it might have been possible to move slightly away from the manner in which the Select Committee procedure has to work under present rules. Under those rules, the petitioners put their case, and the promoters' case is not described in the way that it is described in annex A, which describes the straight factual side of the relationship between wind exceeds and restrictions on the flow of traffic.

Three major issues were put to the Select Committee. The first was what sort of wind there would be. The second question was what effect it would have on restrictions on traffic. The third question—in effect the trial within the trial, which is where commercial confidentiality comes in—was whether it was possible to add 3 m high wind-shielding to the existing design. Commercial confidentiality was not the issue at the base of the hours of wind. That was a separate issue.

It is worth saying that Dr. Cook is a recognised expert, and nothing that I have said was designed to undermine that in any way. It was his work that described the hours of exceedence as being plus or minus 40 per cent. Obviously, there is no doubt about the integrity of the proposed bridge, where Dr. Cook's work leads to a confidence factor of plus or minus 5 per cent. That is far more useful than plus or minus 40 per cent., which gives a wide range.

The issue of commercial confidentiality exercised the Committee to some extent and in some strength, but dealt with the subsidiary issue whether it was possible to adapt the existing bridge design and put 3 m high wind-shielding on it. It is quite clear from my experience around the world, and from research that has been carried out, that there is no bridge with a 3 m high wind shield across an estuary. The closest was the Europa bridge in Austria which had to contend with the föhn wind, which could sweep up suddenly at 80 miles an hour.

I spent a fair amount of time looking at Japanese road reports. Japan has a 21-mile stretch of road that goes over bridges that do not have wind-shielding. I have here the annual report on roads from the Japan Roads Association. In it there is a picture of the Seiun bridge on the metropolitan expressway. There is one cable-stayed expressway. The Seiun bridge is a different type of bridge, with no wind shields. If wind shields were in any sense common and appeared on, for example, 10 per cent. of the bridges currently under construction, there would be more of a basis for saying that the Department is wrong.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Minister accept that the same principle would have applied to the Severn bridge in 1966? That was the world's first box girder bridge. The Minister is saying that nothing must ever be done for the first time.

Mr. Bottomley: No, I spend most of my time arguing the opposite; arguing against the historic negative that one cannot do something in a new way because it has never been done that way before. I am not arguing in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests. The addition of limited wind-shielding is acceptable.

In that context, I should like to pick up some of the points made in the debate. Without the persistent concern of Essex and Kent county councils, I do not think that the partial wind-shielding would have been brought forward in the first place. It was not suddenly produced as a pre-emptive measure three days before the Select Committee started its proceedings. Obviously, work needs to be done to test whether partial wind-shielding would have a good effect and whether the bridge could stand it. One needs to take those issues in the round rather than try to divide people into camps or try to mislead the Select Committee or decide to what extent one side of the argument may have exaggerated or gone up to a 40 per cent. tolerance one way or the other.

The speech of the hon. Member for Bradford, South showed that interest in this subject is not confined to those who served on the Select Committee. I sometimes wonder, when the hon. Gentleman starts shouting and accusing people of being childish, whether he is moving away from the substance of the debate and on to other approaches to politics.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) spoke about the hybrid Bill procedures. The House is considering opposed private Bills. Hybrid Bills are slightly separate. Perhaps the usual channels will consider what has been said tonight and whether an improvement can be made to the hybrid Bill procedure.

Mr. Robert Hughes: I am grateful to the Minister for those remarks. It has been argued that, because the hybrid Bill procedure produces quicker results in planning terms than the formal planning procedures, of necessity it can never be challenged because it might cause delay in the initial programme.

The other difficulty is that, when we debate such matters, inevitably partisan terms are used. When we are putting a non-party point, I object to hon. Members saying across the Floor of the House that while in previous years I have argued for more jobs, because I wish these issues to be properly and thoroughly discussed I am in favour of losing jobs. That partisan element makes it difficult, under the present procedure, to speak objectively.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Motion relating to the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. MacLean.]*

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

Mr. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman has made his point and I shall not dissent from most of what he said.

The interest in the Bill seems to be growing in the House. Hon. Members from Essex and Kent who have been present throughout the debate have shown a clear interest, as the traffic starts in those counties. One can understand the interest of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn). I am sure that he would have spoken had he not been a member of the Goverament.

I pay tribute to the Father of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine). The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North accepted that wind-shielding would need to be redesigned. Although he would not claim to be an expert in bridge design or redesign, his conclusion would be accepted by most people. I know that the Select Committee spent much time considering that point, but with the extra evidence that the Government have made available, it would be common sense to accept that conclusion. Bridges across the Thames are not designed and redesigned in Committee. They need to be designed in such a way that the promoters and the concessionaires have confidence in them and can demonstrate that confidence to reasonable, objective people such as myself.

I have had to consider what is right. Although delay can matter, the key issues are whether the bridge will last and whether it will be safe. Clearly, it will last, and the Government consider that it will be safe. Obviously, different points of view have been expressed during the debate. There was a reference to cutting corners. We do not intend to cut corners. We want a bridge that will work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) who chaired the Select Committee, carefully pointed out the issues with which the Select Committee was concerned and explained the Select Committee's conclusions about the evidence that was put forward. His speech stands by itself and needs no comments from me. I emphasise that he dealt with the cost and the delay. He also spoke about the technical advisers to the Committee. Having read the way in which the case was put, I reckon that the best move would be for counsel's fees to decline daily, as the Select Committee proceeded, and for hon. Members' attendance allowances to increase daily.

My hon. Friends the Members for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) and for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) put their cases very well, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon). I shall not summarise the arguments put forward in favour of the Government's conclusion, which I do not deny was the same as that with which they started. However, we have ended up with rather better evidence for our view. I hope that I have put it rather better, or at least more briefly than it was put during the Select Committee hearings.

I must say to the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) that I did not hide the decision that the Government had taken in Standing Committee. The Government had not taken a decision in Standing Committee. Indeed, my opening speech led my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) to believe that the Government would accept full wind-shielding. It was only on my second attempt at explaining the Government's considerations that it became apparent that if the Government's further research confirmed that full wind-shielding was not necessary, the Government would come forward, in the open, on the Floor of the House, to ask the House to make a decision. It would have been wrong in Standing Committee, even if all the further work had been completed, to take out the amendment, or propose to take it out, when more than half the members of the Select Committee were not on the Committee. It is far better to do it openly if we decide to do that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley rehearsed some of the arguments about plastic covering that were put to the Select Committee. It is unnecessary for me to repeat those arguments. The conclusions reached by the

independent engineer, at least independent of the DRCC and the Government, had given some weight to the views on the cost and the delay, and annex A helps to deal with the inter-relationship between the hours of wind-exceedence and the effect on traffic.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr.Dicks) made a robust speech. I am happy for him to pat me on the back, but some of the transfer of the approach suitable for a politician to a public official is wrong. I spend a lot of time with officials in the Department of Transport. They occasionally make mistakes, and I more frequently make mistakes, but together we serve the community well, and the same thing would apply if the Labour party were in government.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman would not be a Minister.

Mr. Bottomley: I am sorry to hear that. I thought that I would be a fixture, like a Speaker.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington that the Department had the benefit of expert advice on all aspects of the scheme through its consultant engineers for the project, Mott, Hay and Anderson. The contractors responsible for the construction of the bridge, the Cementation Construction Company and Cleveland Bridge and Engineering, have worldwide experience in major construction projects. They are advised by Sir William Halcrow and Partners Ltd. The bridge is designed by Dr. Engineer Helmut Homburg, who has contributed to the development of the cable staybridge type, and has been responsible for the design of a number of cable staybridges, including the Kessoch bridge in Scotland.

When my hon. Friend left his usual high standards was when he started to make jokes about people's names. I am exposed to that kind of joke rather often, and addressed to a fellow member of the European Community it does not go down too well.

Mr. Hicks: My hon. Friend should be careful about this point. When criticising the civil servant whom he so rightly defended, I was only using criticism that is already clearly in the minutes of the Select Committee.

Mr. Bottomley: I had not got on to dealing with what my hon. Friend said about an individually named civil servant. I was dealing with who was advising the Department and who was advising the concessionaires ad the people who designed the bridge. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that.

Mr. Selby, the project manager, reports to his director, who is an expert bridge engineer. Mr. Selby has served the Department well for 19 years, and I and the Department have every confidence in him, and I shall return to defend him if he is further attacked about the design of bridges. Bridge design concerns bridge designers, and they were reasonably well represented in the Select Committee.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Minister said that it was always the Government's intention to listen carefully to the evidence. In that case, will he comment on the report in the *Financial Times* on 15 December last year, long before the Standing Committee sat, which said:

"Parliament and politics: Bridge wind shield plan faces block. The Government is prepared, if necessary, to override any proposal by the cross-party Select Committee on the Dartford-Thurrock crossing that the planned bridge over the Thames should have a special wind shield."

It seems pretty clear that the Government leaks had made it well known to the press that they were going to block the wind shield proposal whatever happened.

Mr. Bottomley: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman understands a word that he has read out. If I were the one who was recommending the decision to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I did not take that decision until after the further work and at the conclusion of the Standing Committee, any leak must have come from a very ropey old bucket.

The hon. Members for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) and for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) put forward arguments. The hon. Member for Cardiff, West said that we needed to show more respect for the Select Committee's conclusions. We have shown that respect in our response, I have shown it in my speech and it is shown in the further work that was commissioned. Design, finance and building contracts can work only if the design is safe. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am convinced that if the Government were to design, finance and build the bridge we would reach the same conclusion as we are recommending to the House tonight. I recommend that the House accepts the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 131, Noes 44.

Division No. 191] **[10.12 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard	Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Amess, David	Fookes, Miss Janet
Amos, Alan	Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Arbuthnot, James	Forth, Eric
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Freeman, Roger
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*	French, Douglas
Atkinson, David	Gale, Roger
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Gardiner, George
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony	Garel-Jones, Tristan
Bellingham, Henry	Goodhart, Sir Philip
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Bevan, David Gilroy	Gower, Sir Raymond
Boscawen, Hon Robert	Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Boswell, Tim	Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Bottomley, Peter	Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard	Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Grist, Ian
Brazier, Julian	Ground, Patrick
Bright, Graham	Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick	Hanley, Jeremy
Burt, Alistair	Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Butler, Chris	Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Harris, David
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	Hawkins, Christopher
Carrington, Matthew	Hayward, Robert
Cash, William	Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Channon, Rt Hon Paul	Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Chope, Christopher	Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Conway, Derek	Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*	Irvine, Michael
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*	Jack, Michael
Cope, John	Janman, Tim
Couchman, James	Jessel, Toby
Cran, James	Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*	Key, Robert
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*	King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Day, Stephen	King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Devlin, Tim	Kirkhope, Timothy
Dorrell, Stephen	Knapman, Roger
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James	Lang, Ian
Dunn, Bob	Lawrence, Ivan
Durant, Tony	Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Fallon, Michael	Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Fearn, Ronald	Lightbown, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy	Lilley, Peter

Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Miller, Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Summerson, Hugo
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Widdecombe, Ann
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle and
Mr. Alan Howarth.

NOES

Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Boyes, Roland
Caborn, Richard
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dover, Den
Duffy, A. E. P.
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Galbraith, Sam
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Hinchliffe, David
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morgan, Rhodri
Mullin, Chris
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Reid, Dr John
Ruddock, Joan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Stott, Roger
Wareing, Robert N.

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ted Garrett and
Mr. Bob Cryer.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Litter Campaign

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

10.21 pm

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): I do not intend to delay the House unduly, but I should like to raise a matter that has been raised on many occasions — the problem of litter, including litter disposal and litter as a public nuisance. Sir Rupert Speir, who represented the constituency of Hexham, was successful with the private Member's Bill on this subject. Regrettably, the provisions of his Litter Act 1958 have not been implemented and are not being implemented today. We are all aware that the Prime Minister is deeply concerned about this matter and, on two occasions in recent months, she has made the problem of tackling the nation's litter a main issue, but so far without success.

We can undoubtedly claim to be the dirtiest country in Europe. That is not much to brag about. We must recognise that litter is a national problem. Litter is basically rubbish. If people thought about litter as rubbish, they would put it in a bin or in a proper place, but they put rubbish in the wrong place and it becomes litter. Litter is a problem to every authority in the United Kingdom and it causes them great concern, as they must deal with it.

I refer the Minister to a recent study by the industry council for the packaging industry. In a series of surveys over the past years, it has concluded that the public are showing more awareness of the scale of the problem than they did five years ago. The public are becoming more aware of the worsening situation, but, regrettably, they frequently display their indifference.

As we well know, local authority staffing levels have been cut. As fewer resources are available, there are fewer people and machines to tackle the problem.

However much local authorities do, the root of the problem is the attitude of the public. Although the public show some concern about the matter, we must recognise that there is massive indifference. We have all met people from time to time who moan about litter and who are ashamed of the filth in their area, but they do not do much about it. They do not seem to protest to councillors or form action groups or write to the local papers. They just sit back in the squalor that surrounds them.

Fortunately, I represent a part of north Tyneside, which I share with the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter). We have a success story to tell. In north Tyneside, the problem has been tackled vigorously by the council. It has given responsibility to the environmental committee and the parks and recreation committee, the chairmen and officers of which have played an important role in keeping the standards in Tyne and Wear exceptionally high.

On my visit to the north-east last weekend, I could not help but notice how clean the streets were. It was a Saturday afternoon when people were shopping and the streets had been in use most of the day, but they were spotless. I was proud of Tyne and Wear, particularly north Tyneside. I was proud to see such an area, which has got rid of its dereliction problems and some of its environmental problems through the decline of coal, shipbuilding and steel. The worst aspects of those industrial eyesores have disappeared and people are tackling improvements to their environment with renewed vigour.

I should like the Minister to go to north Tyneside in a few weeks' time, where he will see a massive spring floral display which equals, if not surpasses, anything to be found in the rest of the country. It is being done by local effort and must be seen to be believed. It is really beautiful.

The council has won quite a few national competitions which have been sponsored by various organisations. Representatives of the staff on the council have come to the Palace of Westminster to receive awards and a residents' association received an award last year.

We want other parts of the United Kingdom to try to follow our example. I should like the Prime Minister to come to Tyneside, especially north Tyneside, to see what can be done. If it can maintain high standards, why cannot the capital city? It must be an amazing experience for foreigners who visit London for the first time to arrive at Heathrow or Gatwick airport, for example, which are spotless, or to arrive at one of our mainline stations where the concourses are kept at a high level of cleanliness due to the efforts of British Rail and then step outside to see litter on every street, every corner and on railway embankments, and apathy about it all. I am appalled at the filth to be found in some parts of London. We can think of areas where valiant efforts have been made, but I regret to say that other areas are a sad story.

I live in north London when Parliament is in session. Anyone who goes down Camden high street or Kentish Town road tonight will see filth and plastic bags piled up by the side of the road. Some bags are split and when the city goes to sleep, cats, rats and dogs will scratch them open, thus creating all the ingredients of a disease which could strike London.

I cannot understand why allegedly responsible people, instead of keeping the plastic bags on their premises until collection, leave them out. I dare say that the same thing can be seen within 200 yd of this building. It must be caused by a breakdown in communications between the local authorities and the public or by plain ignorance on the part of the public. I fail to see why local authorities, encouraged by the Government, do not take a more positive line and explain to people the hazards that they are creating, irrespective of the fact that the poor council refuse collectors must sweep up the mess. I should like the Minister to urge councils to educate people to keep litter indoors until the time of collection.

We have all seen the trails of litter from the entrances of the schools in our areas to the local shops where the school children buy their lunchtime trash—school meals having virtually been abolished—and, coming back after their lunch break, leave another trail of litter. Their parents would not let those children do that in their own houses. Why do they throw litter away instead of keeping it until they go home, or back to school, where they can put it into refuse bins?

The teaching profession has opted out of part of the responsibility. Teachers do not educate children and enforce standards on them. Children should be responsible for their personal litter; they should put it in their pockets or in the school litter bins. Perhaps the problem is part of the general epidemic of indifference that has struck the nation—indifference, in this case, to our surroundings.

Do people who have shops, commercial businesses or even blocks of flats have any responsibility for keeping the pavements and gutters in front of their premises in a tidy condition? If they have no legal responsibility, is it not time that we thought about the matter?

Let me return to the plight that faces our capital. I am fortunate enough to be a member of the Council of Europe, and to see quite a few of the European capitals. I blush with shame when I compare London with the cleanliness of Paris. I note one significant difference. Paris uses water to clean the streets, with hydrants connected to hoses. The rubbish is swilled down the streets to a collecting point. It is a clean and efficient method which saves labour, and also helps to remove any refuse left by dogs. I cannot understand why, when we are so close to a river the size of the Thames, water cannot be harnessed to clean our streets as it is in Paris and other cities.

We must think hard about finding solutions to the problem. In many areas, there is a lack of civic pride. That pride has been dented for a variety of reasons. At one time, people were proud of their cities, towns and villages. Now there is an indifference which I find rather sad, having spent many years on a local authority.

There is also a lack of national pride. We are indifferent to graffiti and litter. We must restore to people's minds the idea of improving their surrounds and conditions. We might give traffic wardens the power to impose on-the-spot fines on litterers. They could combine the jobs of traffic warden and litter warden.

There is no doubt that attitudes must be changed. If there is a return to civic pride, there will be a sense of cleanliness as a nation and then there will be a better response, for example, in tourism. The tourists will return and notice with pride that London has something going for it—that it is smartening itself up and cleaning itself up. If London sets an example, the rest of the country will follow suit. North Tyneside has set the example. I ask the Minister to give an assurance that the matter will be given immediate and urgent study.

10.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): It is some time since the House had an opportunity to debate a topic—litter—which affects us all, whether we live in cities, small towns, villages or the countryside. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) on his choice of subject.

We all recognise how unsightly and offensive litter is and how it makes our surroundings less pleasant and, in some cases, even dangerous. Apart from the obvious impact that litter has on our environment, it also costs every one of us money, with public resources having to be expended on clearing up the mess. What makes this situation so appalling is that litter is unnecessary. It does not occur naturally; we create it ourselves through thoughtless actions and careless habits. With consideration and care, it could be avoided.

The Government certainly share the widespread public concern about this issue—a concern which is reflected in my Department's postbag. Quite apart from the natural repugnance all of us feel about living in an untidy environment, it is unpleasant to learn of comments made by visitors from overseas, and by those returning from overseas, which contrast the state of our streets and countryside with those of other countries. The hon. Member for Wallsend referred to such comments. Although I cannot accept that Britain is the dirtiest country in Europe, I agree that we should be the cleanest, and that is the Government's objective.

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

The problem is not one that the Government alone can solve. The role of the Government in relation to the litter problem is twofold: first, to ensure that the right legislative framework exists to tackle the problem—I think that we have achieved this—and, secondly, to create a climate of opinion in which to foster a change of public attitudes. The question we must ask is: why do people who are clean and tidy in their home become insensitive and inconsiderate in public places? Perhaps it is a feeling that it is someone else's job to clear up the mess—a feeling that "they", whether Government, local authorities, British Rail or whoever, should do something about it.

The ultimate remedy lies in the hands of each individual member of the public—use litter bins, or take rubbish home. In short, do not create litter. That is easy to say but less easy to bring into effect. There are two essential approaches: one via legal constraints, the other via persuasion and education.

Under the Litter Act 1983, it is an offence to drop litter in the open air—with a penalty of a fine up to a maximum of £400. There are about 1,600 prosecutions a year. We have tightened up the law to make enforcement more effective by making it an offence for a suspected litterer not to give his name and address to a police officer on demand. Nevertheless, given the very great pressures on the police, there are problems with enforcement.

For this reason, we are particularly interested in the progress, and, if it is enacted, the eventual operation of the Westminster City Bill, which contains a power to introduce fixed penalties for litter. The city council proposes to use its 50-strong multi-purpose inspectorate to help enforce the measure, under which offenders will be asked to pick up the litter they have dropped. Any who refuse to do so will be issued with a fixed penalty ticket, to be paid within 14 days. The Government have given this Bill a fair wind and, if it is enacted, we shall monitor its operation closely with the council. If it is successful, it may prove to be a suitable model for wider application.

In addition, there are various powers that local authorities, in their capacity as litter authorities, can use if they wish. This is important since, although the problem is often described as a national one, it does vary from locality to locality. Thus, local authorities may, if they decide to give the matter appropriate priority, appoint litter wardens for their areas. A number have already done so.

Mr. Garrett: Will litter wardens have the same powers as traffic wardens? Will they have the power to impose on-the-spot fines?

Mr. Chope: No. We have considered the use of traffic wardens to enforce the Litter Act 1983, but the traffic warden service is already hard-pressed nationally to cope with its existing responsibilities to support police efforts to enforce road traffic laws. There is strong pressure for better enforcement of parking restrictions to reduce accidents and to keep traffic moving. It would not be sensible to add to that burden.

On-the-spot fines are often mooted as a simple and effective way of enforcing litter legislation. However, there would be major difficulties—for example, accounting for cash collected; the risk to the police or anyone else carrying substantial amounts of cash; and dealing with offenders who do not have funds available on ths spot. For those reasons we have rejected those ideas. As I said, Westminster city council is seeking to obtain legislative approval for a new approach.

I should like to think that a significant role will also be played by competition for street cleansing when the Local Government Bill becomes an Act. One of the first effects of competition will be to make local authorities set out very clearly what work they want to be done in this service, as in the other services concerned. Clarity of purpose can have nothing but beneficial effects on results achieved.

The second main effect will be to increase the efficiency with which the work is carried out. Perhaps, with more money available as a result of such efficiency gains, the authorities with the worst litter problems will then be able to step up the standard of litter cleaning.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the London borough of Camden. As he will probably know, it is one of the highest spending councils in the country. Despite its high levels of expenditure, it does not seem to be able to cope with the problem of litter, which I am sure most of its residents would regard as a high priority. It is a question not of councils not having the money but of them not giving sufficient priority to resolving the litter problem and not running their refuse collection and street cleansing services as efficiently as many of them could.

The need for voluntary local efforts brings me to the second prong of our approach to the problem. The Government have, for a number of years, supported the Tidy Britain Group, a registered charity formed under the original name of Keep Britain Tidy. In the current year, the group is receiving a grant of £570,000 from the national taxpayer towards its objective of promoting the prevention and control of litter. The group also obtains sponsorship from private sources, and it organises competitions, such as the "Beautiful Britain in Bloom" competition, which is financed by Barratts and the Kentucky Fried Chicken awards and trophies.

As the hon. Gentleman has said, North Tyneside metropolitan borough council has been particularly successful in this competition. The council has reached the finals of the Kentucky Fried Chicken competition every year since its inception, and it won it in 1978, 1983 and 1986. I am pleased to add my congratulations on such efforts. I am sure that many members of the Government, given the opportunity, would be happy to visit North Tyneside and see what gives it such an advantage in those competitions.

The main activities of the Tidy Britain Group are concentrated in two main sectors. First, it has devised a comprehensive litter abatement programme — the community environment programme—which is focused on district and borough councils and trains local authority officers in techniques of litter abatement, by enlisting public support, working with local industry and commerce and with voluntary organisations. I understand that 113 local authorities have so far formally adopted the programme, that 19 are considering its adoption and that nine have partially adopted it. We give every encouragement to local authorities to take up the group's community environment programme. It is inevitable that the results of this approach will take time to come through, but we are encouraged by the results so far.

The second aspect of the group's activity concentrates on education. As part of its education programme, the group has produced a range of learning kits for use in schools, and a youth action pact for youth group activities.

They have proved particularly valuable. They have the twofold benefit of obtaining practical results for today as well as offering a sound investment for society for the future. In addition — I think that it can rightly be considered as part of the educational effort—the group and my Department have co-operated to make a number of short promotional films that we hope the television companies will pick up and use to encourage a more responsible attitude towards litter prevention.

I do not underestimate the role of members of the teaching profession. I am not sure that all schools adopt the attitude of the one at the end of my garden. On a summer's day, after the children have spent a morning in the playground, the head teacher goes out to the playground and says, "Before you go back into school, you must clear up all the litter in the playground." Many of the playgrounds of the schools that I have seen are filled with litter. That is not setting the right example for children at an impressionable age.

The Tidy Britain Group has, at our request, reviewed its strategy and approach, and we are considering with it how to achieve greater effectiveness.

Local authorities clearly have a major part to play, and I hope that others will adopt the same approach as North Tyneside, to which I have already referred. The priority and resources that authorities choose to devote to litter abatement and clearance are for them to decide, but I should like to encourage them to work with the Tidy Britain Group, local businesses and local voluntary groups to tackle the local problems and to promote civic pride.

Business interests can play a major role. For example, the growth of the fast food industry has brought its own litter problems. Customers are not always as responsible in disposing of food and drink containers as we would wish. The Take-Away Food Federation (UK) Ltd. is therefore to be congratulated on the production of a booklet entitled "Less Litter, Better Business", giving guidance to proprietors of such establishments about the proper disposal of the potential litter that they create.

Drawn up in conjunction with the Tidy Britain Group, the booklet covers such matters as the provision of posters and signs in the premises carrying the anti-litter message, and the provision of litter bins and litter patrols by staff. Adoption of such measures by more proprietors, along with the Tidy Britain Group message on containers, will add to the efforts to educate the public about litter.

A great deal has been and is being done to deal with this unpleasant and unnecessary problem. We, and all sectors of society, must continue to seek ways to strengthen and reinforce our efforts. The Tidy Britain Group has been invited to take a fresh look at its activities and to show how a new impetus can be achieved. We are always ready to receive ideas and suggestions on how the problems can best be tackled.

The hon. Member for Wallsend, in initiating this debate this evening, has made a valuable contribution towards increasing public understanding and awareness. He made it apparent that it is basically a matter of common sense, and there has not been sufficient common sense applied to it by enough people.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 23 February 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Staff Dispersal

1. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all current plans for relocation *(a)* within Greater London and *(b)* elsewhere of units of his Department.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): It is not possible to provide the detailed information sought by the hon. Member without a disproportionate amount of work. However, I can inform the House that the number of civilian staff in London has reduced by over 10,000—that is 35 per cent.—since 1979. Moreover, we continue to pursue every opportunity to relocate defence work from London when justified in both operational and economic terms.

Mr. Galbraith: The Minister said that the number of jobs in London had been reduced, but does he agree that the number of jobs in other areas of the country has also been reduced? At the previous Defence Question Time the Minister said that only 2·2 per cent. of jobs were located in the north and that that figure had not changed for some time. Therefore, will he take definite steps to relocate jobs in the north and abandon any plans for further office accommodation in London—for example, at Thames House, which does nothing for jobs, but simply helps property speculators in London?

Mr. Sainsbury: I remind the hon. Gentleman that after the Hardman report in 1973, the Labour Government between 1974 and 1979 achieved absolutely no dispersal to Scotland. This Government have a far superior record.

Dr. Hampson: Does my hon. Friend accept that this is not just a matter of the relocation of units of the Department, but is a matter of general spending policy? Is there not a gross disparity in spending between south and north, and will my hon. Friend institute some means of scrutinising the bids from the service chiefs with a view to dispersing them elsewhere in the country?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend is aware that there are very good operational reasons for the concentration of defence establishments in the south. However, whereas we have reduced the number of defence posts in London and the south-east by 35 per cent. since 1979 in our search for greater efficiency, the reduction in the number of posts in the northern region over the same period was only 23 per cent.

Mr. Sean Hughes: Will the Minister tell the House why it is necessary for the Ministry to take offices at Thames House? Can he not accept that if his Department located in the north, it would not only save the taxpayer money, but would provide jobs in areas that badly need them?

Mr. Sainsbury: I assure the House that there are no plans to centralise in Thames House, Millbank part of the MOD headquarters staff at present located in London. As I hope the hon. Gentleman is aware, accommodation for London-based headquarters staff is a matter for the Property Services Agency.

Mr. Dykes: As we are talking about buildings as well as jobs, will my hon. Friend say when the Ministry intends to relinquish its buildings in the Stanmore area—both the Royal Air Force and other MOD buildings? In due course that accommodation will be available for pressing housing requirements.

Mr. Sainsbury: That matter is under active review.

Mr. Cartwright: Can the Minister say when he will decide about the future location of the directorate-general of quality assurance? Is he aware that the uncertainty has continued for years and is now starting to affect morale? When he makes a decision, will he bear in mind the contribution of the people of Woolwich to that military establishment and many others, for generations?

Mr. Sainsbury: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's interest in this matter and I recognise that Woolwich has a long association with the Ministry of Defence. The issues involved in the location of the quality assurance office are complex, and further study is needed before we can reach a decision. However, I hope that it will not be too long before we can give further information.

HMS Conqueror (Log Book)

2. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set up a further inquiry into the disappearance of the log book from HMS Conqueror, in the light of recent allegations that the log book was deliberately destroyed.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Ian Stewart: As I have already explained in correspondence with the hon. Member, the official concerned categorically denies the allegations. The fact is that he was not, in 1982, nor has he ever been, in a post which would have given him access to naval log books. On that basis, no case has been made out for reopening the inquiry.

Mr. Williams: Is it not the case that the commander of the Conqueror reacted with incredulity to the order to torpedo the Belgrano, that that order had to be repeated three times over six hours and that the messages between Northwood and the Conqueror would have been recorded verbatim in the log book, and that is why the Government ordered its incineration?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand what control room log books are about. They are about technical matters, such as the course, depth and speed of a submarine at a particular time.

Mr. Dickens: Does the Minister agree that the sinking of the Belgrano was operationally correct and necessary, and that the Argentines have agreed that, placed in similar

circumstances, they would have done exactly the same? Why do the Opposition persist in trying to discredit the Royal Navy, when they should be proud of it?

Mr. Stewart: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right, but one does not have to be a Member of the House for very long to know that most of the Opposition's ideas about defence are wonky.

Mr. Dalyell: What on earth could have prompted the former Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), to opine that he wanted

"to make sure that there was not a Watergate round here"?

Who could he have had in mind for the role of Richard Nixon?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman can speculate on all sorts of things, but I cannot follow him on that.

Trident

3. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications for the safety of the Trident missile programme of the recent test firing of a Trident 2 missile at Cape Canaveral.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Younger): The latest test flight of a Trident D5 missile on 21 January revealed a deficiency in the design of one of the missile sub-systems. One of the objectives of project development programmes is to expose any design deficiencies. There have already been eight successful Trident II firings and, overall, the development test programme has been highly successful.

Mrs. Mahon: Is not the truth that the testing was a miserable failure, with the missile exploding after two minutes 43 seconds? Does that not prove that the people who target the missiles are in more danger than those targeted, and would not the money be better spent on the National Health Service and on housing?

Mr. Younger: The objective of such tests is to discover whether the missile systems are working properly, and, as the test clearly demonstrated that this particular missile was not working properly, the test can be said to have been a 100 per cent. success. The hon. Lady might agree on reflection that it is no use having the most perfect health service in the world if one cannot defend the country in which that health service exists.

Sir Antony Buck: Does my right hon. Friend agree that he and the Government are going for the D5 for precisely the same reasons as the Opposition went for updating our deterrent by going for Chevaline without telling anybody?

Mr. Younger: Yes, my hon. and learned Friend is correct. The Opposition updated the Polaris system because they, too, wished it to be effective when they were in office. The sad thing is that they have abandoned responsibility now that they are out of office.

Mr. O'Neill: Does the Minister agree that this is now the second or third hold-up in the project and that the expenditure of £500 million on the latest enhancement programme for Polaris suggests that we are miles behind schedule, contrary to all the undertakings given during the general election?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman is utterly wrong. There is no hold-up in the Trident system, which is absolutely up to time. *[Interruption.]* Yes, it is absolutely up to time, including the warheads, which are being made in Britain. In fact, the manufacture of the warheads was started last month.

Mr. Morgan: In Cardiff, not in Aldermaston.

Mr. Younger: No, in Aldermaston. The tests are designed to make sure that the system is working properly, and the test series has been the most successful of any missile system yet.

Nuclear Weapons

4. **Mrs. Wise:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to the number and nature of nuclear weapons accidents or systems malfunctions.

Mr. Ian Stewart: There has never been an accident involving damage to, or release of radioactivity from, a nuclear weapon in the United Kingdom. Nor has there been any malfunction of systems associated with such a weapon which could have posed a hazard to service men or to members of the public.

Mrs. Wise: Has the Minister seen the "Handbook of Nuclear Weapons Accidents" published by Bradford university? Has he noticed that the handbook lists some horrendous near misses, such as missiles virtually launching themselves because of computer error, or weapons exploding and only by luck not detonating the nuclear warheads? Does the Minister not agree that, in the words of the former United States Admiral Eugene Carroll, our nuclear weapons are just a trigger to commit suicide? Would we not be better off without them?

Mr. Stewart: I am aware of the latest in the series of publications by the Bradford school of so-called peace studies, but, as usual with its publications, this one contains a large number of false assumptions. Not surprisingly, its conclusions are equally astray.

Mr. Squire: Has my hon. Friend seen the profusion of questions on the Order Paper from the Labour party on nuclear weapons? Does he consider reports that the Labour party may be moving towards an acceptance of nuclear weapons as an essential part of our——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister cannot answer for reports about the Labour party.

Mr. Squire *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman made rather a duff start.

Mr. Cryer: Can the Minister confirm that there was an accident in Lakenheath in 1956 in which an American plane carrying nuclear weapons crashed on the aerodrome and was allowed to burn out, including its crew, because the danger of radioactive leaks from the nuclear weapons was so horrendous, and that it came within a hair's breadth of causing a major nuclear explosion at that time?

If that is true, why does the Minister not come clean about these nuclear weapons of which he is so proud—these instruments of mass extermination—and accept that they are dangerous to the people of this country?

Mr. Stewart: The assurances that I gave the House in response the original question cover the incident that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned, and all other such incidents.

We maintain stringent standards of safety with nuclear weapons, and it is worth remembering that the nuclear

deterrent has achieved a longer period of peace and stability in the world than we have enjoyed for many centuries.

Nuclear Strategy

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received from the West German Government regarding nuclear strategy.

Mr. Younger: None, Sir.

Ms. Short: Is it not true that Germany is anxious to negotiate away battlefield nuclear weapons, because the Germans are very worried that a nuclear war might be fought on their soil? Instead of welcoming reductions in nuclear thresholds in East and West, the British Government are leading the pack in demanding rearmament in Europe to make up for the INF cuts. I understand that the decisions are to be made in May by NATO Defence Ministers in Denmark. Can the House have an undertaking that we will discuss the matter before those serious decisions are made?

Mr. Younger: The German Government entirely support the nuclear strategy of the NATO Alliance, of which they are prominent members. The Alliance will be discussing the next stages in the process of nuclear disarmament in the next two months. It will, I think, agree that the priorities for the next stage should be a worldwide ban on chemical weapons, and a start on reducing conventional weapons.

As the hon. Lady must surely admit, there is now no doubt that the attitude of the present Government, who have been leading the pack towards reductions in nuclear weapons, has been overwhelmingly successful.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the leaders of West Germany realise that the Trident programme is the guarantee of their freedom and ours, and that if we were to abandon the nuclear deterrent we should be faced by the vast superiority of the Warsaw pact countries in conventional and chemical weapons? Will he promise to listen not to the harridans of Greenham Common, but to the common sense of the British people?

Mr. Younger: I agree with my hon. Friend. I have no doubt that the German Government and people will understand that their safety and security depend on the nuclear strategy of NATO.

Ms. Ruddock: I am sure that the Secretary of State is as aware as I am that the Soviets have an overwhelming superiority over the West in short-range nuclear weapons. Is it not a fact that the British Government are opposed to a negotiation between NATO and the USSR because it is most likely that Mr. Gorbachev would agree to removing all those short-range nuclear weapons, despite the fact that the Soviet Union has a great excess, and that the British Government are terrified of the denuclearisation fo Europe, which is what the people of Europe want?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Lady ignores the fact that this Government have been leading the search for fewer nuclear weapons and are the first Government ever to have achieved a reduction in nuclear weapons.

Germany would agree with us that the priorities are as I have set out. We are saying, not that other forms of nuclear weapons should not be negotiated away, but that the priority, for our safety, is chemical weapons and the conventional imbalance. The hon. Lady should come to terms with the fact that the solution that she supports has failed dismally.

Mr. Summerson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if there is a war on West German soil the aggressor is hardly likely to be either NATO or the West German Government?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The question of conventional weapons must address the fact that the Warsaw pact forces are arraigned in an offensive posture and it is that which we must negotiate away as soon as we can.

Mr. Denzil Davies: I am sure the Secretary of State is aware that there is consensus in the Federal Republic, between Right and Left, that there should be parallel talks on the reduction and elimination of battlefield nuclear weapons, and on conventional arms reductions. If the talks on conventional reductions prosper, the talks on battlefield nuclear weapons can prosper. However, if they do not, there will not be any progress in the talks on battlefield nuclear weapons. Why are the Government so opposed to such a reasonable suggestion? What are they afraid of?

Mr. Younger: The right hon. Gentleman is putting words in the mouths of the Germans, who fully support NATO's nuclear strategy, which depends upon a flexible response being available in any possible nuclear attack. The NATO Alliance as a whole, including Germany, will have to make up its mind whether it agrees with the priorities that I have set out as the British Government's view. It will do that in the next few months.

Mr. Wallace: Last week the Prime Minister commented on the need to modernise nuclear weapons. That could have implications for the Federal Republic. Has the Prime Minister discussed that view with any representative of the German Government? Have any decisions yet been taken on modernising a British tactical nuclear weapon, or is that decision to await the decision of the NATO nuclear planning group?

Mr. Younger: No decisions of that kind have been taken. This matter predates the INF agreement. It is necessary that we keep our existing weapons systems up to date. Nobody can keep weapons systems without keeping them up to date. That is what the Montebello discussions were all about, and we shall have to reconsider that in the future to make sure that we never have outdated weapons.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: When responding to the Opposition, who use the West Germans to support their unilateralist cause, will my right hon. Friend remind the House of West Germany's record and of the fact that it was the West German Government and leaders who appealed to NATO to bring in the dual-track policy that brought about the installation of cruise weapons in the first place?

Mr. Younger: Yes. Opposition Members are being most unfair to West Germany, which is a strong advocate of NATO's strategy. I remind Opposition Members that all the NATO allies, without exception, support NATO's strategy of nuclear deterrence. Only the British Labour party is out of step in this matter.

Tucano Aircraft

7. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the introduction of Short's Tucano into RAF service.

9. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the introduction of Short's Tucano into Royal Air Force service.

Mr. Sainsbury: The release-to-service trials programme is continuing at the Aeroplane and Armament Experimental Establishment, Boscombe Down, and should be completed within the next few months.

Mr. Garrett: Is the Minister still convinced that the design and engine power of these aircraft will be suitable and that when they are introduced at squadron level they will not prove expensive to maintain, and possibly, be failures? Is he really satisfied that there are not problems, other than armament problems, with these aircraft?

Mr. Sainsbury: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we still consider that the Tucano will meet the RAF's training needs satisfactorily. Therefore, there are obviously no plans to review our decision to purchase that plane. Nor do we expect it to be unduly expensive to operate.

Mr. Haynes: Can the Minister remember coming to the House and telling us that this aircraft was the bee's knees and that it was the aircraft that we needed to train our RAF personnel? Will he now stand at the Dispatch Box and say that that statement was a failure? You know, Mr. Speaker, some of the Ministers in this Administration are useless. If the Minister was a councillor and had wasted ratepayer's money in the way that he has wasted taxpayers' money, he would be disqualified.

Mr. Sainsbury: My memory does not go back quite as far as the hon. Gentleman's. I do not recall being at the Dispatch Box and using such an eloquent phrase as the "bee's knees". I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that we have every confidence in the aeroplane. There is no cost penalty for the Ministry of Defence because of any delay, as there is a fixed-price contract and the aircraft are paid for when they are delivered.

Mr. Colvin: Will my hon. Friend confirm that because it is a fixed-price contract—130 aircraft for £125 million—the lateness in the delivery of the initial aircraft will not add one penny to the overall cost, and may even help his cash flow? It will not have any effect on the completion of the delivery.

Mr. Sainsbury: I am glad to confirm what my hon. Friend said. The late delivery does not add one penny to the overall cost. Throughout the delivery period we hope that there will be an acceleration that will enable us to catch up on some of the original delays.

Mr. Sayeed: How is the reciprocal trade agreement on Short's Tucano going?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend may know that there is no offset arrangement with Brazil for the Tucano because some 90 per cent. of the value of the airframe is represented by work to be carried out in the United Kingdom, mainly by Short's. We have an offset agreement with the engine manufacturer, Garrett, and that is bringing significant benefits to United Kingdom industry.

Mr. Rogers: Why will the Minister not come clean and lay the facts before the House? The two Tucano prototypes that have been delivered and are undergoing tests have only flown for three quarters of an hour — *[Interruption.]* That information was given to me in answer to a written question in mid-January. Those prototypes have flown for only three quarters of an hour. At this time the RAF should have at least 24 such aircraft in service. I wonder whether the Minister is now considering hiring some PC9s from the Saudi Air Force, which has had its aircraft delivered, in quantity, already?

Will the Minister also come clean and tell the House that there is a cost to this country as a result of the late delivery of Tucanos? The price of the aircraft may stay the same, but there is a cost of at least £10 million every six months to keep the Jet Provosts flying.

Mr. Sainsbury: If the Jet Provost were not flying we should be flying the Tucano instead—there would be no cost in that. The hon. Gentleman has got those figures wrong, as he has the others. I hope, he will appreciate that the RAF has, correctly, extremely high standards, especially for training aircraft. There have been delays to ensure that those standards are satisfied. So far, the five production aircraft have achieved a total of 180 flying hours.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Tucano, with its new upgraded engine, the strengthened wing spar against bird strikes and improved undercarriage, is a different aeroplane from the Tucano that was first looked at? When the new Tucano comes into service it will be capable of doing exactly what the RAF requires.

Mr. Sainsbury: I am glad to confirm what my hon. Friend says. The RAF has every confidence that the Tucano will meet requirements and specifications.

Rev. Martyn Smyth: Will the Minister confirm that not only has Short's an excellent reputation for a sturdy plane, but that, time and again, the world has turned to Short's to satisfy its needs, as the Queen's prize for exports has testified year after year?

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Gentleman will know that Short's has a long and proud history of providing defence equipment, and I hope that it will continue to maintain that record.

Jet Provost Aircraft

8. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current cost of maintaining the Jet Provost planes in operation.

Mr. Ian Stewart: About £65,000 per aircraft per year.

Mr. O'Brien: Is not the Minister's reply shameful, given that our pilots are training in antique planes, when the Minister promised the House that the Tucano aircraft would be in operation by this time? The Government have failed the country yet again on this issue. Is the Minister not ashamed to come to the Dispatch Box and say that the new planes are not being introduced and are costing the taxpayer a great deal of money? As my hon. Friend said, if the Minister had been a councillor and shown the same attitude, he would have been disqualified from holding office.

Mr. Stewart: I am sorry that both the hon. Gentleman and I have had part of the ground cut away from under

our feet by the answers to the previous question. I repeat what my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement said. There is no extra cost to the Ministry of Defence budget through running on the Jet Provosts because, in the meantime, the Ministry of Defence does not have to find the up-front money for the Tucano. The Jet Provost is more expensive to run than the Tucano and it consumes more fuel, but, until such time as the Ministry of Defence has to pay for the Tucanos, the net effect of this is not to add any extra cost to the Ministry of Defence budget.

Mr. Bellingham: Will the Minister consider carefully the regulations governing the use of aircraft as demonstrators? Is he aware that yesterday a con man, purporting to represent the Sultan of Brunei, persuaded the Royal Air Force to fly up to Norwich airport a BA146 of the Queen's Flight for a full demonstration, involving a free flight and a full briefing of all the sensitive equipment in the aircraft? Will he tell the House why the RAF did not check that person's credentials? Does he agree that a full explanation is required?

Mr. Stewart: I agree with my hon. Friend that a full explanation is required, and I understand that the person concerned is helping the police with their inquiries.

Mr. Ron Brown: Given the Minister's statement, is it not also opportune to pay compensation to Sergeant Jarvey of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, who is linked with that project, and therefore compensate him in a small way for all the stupidity and nonsense that we heard from the brass hats in Berlin about his alleged misconduct? Is it not time that something was done to make amends to Sergeant Jarvey? Does the Minister remember the case?

Mr. Stewart: I do not know whether the person concerned was flying a Jet Provost at the time, but I find it difficult to relate the hon. Gentleman's remarks to what we have been discussing.

West German Defence Minister

11. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met his West German counterpart; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Younger: I last met Dr. Woerner on 20 January, when we discussed matters of mutual interest.

Mr. Coombs: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is both his view and that of Chancellor Kohl, as set out in a speech in Munich on 2 February, that, until further progress has been made on the reduction in conventional forces and the elimination of chemical weapons, the denuclearisation of Europe is not an option? Will he also confirm that, in the meantime, the upgrading and modernisation of nuclear and short-term weapons, which have not been included in the INF agreement, are vital to European security?

Mr. Younger: I understand that, as my hon. Friend says, those are roughly the views of Chancellor Kohl and of the West German Government. Certainly, all the NATO allies are agreed that our weapons systems must be kept up to date.

Mr. Conway: When my right hon. Friend met his counterpart, did he have an opportunity to express the value that we attach to the kindness and hospitality of the West German people when our troops are on exercises in West Germany fulfilling their NATO function? Will there be more exchanges of home-based forces, particularly territorial forces, with the British Army of the Rhine, to take part in mutual exercises?

Mr. Younger: Dr. Woerner and I have discussed these matters on many occasions. I have no doubt that he and the German Government are extremely grateful for the presence of British forces in Germany. We are grateful for the training facilities with which they are able to help us.

Mr. McFall: When the right hon. Gentleman meets his West German counterpart, will he discuss with him the incident at Faslane on HMS Resolution on 26 January in my constituency, which was described by the Ministry of Defence as a minor electrical malfunction? The Ministry of Defence did not give a sufficiently robust rebuttal of what happened, so my constituents——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is difficult to relate this to the question.

Mr. McFall: It is related because of the interest of the European Community in the incident. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot hear whether the question is relevant or not.

Mr. McFall: Many European reporters contacted me about the matter.

Will the Secretary of State ensure that if there is no substance to the reports, the Ministry of Defence will deny them robustly and communicate that to the local community so that unfounded fears can be laid to rest?

Mr. Younger: I do not think that it will be necessary for me to raise this with Dr. Woerner, because I would only have to tell him that there was a small electrical malfunction. At no point was there any danger to anyone on board or in the neighbourhood. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be glad to retail that in full detail to his constituents, who have nothing to fear.

Mr. Jack: Did my right hon. Friend discuss the European fighter aircraft with Dr. Woerner? If so, what did he say?

Mr. Younger: Yes, my hon. Friend has guessed correctly. We discussed the European fighter aircraft and Dr. Woerner expressed himself and his Government as being determined to press on with it and—I agreed with him about this—to try to reduce its price. I am glad to say that good progress has been made and I hope that the partners will be able to get together before long to agree the next stage.

Mr. Denzil Davies: The Secretary of State has still not given the House a rational explanation of why the Government are so opposed to parallel talks on conventional arms reductions and battlefield nuclear weapons. As we have constantly been told that NATO must have battlefield weapons because of the large concentrations of Soviet armour, and as conventional talks will be about reducing those, why not have parallel talks on battlefield nuclear weapons, especially as the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact have some superiority in nuclear artillery and a large superiority in short-range nuclear missiles?

Mr. Younger: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who has made my point for me. If what he

said meant anything, it meant that it would be infinitely wiser to go for conventional reductions first to establish whether the tank concentrations that he talked about can be reduced.

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, were there to be significant reductions in conventional Soviet forces, and were they to be pulled back behind the Urals, because of the much greater reinforcement distances across the Atlantic for American reinforcements there would still be the potential for an imbalance to reassert itself quickly? That is why it will always be essential that we have battlefield nuclear weapons.

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is right. The whole reinforcement capability will have to be taken into account in the conventional talks. The House should be in no doubt, and should not forget, that we are having this discussion in the context of the first major progress in arms reduction, which was a product of the policy that the Government have been following.

Nuclear Strategy

12. **Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received from the French Government regarding nuclear strategy.

13. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received from the French Government regarding nuclear strategy.

Mr. Younger: We maintain a fruitful dialogue with the French Government on a wide range of defence matters of mutual interest, including nuclear matters.

Mr. Redmond: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain the Government's attitude to the fact that, because the Franco-German defence council and brigade remain outside of NATO, and because of the Prime Minister's total reliance on the USA, there is a danger of a serious military split occurring?

Mr. Younger: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman need fear such a split. We take the view that the Franco-German brigade is a welcome development, especially as none of the troops for it will be taken from troops that are already committed to NATO. It is therefore a bilateral development outwith NATO, which can only help the strength of the West.

Mr. Campbell: What is the Government's attitude to the new Franco-German defence council and brigade outside NATO?—*[Interruption.]* Given the fact that the Prime Minister is wholly relying on the United States, will there not be a military split?

Mr. Younger: With respect to the hon. Member, I think that that is the question asked by the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond), which I answered a moment ago.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the robust, independent pro-nuclear policy of the former Socialist Government and Socialist President of West Germany has much to commend it to the Labour party?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is correct. I only wish that the previous Socialist Governments of West Germany could give a teach-in to the Labour party about sensible defence policies.

Mr. William Powell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most helpful developments in European policy and strategy is the increasing willingness of France to engage in manoeuvres with her allies in NATO? Will my right hon. Friend do all that he can to ensure that France carries out manoeuvres, not only with West Germany, but with ourselves?

Mr. Younger: I very much welcome the extremely good defence relationship that we have with France at present. It is helpful not only in joint manoeuvres—which are developing quite satisfactorily—but in joint procurement policies, which also have great promise for the future.

Mr. O'Neill: Further to that point, does the Secretary of State agree that it is about time that the French paid their full dues to Europe and became, once again, full members of NATO and stopped trying to have their cake and eat it?

Mr. Younger: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I hope that the time will come when the French will feel able to come into the military structure of NATO. At the present time we are happy to develop warmer and closer relations with France, and I believe that that is happening now.

Mr. Curry: Is my right hon. Friend aware that President Mitterrand of France is to attend the forthcoming NATO summit, which will be the first time that a French Head of State has attended it for more than 20 years? Does he think that that is a positive sign for the increasing integration of France, in practice, into the defence of Western Europe?

Mr. Younger: Yes, I think that the presence of the French Government, at presidential level, is a good augury for a successful NATO summit, which I hope will produce a clear and strong declaration.

Dual-Capable Aircraft

14. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary for State for Defence how many aircraft types there are in the Royal Air Force currently classified as dual-capable.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Three, Sir.

Mr. Barnes: Is there any intention to include the three dual-capable aircraft, which are capable of nuclear use, in conventional—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is very difficult to hear at this end of the Chamber.

Mr. Barnes: Is there any intention to include those three aircraft in the Geneva conventional arms talks, or is it the Government's intention never to introduce discussions about nuclear capability into negotiations?

Mr. Stewart: We do not believe that nuclear systems should be included in conventional arms talks.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that dual capability for the RAF is not new? It goes back to the introduction of the Victor, Vulcan and Valiant in the early 1950s. Therefore, the RAF is simply maintaining the capacity that it has had over all those years.

Mr. Stewart: My hon Friend is right. There is a long history of dual-capable systems for aeroplanes. As to the negotiations on arms control, which the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) raised, we believe

that conventional talks should concentrate on conventional forces. The priority in that regard is the great advantage and numerical superiority that Warsaw pact forces have in conventional ground forces.

Mr. Duffy: Will the Minister tell the House when those RAF aircraft will benefit from the protection and security of a NATO identification friend or foe system, for which we have been waiting for years?

Mr. Stewart: As the hon. Member knows, we have studied the systems for a long time. We are always anxious to update IFF and other systems, and I have no doubt that those aeroplanes will benefit from that.

Mr. Rogers: Will the Minister simply give a straight answer: will the three dual-capable Tornados be included in any conventional arms talks?

Mr. Stewart: We have said that we would not expect nuclear capability to be included in conventional arms talks. We have not said that dual-capable aircraft or other systems should be excluded in so far as that applies to their conventional role.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty The Queen.

Mr. Dykes: As this is such a crucial moment, will my right hon. Friend today and in coming weeks continue her determined and much appreciated efforts to secure an international peace conference and a lasting settlement in the middle east, bearing in mind that this must be done without preconditions on either side, that the credibility of the United States is inevitably reduced by its historic and strategic closeness to one party to the dispute, and that Europe and the United Kingdom have a unique role to play in this process?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, our policy has not changed, over the past year in particular, when we have espoused the cause of an international conference as a background for direct negotiations between King Hussein and the Palestinians and Israel. It has not been possible to get that going because it has not met with a sufficient degree of support from Mr. Shamir. We shall continue to espouse that course because we think it is the best one. The other side of the problem arises as to who shall negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians, but I believe that that particular part is soluble.

Mr. Kinnock: First, I warmly welcome the reply that the Prime Minister gave on the international conference.

Does the Prime Minister recognise that her refusal to give a commitment fully to fund the Health Service pay award is, in the words of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, causing "damaging uncertainty" and in some areas continued ward closures. Will she now make the necessary commitment to funding so that health authorities can plan and provide properly without cutting staff and without closing wards?

The Prime Minister: No, Mr. Speaker. This is about the fifth time that I have had the same question, so the answer will be precisely the same. The pay award will be dealt with in precisely the same way as previous awards, and of course previous awards have been highly beneficial to the nurses. I did look up to see precisely the dates upon which we dealt with it last year. All the reports of the review bodies came in between 1 and 14 April. We like to deal with them altogether. The nurses, doctors, dentists, the profession supplementary to medicine, the armed forces and the top salaries pay review bodies' reports all came in within a fortnight and we announced all our decisions by 23 April. I hope that if the reports come in in a similar group this year we will be equally expeditious in announcing our decision.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister says that she has made the commitment before, but never before have we had a Select Committee with a majority of her hon. Friends saying publicly that the absence of a commitment is causing "damaging uncertainty", and never before have we had the same Select Committee saying that the Prime Minister has up to £2 billion extra that she could spend on the National Health Service without changing the proportion of GDP spent on the service. When that service has such desperate and immediate need today, and when she plainly has the money, why does she not use the money?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary gave a very effective reply to the Select Committee. With regard to GDP, the right hon. Gentleman will be aware that not only has GDP gone up —there is further good news on that today; it is up 5 per cent. on what it was a year ago—but the proportion of unincreased GDP spent on the Health Service has gone up from 4·8 per cent. under Labour to 5·6 per cent under the Government.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister quotes her right hon. Friend. In response to him, her right hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) said that coded messages were not enough and that his reply was not good enough. Today, now, wards are being closed and uncertainty is causing damage because the right hon. Lady will not make a commitment. Why does she not make a commitment and relieve the health authorities of further weeks of uncertainty, causing further damage to the Health Service?

The Prime Minister: The nurses have had great action under Tory Governments, and have had pay increases of 30 per cent. over and above inflation, compared with a 20 per cent. reduction under Labour. The nurses have done very well under Tory Governments, and I shall deal with the report as I have indicated.

Mr. Knapman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that vast sums of public money have been given to the Rover car company and that further sums of money should not be given to that company to fund excessive pay demands?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is correct. During the lifetime of this Government about £2·9 billion has been given to the Rover-Leyland group. There is no intention of providing any more money specifically to fund the demand for an increase greater than that which the management has decided to offer. It is for the management and the work force to resolve the strike. I hope that it will

not last long, because strikes do not help anyone, least of all those who work in a particular company. My fear is that that would be handing jobs and business to Japan.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: I am pleased that the Prime Minister is a regular visitor to Cornwall, but is she aware that in so doing she and many others are adding to the burden on the Health Service in Cornwall? Roads are congested and ambulances are less able to move around the county as hospital closures increase. Will the Prime Minister—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask a question, please.

Mr. Taylor: Will the Prime Minister ensure, within the review of the Health Service, that a new commitment is made to tackle the problem of rural scatter in areas such as my constituency?

The Prime Minister: We shall have a very thorough review of the Health Service, taking into account many representations. If the hon. Member has specific and rather more definite representations to make, perhaps he will let me have them in writing.

Mr. Colvin: When does my right hon. Friend expect the flotation of the National Freight Corporation, a business that was previously owned by the state and is now owned by its workers? Are not the privatisation and flotation further examples of the transfer of wealth in favour of working people and their families?

The Prime Minister: I very much welcome the progress that the National Freight Corporation has made since it was privatised by a management buy-out. It has done very well by its work force, and the work force has done very well by the National Freight Corporation. Profits have increased by about nine times since privatisation, and those who helped with the buy-out have had a very good deal. I wish the company well for the flotation.

Engagements

Q2. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mullin: Does the Prime Minister agree with Lord Denning that it is better to have one or two innocent people remain in gaol than to risk undermining the credibility of the legal system by having to own up to a mistake? *[Interruption.]* Does she further agree that nothing discredits our system of justice so much as the widespread notion that some mistakes are too big to own up to?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman asked me to agree with a proposition by Lord Denning. I would prefer to see the proposition in context. I understand that the hon. Member may be referring once again to the recent hearing by the Court of Appeal of the case of the Birmingham pub bombings. The Court of Appeal hearing fully examined the defence case and decided that the convictions were sound. The Court of Appeal has certified that there is a point of public importance. I understand that the appellants intend to apply to the House of Lords to pursue the matter. The judgment, of course, is fully available to those who wish to read it in detail.

Mr. Favell: Has my right hon. Friend had time today to consider the Japanese ambassador's comment that if there were a business Olympics we would win gold medals? What kind of medals would we win if the Opposition were in charge?

The Prime Minister: I saw the most excellent comment by the Japanese ambassador. I think that he and Japan are very pleased with the inward investment that they have had into this country. They have insisted on one union only with which to negotiate. The companies have done well and the work force has done well. They have done well for Britain and we are very pleased with the compliments of the Japanese ambassador on our excellent, enterprising industry.

Q2. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Strang: Will the Prime Minister acknowledge the fundamental importance to the Scottish economy of the coal and steel industries? Is she aware of the widespread concern that thousands of jobs which depend upon these industries are threatened by privatisation? Will she take steps to direct British Steel to invest in new facilities in Scotland? Will she put an end to the suggested economic lunacy of a privatised South of Scotland Electricity Board being allowed to close pits by importing foreign coal?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has, not unexpectedly, asked two questions, one about steel and one about coal. As to steel, it is the subject of a debate later. The hon. Gentleman is aware that undertakings, subject to commercial considerations, were given to Ravenscraig with respect to steelmaking for the next seven years and to the Associated Dalzell plant for plate-rolling. It was, I think, an undertaking for the longest production of almost any steel plant in Europe. I thought that that went down extremely well in Scotland. We hope to undertake the privatisation of electricity, including Scottish electricity, during the lifetime of this Parliament. There will, I hope, be a White Paper out soon about our proposal.

I understand that the hon. Gentleman was asking a third question about coal, in connection with the ending of the coal contract, which I believe is due to terminate at the end of March—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is aware that the existing arrangements between the South of Scotland Electricity Board and British Coal are due to terminate at the end of March. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] If they are not, there is no problem.

Mr. Stanbrook: When my right hon. Friend signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement, did she expect that the Irish Government would use it to justify a unilateral inquiry into an incident that occurred within the United Kingdom, to restrict the extradition of alleged terrorists from Ireland, to set aside a decision of the Attorney-General and to attempt to reverse the verdict of the British Court of Appeal?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that it is right or possible to use the Anglo-Irish Agreement for that purpose, if one looks at the terms of the agreement. With regard to the inquiry which the Republic of Ireland has recently indicated that it has set up, of course, in their own

country the Irish Government can inquire into anything they wish, but not in matters north of the border. I have taken note of what my Friend has said about the extradition arrangements which we had with them and which were changed unilaterally. I have nothing to add to the excellent statement which my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General made in the House on other matters.

Q4. **Mr. Smith:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Smith: Further to the question that was asked earlier by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, was the Prime Minister denying the report that appeared in today's *Daily Telegraph* that Ministers have already decided not fully to fund the nurses' pay review, but instead to seek further efficiency savings? If she is not denying those reports, when will she realise that for her to suggest that nurses' pay should be funded only at the expense of patient care would be beyond contempt and rejected decisively by this House, as it has been by the Select Committee on Social Services, and as it will be by the people of this country?

The Prime Minister: I have not read any newspapers today. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I have been far too busy. What appears in those newspapers is not my responsibility. We shall deal with the report of the review bodies in precisely the same way and with precisely the same expedition as we dealt with them in previous years, and in particular last year. The hon. Gentleman will not have long to wait.

Mr. Strang: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take points of order after the statement.

Mr. Strang: I have a point of order arising out of Prime Minister's questions, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise a matter, but I shall still take points of order after the statement.

Britoil

3.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement.

On 1 February I told the House that, following the acquisition by BP of the majority of Britoil's ordinary shares, the Government would discuss with the two companies how we would use the special share. I reaffirmed that the powers of the special share would be used for so long as it was in the national interest to do so. I undertook that, in the discussions, we would take fully into account what was best for Scotland and for the development of the North sea. Those discussions have now been completed, and an acceptable arrangement has been reached with BP. The details are set out in an exchange of letters between BP and the Treasury, and I am placing copies in the Library of the House.

I shall deal first with the undertakings BP has given about its management of Britoil's North sea assets on the United Kingdom continental shelf. BP will seek to achieve an increase of at least 5 per cent. in recoverable reserves from Britoil's North sea oilfields. It has also undertaken to increase exploration substantially. By 1990, BP plans to spend between £300 million and £325 million a year on combined BP and Britoil North sea exploration. This represents a large increase in expenditure, and will lead to a major expansion in the number of wells drilled. BP has undertaken to develop as fast as is practicable all economic North sea discoveries in the combined BP and Britoil portfolio, including those resulting from the increased exploration programme.

All this implies a faster and more effective development of assets in the North sea. This increase in activity should give a welcome boost to the United Kingdom offshore industry.

So far as Scotland is concerned, BP has undertaken that Britoil's Glasgow office will become the business headquarters for the management not only of BP's and Britoil's combined United Kingdom upstream assets but also of BP's Norwegian and Irish interests, and that the overall number of employees in Aberdeen and Glasgow will not fall as a result of the acquisition.

BP has also undertaken to transfer to Glasgow the management of a high technology research and development project for the exploitation of the deeper waters of the United Kingdom continental shelf and elsewhere. As a minimum, between 50 and 75 senior BP executives and other highly qualified technical graduate staff will move to Scotland.

BP expects to increase the existing commitments of both companies in support of United Kingdom continental shelf-related research at Scottish universities. In addition, the company will endow a number of BP research fellowships for postgraduate research in Scottish universities. Both BP and Britoil have an excellent reputation for support for the Scottish community, and BP has undertaken that that will be continued at at least the present levels for the two companies.

The board of Britoil will be headed by a new non-executive chairman without any previous BP connections, whose appointment will be agreed between the Government and BP. Of the rest of the board, the chief executive and the executive directors will be nominated by BP, but the appointment of a majority of the non-executive directors will be agreed between the Government and BP.

If BP, which currently owns some 80 per cent. of Britoil's ordinary shares, ends up with a majority, but not a 100 per cent. shareholding, the same assurances and arrangements will apply, to the extent consistent with the obligations owed to Britoil's minority shareholders. Britoil will then be managed and operated as a separate, independent subsidiary and will have its own chief executive. The proposed staff movements to Scotland will still take place.

The Government have told BP that in return for these assurances, and so long as we are satisfied that BP is complying with them, we do not intend to exercise any of the rights attaching to the special share. After a period of time the Government will review, in the light of the way that these assurances have operated, when the special share should be redeemed. Meanwhile, responsibility for the special share will be transferred from the Treasury to the Department of Energy.

The existence of the special share has enabled the Government to secure from BP these wide-ranging, valuable and public assurances. BP has a high reputation, both internationally and also as a major employer in Scotland, and I am sure that the House will share my confidence that it will honour the assurances it has given.

I believe that this outcome is good for Scotland, good for the efficient exploitation of our North sea assets, and good for the future of the two companies and of their employees.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): I hope that the Chancellor does not expect the House of Commons to accept that this pathetic exercise in window dressing is an honouring of the specific pledges about the independence of Britoil that he gave when he was Secretary of State for Energy while assuring us of the magical properties of the golden share. Let me remind the Chancellor of what he said to the House when he was Secretary of State for Energy. He said that the special share

"will act as the most formidable deterrent to anyone who tries to take over control of the board, of the company or of the majority of its shares, and who the Government consider to be unacceptable."— [*Official Report*, 31 March 1982; Vol. 21, c. 334.]

Does the Chancellor also recollect that the then Minister of State for Scotland, now Lord Gray of Contin, said:

"The articles will contain effective safeguards for Britoil's independence and the safeguards will be triggered if there is an attempt to take over voting control of the company or to control the Britoil board or its composition." — [*Official Report*, 1 April 1982; Vol.21, c.450.]

Is it not right to say that BP correctly judged that the Government would not stand by their own assurances and has now rolled over the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

In exchange for the obliteration of the independence of Scotland's largest publicly quoted company there is an undertaking that jobs will not fall, although there is no guarantee for the future, 50 to 75 executives will move with the research project, which should have been in Scotland in the first place, and the Scottish universities will get a few extra research fellows.

Is it not crystal clear that the Chancellor exacted precious little from BP in exchange for handing Britoil to

it on a plate? Is it not typical of the muddle of public relations and doublespeak with which this statement is riddled that Britoil

"is to be managed as a separate, independent subsidiary"?

Does not the Chancellor understand that a subsidiary has ceased to be independent? Was it not the independence of Britoil that the golden share was supposed to guarantee? Is it not significant that BP has sole and unfettered control over the appointment of the chief executive and all the executive directors of the new subsidiary?

Having failed to use the powers of the golden share, the Chancellor is now signalling its end, and even in its limbo period it is so worthless that the Treasury is tossing it over to the Department of Energy.

Does not this whole episode prove that the Chancellor is not to be trusted when he gives assurances to Parliament? The result of the whole exercise is the betrayal of the public interest exemplified by an increase in monopoly power, a move of decision-making power to London and the extinction of a proud and successful oil company.

Will the Chancellor reflect on the irony that, while he allows BP to gobble up Britoil, the Kuwaiti Investment Office is steadily increasing its shareholding in BP—the pathway opened to the Kuwaitis by the Chancellor's decision to persist in selling the Government's share after the crash? Do not the Kuwaitis have a clearer concept of their national interest than the Chancellor has of the British interest?

Mr. Lawson: I am not at all surprised that the right hon. and learned Gentleman got on to the subject of the Kuwaiti holding in BP, because he knew that he was on such flimsy and hopeless ground on the issue about which I made my statement. He also knows of the assurances that we have received from the Kuwaiti Government on the Kuwaiti holding.

I am sorry that the right hon. and learned Gentleman should have decided to imply that BP was such an unacceptable owner of Britoil, as I well recall an earlier occasion—over the BP share issue—when he lauded the merits of BP to the skies. He seems to have changed his tune to a remarkable extent. Also, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has not read the statement very carefully, although he had a long time to do so. The reference to the separate independent subsidiary was in the case where BP did not secure 100 per cent. of the shares and therefore there was a minority outstanding. Therefore, that is an accurate statement in company law. If, however, BP gets 100 per cent., Britoil will not be independent but it will still be subject to the assurances that BP has given. They are substantial assurances and the right hon. and learned Gentleman is wholly wrong to brush them aside. His views will not be shared by anyone who knows anything about the oil industry in general and the Scottish offshore oil industry in particular.

Finally, I would refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to the statement that I made more than five years ago as Secretary of State for Energy which he quoted. I said that the special share would be a deterrent to the takeover of Britoil by anyone who the Government considered to be unacceptable. The Government have found that a takeover by BP, subject to the assurances that BP has given, is thoroughly acceptable and in the best interests of the British people and the British economy.

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that there has been a direct challenge from BP to the Government? In those circumstances, my right hon. Friend is placed in extreme difficulty. This is indeed a sad day for the independence of Britoil and of the British oil sector. Having said that, will my right hon. Friend accept that the assurances that he has obtained from BP in these difficult circumstances are very much to be welcomed? Will he ensure — particularly in the future interests of Britoil's staff—that there is no backsliding and that BP fulfils to the letter the undertakings that have been given?

Mr. Lawson: I thank my right hon. Friend for his remarks. I am quite sure that there will be no backsliding by BP. BP has given solemn assurances to me and, through me, to the House of Commons. But of—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is very difficult to hear what the Chancellor is saying when there is so much background noise from a sedentary position.

Mr. Lawson: But of course it is important that the House should be assured that the undertakings that BP has given will be carried out, and that is why we shall be retaining the special share, with all its powers, until such time as these assurances and undertakings have been fully implemented and have been seen to be working satisfactorily for a reasonable period.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Sir Hector Monro. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I will balance up in a minute.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Does my right hon. Friend accept that most thinking Scots will welcome a company such as BP with an international reputation developing its operational and administrative role in Scotland? Has my right hon. Friend discussed with BP the likely employment figures over the next two or three years?

Mr. Lawson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The employment figures will obviously depend on the success of the exploration programme and the success of the North sea oil industry based in Scotland, but I have no doubt that the arrangements that we have secured will benefit the North sea oil industry in Scotland. It is interesting that the total amount that BP expects to spend on exploration in the UKCS by 1990 of between £300 million and £325 million compares with a total for BP and Britoil this year of around £200 million.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Chancellor enlighten us a little on one of the conditions that BP seems to find acceptable — the 5 per cent. increase in the return on recoverable reserves? What timespan does the Chancellor seek to put on that evaluation? Will he or the Department of Energy continue to hold the golden share in order to ascertain whether this is a mere promise on the part of BP, or a promise that looks at the value of a field over, say, 20 to 25 years? How will the Chancellor or the Department of Energy seek to monitor that, or has he, in reality, sold out on a whole range of conditions to an oil company that knows what it is doing when he does not?

Mr. Lawson: The way in which BP conducts itself when it has secured Britoil and its operations in the North sea will be carefully monitored by the Department of Energy,

[Mr. Lawson]

which is one of the reasons why it seemed to me appropriate that the special share should be transferred to the Department of Energy.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the Chancellor acknowledge that his statement to the House this afternoon is a shameful climb-down on the merit of the golden share? Why was not the takeover of Britain's largest independent oil company by Britain's largest oil company referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission? Does not the takeover show the Government's complete lack of understanding on the role that can be played by independent oil companies as opposed to multi-nationals? Will the net effect in Scotland outweigh the fact that BP is now transferring 300 people from Aberdeen to London, and will the transfers to Glasgow be from south of the border or from Aberdeen?

Mr. Lawson: Whether the arrangements should have been referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading and for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, not for me. The enhanced activity of the combined British Petroleum and Britoil group will mean great benefits for Scotland. The special share has ensured the independence of Britoil for over five years. It has ensured there has been no foreign acquisition of Britoil and it has ensured that BP has given the important undertakings that it has.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the original object of the special share was to ensure that Britoil remained a British company? What could be more British and more acceptable than for Britoil to be acquired by BP?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is deplorable that the Opposition seem to have nothing good to say about BP, Britain's largest company. One might have expected that sort of thing from Members of the Scottish National party, if there are any around; I would not have expected it from Members of other parties who believe in the union.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Will the Chancellor answer a simple question by telling the House what contingency arrangements he has in case BP fails to honour the undertakings that he has given the House today? Is it possible that BP will be divested of its share interest in Britoil if it fails to honour the undertakings which it has given the Chancellor and which he in turn has given the House?

As for BP's employment record, does the Chancellor realise that he simply does not know what he is talking about? As a Scottish Member in whose constituency BP has been throughout my parliamentary life, I know that it has the most appalling employment record of any company in my constituency. I do not regard the undertakings that BP has given the Chancellor as being worth the paper on which they are written.

Mr. Lawson: I find it difficult to contemplate that a company such as BP would give such undertakings to me, and through me to the House, and then break them. If, however, BP did not live up to those assurances, the Government would have full power to use the special share to remove the entire board of Britoil, and to replace it with another board.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, if the Opposition have no interest in the jobs in Scotland, we would be happy to have them in the north-east and receive similar assurances there? Does he not agree that, if the Opposition cannot attach any value to the concept of a tartan share, it is probably high time that it was redeemed?

Mr. Lawson: I note what my hon. Friend has said. He is always a powerful advocate for the north-east of England.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What exactly has BP given in the way of undertakings? Will the Chancellor look at the small print? For example, paragraph 7 of his statement tells us:

> "BP expects to increase the existing commitments of both companies in support of UK continental shelf-related research at Scottish universities."

BP only "expects" to do that. Where are the undertakings? If BP cannot agree to that, what can we expect from it?

If we look at the statement carefully, we see that BP has not given the undertakings that the Chancellor is trying to give the impression it has given. What is meant by "expect"? Why could not even that be a definite undertaking?

Mr. Lawson: What is meant is that the hon. Gentleman can expect BP to live up to its undertakings. If he wants to look at the small print, however, I suggest that he looks not merely at my statement—which is perhaps the large print—but at the letter written by BP, which I have placed in the Library of the House and which runs to no fewer than 32 paragraphs.

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): Will not the public in general, and the Scottish public in particular, be much more impressed by my right hon. Friend's announcement about the increased development in the North sea, and the intensification of research and development in Scotland, than by the accustomed sterile preoccupations of the Opposition with which shares reside in which strong box? Can my right hon. Friend tell us whether this represents any change in the Government's policy towards the independent sector?

Mr. Lawson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said. There is no change in the Government's policy towards the independent sector of the North sea, but that is not a matter for me; it is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is the Chancellor aware that the exploration figures that have so excited him in relation to BP's projected expenditure in 1990 are less than the combined exploration expenditure of BP and Britoil in 1985? Are we not moving backwards, and are not those figures almost certainly less than they would be if the two companies remained independent?

Is it not the case that, if BP reaches 90 per cent. of the shareholding, the rest of the small shareholders will be forced to sell out? Are there any guarantees for jobs, given that BP plans to expand its job control from Dyce by 1,000 according to its own devices, and that to maintain employment could still conceal a rationalisation of Britoil jobs?

Does not the Chancellor remember telling the House that it is

"important to protect the character of Britoil as an independent company, responsible for its own management and business strategy"?—[*Official Report*, 31 March 1982; Vol. 21, c. 334.]

Has that been done, and, if not, why not?

Mr. Lawson: On the specific undertakings given by BP, I ask the hon. Gentleman to look at the letter that I have placed in the Library of the House which goes into that in considerable detail, and which I summarised in my statement to the House a little earlier.

As for exploration levels in 1985 and now, I shall let the hon. Gentleman into a secret. At the beginning of 1986, there was a complete collapse of the world oil price, which led to a dramatic fall in exploration world-wide and not merely in the North sea. Therefore, the comparison is between what is promised by BP and what is happening now. As I have said, BP's best estimate of the total amount of expenditure in the North sea by BP and Britoil combined this year is about £200 million whereas the undertaking for 1990 is for expenditure of between £300 million and £325 million. That is a substantial increase.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Further to his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), does my right hon. Friend agree that, although the number of jobs is, of course, important, the quality of those jobs is crucial and that that is why, for example, the transfer of the sub-sea technology department to Glasgow is so welcome? Can my right hon. Friend give any indication of the timetable for the transfer of that important work?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is right. On the timetable, BP will carry out that transfer as soon as practicable—*[Interruption.]* It is of importance. When I visit Scotland the point is often made to me that the jobs that people in Scotland seek are high grade jobs. The jobs to which my hon. Friend referred and to which I referred in my statement are jobs for senior executives and high and top level technologists. They are just the sort of jobs that the Scottish people have wanted to see in Scotland.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): On the version in the Chancellor's statement, I think that we can take it that he has battered BP into submission. Is he aware that Britoil's employees in my constituency are still extremely concerned about their job prospects? Did the Chancellor receive undertakings from BP about future developments in, for example, the Don, the Ettrick and the Amethyst fields which would protect those jobs and guarantee their future?

Mr. Lawson: Clearly there were no specific agreements about individual fields, but there was an undertaking to increase exploration activity substantially. That can only be good news for the United Kingdom offshore oil industry based in Scotland.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): Will my right hon. Friend note that if he wants evidence of commitment to Scotland by BP he need look no further than Grangemouth because not only is that Scotland's only refinery but there has been a substantial programme of investment there? When Opposition Members huff and puff about BP, will my right hon. Friend remind them that during the oil price crash Britoil laid off people right left and centre, whereas a large conglomerate such as BP was in a much better position to protect the jobs of its employees?

Mr. Lawson: I think that my hon. Friend is implying that, as usual, Opposition Members are completely out of touch with reality and with the British people. He is quite right.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): Does the Chancellor accept that the undertakings given by BP are remarkably similar to those that were given by the Guinness company, and they were broken? What does the Chancellor plan to do to enforce those promises, or is this another example of major influence on the Scottish economy passing, in this case, not just to London, but to the shores of the Gulf?

Mr. Lawson: I have already explained—I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman understood it—that we shall for the time being retain the special share, with all its powers, to ensure and to satisfy ourselves that the undertakings are carried out. I greatly deplore the slurs that the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. and hon. colleagues are making about BP.

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on achieving what he has achieved as a demostration of his conscious responsibilities as a Minister peculiarly responsible for matters in all parts of the United Kingdom. The opportunities that he has obtained for executives at senior level to come to Scotland will enable them not only to enjoy the highest standard of living in the United Kingdom, but to promote the huge surge of industry, energy and prosperity which Scotland has enjoyed under this Government.

Mr. Lawson: As usual, there is much in what my hon. and learned Friend says. I believe that it would be more constructive and certainly a great deal better for Scotland if right hon. and hon. Members on the Labour Benches would occasionally stop all this carping and tell the world of the successes of the Scottish economy.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Is the Chancellor saying that anyone who objects to the agglomeration of independent companies into already huge multinational companies is guilty of carping and, by definition, guilty of attacking the company that is doing the acquiring? Does the Chancellor agree that he has made the Secretary of State for Scotland look more than usually absurd? Only last Thursday the Secretary of State for Scotland, in a much-hyped speech, boasted that privatisation led to greater corporate control resting in Scotland. How does the Chancellor equate what has happened to Britoil, with its movement from the public to the private sector and its eventual movement from control in Scotland to Kuwait, with the statement made by his right hon. and learned Friend?

Mr. Lawson: I agree entirely with what my right hon. and learned Friend said. I assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no question of control moving to Kuwait. As for my right hon. and learned Friend looking unhappy, he does not look very unhappy to me, and I should be surprised if he were because I consulted with him throughout the negotiations.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Since this is the first time that the golden share technique has been tested in this way,

[Sir Peter Hordern]

will my right hon. Friend say whether other companies in which the Government hold a golden share may also be subject to a takeover bid subject only to the consent of the Government?

Mr. Lawson: Each golden share has its own terms and conditions. However, with the exception of Enterprise Oil, where the golden share terminates at the end of the year, pretty well all the other golden shares restrain a holding to 15 per cent. Therefore, the situation is rather different from the situation that pertains in the case of Britoil.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): The Chancellor has made reference to the statements that he has previously made. Does he recall the statement he made from the Dispatch Box about the flotation of Britoil? He said that the purpose of that flotation was to create a new, independent company—independent of the oil majors. If it was a good thing then, why is the destruction of such independence now considered a good thing?

Mr. Lawson: We created a new, independent oil company and freed it from state control and, since then, it has done well. What I also said—indeed it was also said by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith)—was that the purpose of the golden share was to prevent a takeover by anybody who the Government considered to be unacceptable. The whole point is that, as a result of the discussions, we have achieved a situation where there is an acceptable takeover of Britoil.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Does my right hon. Friend realise that there are many Scots who will welcome the statement in the form that it has taken today because they are proud of being Scots and proud of being British? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that BP's independence as a British company — operating as it does in the international market of which, by nature of the business, it must be part — is now much stronger and better because BP and Britoil together are obviously a much safer and better company than they were apart?

Mr. Lawson: As my hon. Friend says, it must clearly be the case that the acquisition of Britoil has considerably strengthened BP.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the Chancellor tell us to whom this takeover is acceptable?

Mr. Lawson: It is acceptable to Her Majesty's Government and it would also appear acceptable to the shareholders of Britoil, some 80 per cent. of whom have accepted the offer.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my right hon. Friend accept that many of us thought that there was an inevitability about Britoil being taken over by BP and that it now becomes even more significant that BP stays British and does not become Kuwaiti? Will my right hon. Friend let us into the secret at to what his views would be should someone who is not a British national make a takeover bid for one of our greatest British companies in the oil industry?

Mr. Lawson: I do not believe that it is sensible to engage in hypothetical speculation, but I am confident that BP will remain British.

Mr. Terry Patchett (Barnsley, East): Can the right hon. Gentleman inform the House how much more of the family silver is left to sell off?

Mr. Lawson: That is a pretty tired old simile. I am proud to say that the privatisation programme will continue for many, many years to come.

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): Will my right hon. Friend remind the House that BP was not prevented by the American Government from taking 100 per cent. control of Standard Oil — without any special share — even though Standard Oil is much larger than Britoil and happens to own the largest oil reserves in North America? What is all the fuss about?

Mr. Lawson: I believe that my hon. Friend puts an extremely valuable perspective on the discussions that we have had this afternoon.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Does the Chancellor agree that he has brought a considerable amount of this humiliating climb-down on himself? In mid-October 1987, he demonstrated, in proceeding with the share sale, that he was a devotee of the James Anderton philosophy of privatisation—flog the underwriters until they beg for mercy. Does he not agree that had he not alienated the management board of BP on that occasion he would have found the subsequent negotiations when trying, with the use of the golden share, to scare it off from acquiring Britoil far easier to undertake?

Mr. Lawson: I am sure that the BP underwriters will be grateful for the hon. Gentleman's solicitude.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Although they have not been mentioned this afternoon, does my right hon. Friend agree that the interests of the Britoil shareholders are worth some consideration? The Government would have had to have extremely strong reasons to justify intervening to prevent them from accepting an otherwise extremely attractive offer.

Does my right hon. Friend also agree that it would have been quite absurd and totally wrong to use the golden share as a way of freezing the structural shareholding of a particular company in a particular way for all time? Markets evolve and in the past few years the oil market in particular has changed substantially. It would have been wrong to prevent BP from having the chance to emerge in the future as a greatly expanded and strengthened major vertical company based both in England and in Scotland.

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend makes a number of pertinent remarks. I would only repeat that I believe that the arrangements that have been put in place are good for the North sea oil industry and good for Scotland. My hon. Friend is right to mention the position of the Britoil shareholders. That was certainly one of the factors that I had to take into account.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Chancellor confirm that nearly two thirds of the shares recently sold in BP have been bought by the Kuwaitis? Is he protesting about that to the Kuwaiti Government? What have they said in response? Have they given any assurances or does he intend that they build up a holding of 29·5 per cent. before he does anything?

Mr. Lawson: It is well known that the Kuwait Investment Office holds a little more than 20 per cent. of the ordinary shares of BP. It is also well known that the

Kuwaitis have given an undertaking and an assurance to the Government that they regard this as a long-term investment and that they have no interest whatever in the control and management of BP.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the overwhelming stench of humbug coming across from the Opposition Benches today should be repudiated? In view of the undertakings given by BP, perhaps he will take into account my constituents, who have Wytch Farm in their area and rely on BP's good name for maintaining the oil interests of my constituency. When he next talks to BP, and given that Scottish Members do not want headquarters jobs in their constituencies, perhaps he will consider bringing jobs to Swanage and Wareham.

Mr. Lawson: Wytch Farm is the most successful onshore oilfield in the United Kingdom. I am sure that it brings considerable benefits to my hon. Friend's constituents, about which he is fully aware.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): One thing is certain: the Chancellor of the Exchequer has proved the old adage, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) has just reminded me, that all that glitters is not gold. What guarantee have BP and the Kuwaitis given him that they will not break their promise in the same way that he broke his promise to the House on the golden share? Is he aware that all the shenanigans that have taken place with British oil companies have provided the Left with a perfect platform for arguing the case for public ownership in the future?

Mr. Lawson: I was not aware that the Left of the Labour party, or, indeed, any part of the Labour party, needed any excuse for arguing the virtues of state ownership. It appears to have done it without any excuse. When the Labour party has been in power, it has done great damage to this country, but that will not happen again. I strongly resent the accusation that I have been dishonest with the House of Commons. I have not.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Surely what is best for British business and thus for British jobs is that there should be no politically imposed Scottish solutions on British business — *[Interruption]* — but rather that Britoil should be free to make its own commercial decisions, free from political interference and special pleading.

Mr. Lawson: I am afraid that there was so much noise from the Opposition Benches that I was not able to hear that question.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us hear this question.

Mr. Dickens: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in answering questions—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Give the hon. Gentleman a chance.

Mr. Dickens: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when Ministers are replying to questions similar to that of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), we ought to remind hon. Members that the British Government have the sanction of removing the board of Britoil if it goes back on its agreement, and that it is the British Government who issue licences for exploration and place a tax structure on oil companies? With all that behind us, why on earth are we worried about a multinational company which has to compete with other multinational companies? We cannot be parochial any longer. We must compete with the rest of the world and, to do that, we must be strong.

Mr. Lawson: I was able to hear that question, and I agree with everything that my hon. Friend said.

Points of Order

4.13 pm

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise an important point of order arising from the Prime Minister's answer to my question this afternoon. The Prime Minister stated that the contract between the South of Scotland Electricity Board and British Coal will come to an end at the end of March. Opposition Members challenged her on that from a sedentary position and she went on to say that, if that were the case, there was no problem. However, only within the past few days, British Coal has taken the South of Scotland Electricity board to court.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This appears to be a continuation of Question Time. What is the point of order for me?

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): It is a genuine point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sure that every hon. Member who raises a point of order has a genuine reason for doing so, but I cannot say whether an answer is right or wrong.

Mr. Strang: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. The important point is that the matter is before the courts. British Coal and the SSEB are currently before the courts seeking a decision on whether the contracts applying to Longannet and Cockenzie end at the end of March or in 1992. Did the Prime Minister breach the sub judice rule?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do my homework on these questions. I am not aware that any date has been set down for this case.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is a matter which concerns the whole House, regardless of Government or Opposition support. It is the practice of Ministers to refer to a document and say that something will be found in it, but when one studies the document one finds that what Ministers have asserted is in it tends not to appear in the document specifically.

The House will recall that the Chancellor of the Exchequer referred us to a document in the Library. It so happens that, in the Library, there is the letter of 23 February from Sir Peter Middleton, permanent secretary to the Treasury, to Sir Peter Walters, chairman of BP, but nowhere in that document is there any undertaking of the kind that the Chancellor said that we would find. It is a gross abuse of the House of Commons for Ministers to refer to documents that are not immediately available. There is certainly something in those documents, but, lo and behold, when we read them, what is asserted to be in them tends not to be there. That is a ministerial abuse of the House.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will have to follow that up in a subsequent question. I cannot deal with it.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise an important point of order regarding Prime Minister's Question Time. You will be aware that a serious incident occurred in my constituency this week. The hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) referred to the matter during Question Time. That serious incident resulted in the death of a young man and, subsequently, in a foreign Government deciding to hold an inquiry into the event at Aughnacloy. I tried to intervene, without success, in Prime Minister's Question Time today, as I have done time after time during the past eight months.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must understand that I am obliged to balance questions in the House and I shall seek to call hon. Members who have not previously been called to ask questions of the Prime Minister. I am well aware of the hon. Gentleman's concern about his constituent, and I am sorry about that, but, with the best will in the world, I cannot possibly call the hon. Gentleman whenever an incident occurs in his constituency. There will be other opportunities.

Mr. Maginnis: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The matter does not arise. I am sorry, but I have already called the hon. Gentleman once during Prime Minister's Question Time. He will be called again, but I cannot call him just because he rises. Many hon. Members rise to ask questions.

Mr. Maginnis: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. No, it does not arise.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I should like to raise a point of order regarding Standing Committee proceedings tomorrow. The *Hansard* for last Wednesday's proceedings of Standing Committee C is not yet available. That will not necessarily prevent the Committee from proceeding, but it is a grave discomfort for Committee Members. I should be most grateful if you would investigate the matter.

Mr. Speaker: I shall look into that.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Was not this afternoon an example of the difficulties that the House gets into because, Sir, of your new practice of postponing points of order until a later time in the day? There was an occasion this afternoon when the Prime Minister should have been called to order immediately, but, because of your intervention in postponing the point of order, it could not happen. We are now in the difficulty that a matter has been raised on which you have postponed a decision—quite rightly—and we shall require another ruling from you.

Would it not be advisable to reconsider this arbitrary introduction that you, Sir, created, of postponing points of order which are relevant when they are raised, but are not relevant one, two or three hours later?

Mr. Speaker: I do not propose to go back on this matter. It is certainly not an arbitrary ruling of mine. I am merely returning to what used to be, and has always been, the practice in this House.

The trouble with having points of order arising out of questions is that, by their very nature, they invite a continuation of Question Time. I think the whole House agrees that the present practice is for the best.

Mr. Faulds *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not hearing any more from the hon. Gentleman about that; I have dealt with it.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would it be possible for you to enlighten me? I understood you to say that you were reverting to an old practice of the House. I have not been an hon. Member for long, but other hon. Members keep telling me that the old practice was to raise points of order when the questions arose. Would it be possible to learn when the old practice became a new practice, to be superseded by an old practice?

Mr. Speaker: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that. In the Parliament before last, that practice began to grow, when the Speaker of the day took the view that, in order not to disrupt Question Time, he would take points of order at the end. I have reverted to the practice that previously existed. I shall be happy to send the hon. Gentleman details of the statement that I made at the time—I do not have it with me now.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your advice. Last Thursday, a Home Office Minister declined to answer eight questions that had appeared on the Order Paper on the ground that the case in question was sub judice. The case, however, was not referred to the House of Lords and was not sub judice. I should be grateful for your clarification on that point, and for your confirmation that there was nothing to prevent the Minister from answering questions on the subject. Is it not about time that Ministers stopped sheltering behind the sub judice rule?

Mr. Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman is asking about the case of the Birmingham six. I can tell him that, from the latest information I have, it is not sub judice under the rules of the House.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could you explain to the House when and why the system was changed whereby hon. Members could rise and say they were not in agreement with what had been said in reply to their questions and would seek to raise the issue on the Adjournment?

Mr. Speaker: That has not been changed; it frequently happens even today. I shall take one more point of order, but we have an important debate on steel——

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: I am telling the hon. Gentleman that a large number of hon. Members want to take part in the steel debate, on which there is a time limit.

Mr. Eadie: Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds), who wrongly left the Chamber. I want to put it to you that when we are dealing with rules that you have decided arbitrarily, we must sometimes reflect on whether, in the light of our experience, they require reconsideration——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope the hon. Gentleman did not say "arbitrarily".

Mr. Eadie: I am saying that you decided the rule. If you decided it, it is arbitrary. I should welcome correction from you, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: I should be happy to send the hon. Gentleman the ruling that I made at the time, with the background to it.

Mr. Eadie: I am continuing with my point of order, Mr. Speaker, whether you like it or not.

Mr. Speaker: I do not mind at all; it is a question whether the hon. Gentleman's colleagues will object.

Mr. Eadie: I was raising the issue whether you should consider what happens to our procedures in the light of experience. What was drawn to your attention this afternoon happened because of the procedure of taking points of order after Question Time. It certainly looks as if the Prime Minister, or the Executive, was protected today, when, as was drawn to your attention, the right hon. Lady made a statement about a matter that was about to come before the courts. When the Prime Minister of the country makes a statement, I am sure that it will be transmitted to the courts and could, to some extent, prejudice, or help to prejudice, any decision by the courts.

I am referring to the issue of the SSEB coal contract in Scotland. All I am asking you to do, Mr. Speaker—I know that you are in a hurry, but I rarely raise points of order—is to consider, in the light of what has happened today, the fact that as you are the protector of Back Benchers you do not want to over-protect the Executive. To some extent, the Prime Minister abused privilege this afternoon, and you listened to that.

Mr. Speaker: Of course, it is my duty to ensure that Back Benchers' rights are protected. As far as I am aware —I briefed myself before Question Time—the case has not been set down for a hearing before the courts. It is therefore not sub judice. If I am wrong, I shall, of course, apologise to the House.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you rightly suggested much earlier, there have been variations on the procedure of points of order during the time that you and I have been Members of the House. It is true that for a long time points of order were raised on questions immediately after they occurred—indeed, that was so for the greater part of the time that I have been here. A few months ago, in 1987, you took it upon yourself to try to be firm and to have all points of order raised after statements so that they could all be collected together. It may not have been the only reason, but certainly one of the criteria for that was the fact that Ministers, who are busy people, arrange to make statements and want to get away from points of order that could occur straight after Question Time, before a statement or business questions might delay them. I can understand that, even though I might not agree with it. You, Mr. Speaker, might have taken a different view.

I have raised this subject before and I am concerned about it. It is fair to say that if the practice stays for as long as you hold your office, Mr. Speaker, and Back Benchers' points of order immediately after questions are disbarred, Front Benchers, who in times of heat, passion and argument, may want to break that rule must be expected to abide by it. As I have said before, there was a slight variation on the rule on one occasion. I suggest that if it applies to my hon. Friends and other hon. Members it must hold fast at all times for all Front Benchers.

Mr. Speaker: I am always prepared to keep such matters under review. I am merely going back to the practice that always obtained in the past. The trouble with asking hon. Members whether a point of order arises out of questions is that the inevitable answer is, "Certainly, Mr. Speaker; of course it does." We then get two slots for points of order in that way. That wastes the time of the House and in any event Ministers do not get an opportunity to reply to the points, because Question Time is over.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. At one time, you made a distinction between hon. Members who wanted to raise points of order directly arising from questions and those who raised other points of order. If you give that further reflection, you will see that, if Question Time ends at 3.30 pm and an hon. Member cannot raise his point of order arising out of it until 5 pm, and in the meantime there have been two statements, and so on, the point of order loses a great deal of relevance.

As you have repeatedly stated, Mr. Speaker, that one of your functions, like that of your predecessors, is to protect Back Benchers—we have limited rights in many respects about asking questions and being called—I should have thought that there was a very strong case for a trial period of six months to see what occurs. Hon. Members who want to raise points of order arising from questions should be asked to do so immediately after Question Time.

Mr. Speaker: Points of order are one thing. As to the practice of the past, the hon. Gentleman needs only to look at *Hansard* of those days to find that very rarely—almost never—were they points of order; they were points of dispute about a statement or an answer given to a question.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the 12 motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Somerset Levels and Moors) Designation (Amendment) Order 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 176) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Designation (Wales) (Amendment) Order 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 173) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Designation (England) (Amendment) Order 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 174) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (The Broads) (Amendment) Order 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 175) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Cambrian Mountains-Extension) Designation Order 1987 (S.I., 1987, No. 2026) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Lleyn Peninsula) Designation Order 1987 (S.I., 1987, No. 2027) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

[Mr. Speaker]

That the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Breckland) Designation Order 1987 (S.I., 1987, No. 2029) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (North Peak) Designation Order 1987 (S.I., 1987, No. 2030) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Shropshire Borders) Designation Order 1987 (S.I., 1987, No. 2031) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (South Downs-Western Extensions) Designation Order 1987 (S.I., 1987, No. 2032) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Suffolk River Valleys) Designation Order 1987 (S.I., 1987, No. 2033) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Test Valley) Designation Order 1987 (S.I., 1987, No. 2034) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. — *[Mr. Wakeham.]*

Points of Order

4.35 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask for your guidance, in relation to the point of order that I tried to raise earlier? When you rose to your feet, I sat down. Thereafter, I was precluded from making my point of order. As Northern Ireland is governed and legislated for through Orders in Council, I am unable, as an hon. Member representing Northern Ireland, to change any legislation that the Government may bring forward. In the past eight months I have been called only once during Prime Minister's Question Time. What is my role in the House in terms of representing my constituents? Do I have a role?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must bear in mind the fact that he is one of a number of Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies. During Prime Minister's Question Time I always attempt to call an hon. Member from one of the minority parties, but it would be impossible to call all of them. The hon. Gentleman is one hon. Member among 650. I must deal with all hon. Members fairly.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Of course I shall take the point of order, but it will affect the hon. Gentleman's colleagues who wish to take part in the steel debate. I hope that I shall not receive any complaints at the end of the debate.

Mr. Dalyell: My point of order arises from what happened yesterday when my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) and others asked questions of you, Mr. Speaker, about the Master of the Rolls. You said that you would reflect on the matter, and I was wondering whether you would be making a statement to the House. The statement has been made much more urgent by what happened in the Scottish courts today regarding the Anthony Cavendish affair and Lord Coulsfield's judgment. The relationship between Parliament and the courts is assuming an extra urgency.

Mr. Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman has raised the matter, I shall reply. I have considered the matter, as I undertook to do yesterday. The rule—which is set out in "Erskine May" on pages 430 and 431—is that,

"Unless the discussion is based upon a substantive motion, drawn in proper terms, reflections must not be cast in debate upon . . ."

certain persons, including peers and judges. That is not to say that hon. Members may not express disagreement with the decisions of judges in cases that are not sub judice, so long as they express their disagreement in proper terms. Nor does it mean — this is the point that the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) raised with me yesterday — that where a person who is covered by the rule undertakes activities in another capacity he may not be criticised in that capacity. For instance, criticism has been permitted of the activities of a member of another place in his role as a newspaper proprietor.

What our rules do not permit, unless it is on a substantive motion, is criticism of the private conduct of a judge of the kind that reflects on his capacity to hold that office.

Mr. Dalyell: Obviously this is an important statement on which the House would wish to reflect. Is, as we interpret it, the House of Commons taking a stand against the behaviour of the Master of the Rolls, not as a judge but more in his role as a politician?

Mr. Speaker: I ask the hon. Gentleman to study carefully what I have said in this considered statement.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You said that it is right and proper for hon. Members to criticise, among other people, judges such as the Master of the Rolls, Lord Donaldson, when they are acting in a capacity that is not in line with their job as a judge. What we argued yesterday, which you have taken on board, is that he had entered the political arena. As opposed to carrying out judgments, he was saying that it was quite all right for somebody to break the law. We challenged that in terms of a motion and he entered the fray and started making comments publicly. He then entered into correspondence with his friend the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker: As I understand it, this is part of the judgment, not acting in a different capacity at all.

Mr. Skinner: The point that I am trying to make is that he erred along the narrow line that he should tread as a judge in interpreting the law as passed by Parliament. We are arguing that, now that he has trampled on to a different course, it is right and proper for us — in accordance with your statement, Mr. Speaker — to challenge him because he has voluntarily decided to move out of that narrow, restricted legal arena into the political arena. If he does that, it is right that we should be able to criticise. I think that your statement, Mr. Speaker, vindicates what we have been saying. We will carry on.

Mr. Speaker: My statement was intended to refer to another case that was mentioned yesterday concerning a former judge who appeared on television and made some statements. That is acting in a different capacity.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

4.36 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require an annual report to Parliament on progress made in investigating the causes, effects and treatment of myalgic encephalomyelitis.

First, I should like to pay tribute to the many sufferers who have written to me in the past few days telling me of their personal suffering from the illness myalgic encephalomyelitis—an illness that is also known as post-virile fatigue syndrome.

I should like to pay tribute to the Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association and the myalgic encephalomyelitis action campaign for the tremendous work that they do for the sufferers of this terrible and devastating illness and for the help that they gave me in preparing the Bill.

The ME illness was first observed in Britain 33 years ago in 1955, but it was observed in other countries as early as 1939. Research into the disease is being carried out in Britain at St. Mary's hospital in Paddington, Glasgow university and establishments elsewhere. Research is also being carried out abroad, notably in Australia and the United States of America.

Research shows that ME appears to be caused by virile infection, combined with a disfunction of the immune system. There is no doubt that ME is an organic disease. The nature of the disease is such that it primarily strikes the central nervous system, the brain and body muscles. Its most common symptom is a profound weakness of the body, which results in even the most active of people being confined to their bed for long periods, sometimes years.

Another symptom that is more distressing than that is the illness's effect on the brain. Some normally bright, alert people find themselves unable to function. Their concentration goes; they have difficulty speaking; and even conversation leaves them completely exhausted. Sufferers lose their jobs and their lives come to a halt. Children affected lose out on their education, sometimes for years. For many children the disease totally devastates their lives.

The greatest suffering of all is the anguish caused by misdiagnosis. On top of the physical and mental stress caused by the disease, sufferers' agonies are compounded by being told that they are well, that there is nothing wrong with them, that they are malingering, or that they are neurotic. It is widely acknowledged that many incidences of suicide result from the refusal of doctors to accept that sufferers are ill from myalgic encephalomyelitis.

The Bill is a simple measure which merely requires the Secretary of State to make an annual report to Parliament describing the progress that has been made in investigating the causes, effects, incidence and treatment of ME. Such a report would be of enormous value in drawing the attention of the medical profession, sufferers themselves and others to whom sufferers may turn for help to what is known about the illness. I cannot emphasise enough how vital it is to give proper recognition to the condition, as the failure to recognise the reality of the illness causes sufferers such great and wholly unnecessary distress.

The following are authentic examples of suffering caused by ME. A mother wrote to me saying:

"My son aged 18 died from this miserable illness last March. He was away at university and had been ill on and off for two years. It all started with an attack of glandular fever. Now we look back over this time and so many things fit into a pattern. He was an active, bright young man with a zest for living and life. This illness got in his way."

She concluded by telling me that her son committed suicide.

Then there was Jill from Sussex, who said:

"I have been to hell and back with this devastating illness. I am still not recognised or getting proper benefits."

I have received hundreds of letters about similar experiences from all over Britain, as well as Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man.

Many well-known persons are afflicted with the disease. Sufferers include the Dean of Westminster; David Provan, a Scottish international footballer who had to retire from a promising career; a famous ballet dancer who is now confined to a wheelchair; and Clare Francis, a well-known adventurer and authoress. I inform the House that one of its Members, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John), who is a sponsor of the Bill, is a sufferer.

I submit that the case for justice for ME sufferers is proved beyond all doubt. I have tried today to resist the temptation to speak in strong terms about the failure of the medical profession to recognise myalgic encephalomyelitis and the failure of the Department of Health and Social Security to recognise the plight of ME sufferers. The sufferers are denied proper recognition, misdiagnosed, vilified, ridiculed and driven to great depths of despair. They look to this House for justice. For them all I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Jimmy Hood, Mr. Alfred Morris, Mr. Jack Ashley, Mr. Brynmor John, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Alan Meale, Dr. Lewis Moonie, Mr. Sam Galbraith, Ms. Harriet Harman, Mr. Jimmy Wray, Mr. Tom Clarke and Mr. Jerry Hayes.

MYALGIC ENCEPHALOMYELITIS

Mr. Jimmy Hood accordingly presented a Bill to require an annual report to Parliament on progress made in investigating the causes, effects and treatment of myalgic encephalomyelitis: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 15 April and to be printed. [Bill 99.]

Orders of the Day

British Steel Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Before we begin the debate, I should tell the House that Mr. Speaker has not selected either of the amendments on the Order Paper.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Regarding the conduct of the debate, you will be aware that Mr. Speaker has received many applications from right hon. and hon. Members to participate in the debate, but you will have observed also that there is no amendment on the Order Paper standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. As the trade union movement seems to be in support of the Bill and Labour Members are divided on whether to oppose the Bill in principle, will you be taking that into account when you consider whether to conform with your usual practice of calling hon. Members alternately across the Chamber?

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If I may correct a quite erroneous assertion by the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), I have the authority — which is hardly needed, given their well-known position on the subject — on the basis of recent conversations with the TUC steel committee and the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, to make it clear that they are totally opposed to the Bill, as is Her Majesty's Opposition. There is no amendment because we propose to vote against the Second Reading.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that all will be revealed during the debate.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it not have been in order for the Chair to select the amendment in the name of my hon. Friends and me or that in the name of the Liberal party?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As I am sure the House knows, Mr. Speaker does not give reasons for selecting or not selecting amendments. I have announced Mr. Speaker's decision to the House, which is that neither amendment has been selected. That does not mean, of course, that the arguments on those amendments cannot be advanced in the debate; they can.

4.47 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Trade and Industry (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I welcome the unusual exchange through points of order between my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) and the Opposition Front Bench. Like my hon. Friend, I had not received a great deal of opposition from the Labour party before today. We look forward to the arguments of the Opposition. We are sure that force of persuasion in the course of the debate will get them, even at this late stage, to reconsider their position and to vote for the Bill's Second Reading.

In the past, steelmaking as an industry has given rise to high passions and strongly held views. Anybody who pays a visit to a steelworks, as no doubt most of us have, understands the excitement of the steelmaking process. It conjures up memories of the finest days of the industrial revolution and it is an exciting industry with which to be associated. That high public interest has in many ways been the misfortune of the steel industry over the past 40 years.

The industry has attracted the attention of politicians who wish to control the course of the British economy and have repeatedly sought to impose their own strategies on the industry. Those strategies, not surprisingly, were essentially political and took insufficient account of the market forces which govern industry, even nationalised industry. Many of those strategies led to difficulties.

It is high time that British Steel is seen for what it is. It is a key modern industry, of course — but it is essentially a normal commercial enterprise like any other. It is successful and it belongs in the private sector.

The Government believe that good commercial enterprises should be in the private sector because they thrive better there. They are free of Treasury control, free of ministerial control and further away from political lobbying which raises problems now or in future. Management and work force in a private company are faced by the reality that their prosperity and their job security depend on their success in the market and the satisfaction of their customers. They are exposed to commercial disciplines when they raise their capital. The management are free to take the best decisions about how to tackle the market place. The present management of British Steel and those who work for the corporation will be able to tackle the problems of the market place with great effect.

Echoing what my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington said in what might have been a helpful intervention, I think the nationalisation-denationalisation debate is effectively over in this country. Looking back over the past few decades, that is quite remarkable. After 40 years the public have seen that the great state corporations dreamt of by Herbert Morrison are not in practice efficient providers of goods and services.

Steel debates have aroused great passions in the past. Then, my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington never could have made that comment about whether to nationalise or denationalise steel. Steel is one of the great issues that has caused divisions between parties and within parties — and definitely within the Labour party at certain times in the past. I do not think that those old battles will be fought again. I do not wish to provoke the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), but I shall be surprised if any hon. Member speaking for the Labour party threatens to return the corporation to the public sector, if ever there is a Labour Government. If the hon. Gentleman makes such a promise, he will live to regret it when he returns to his main role of trying to reconstruct the Labour party and make it electable again.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend has spoken about the view of the Opposition and the view of the management of the British Steel Corporation. Does my right hon. Friend accept that the management and the workers of the British Steel Corporation at BSC Redcar who live in my constituency look forward to the passage of the Bill? They consider that it will give them greater freedom from political interference and the opportunity, for the first time in recent memory, to take a stake in their own industry and have some control over their future.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is closely in touch with the opinions of steel workers in his constituency—*[Interruption.]* In due course I shall listen to speeches from the Opposition which will seek to refute what my hon. Friend has said, but I believe that the underlying current of public opinion in Britain on the nationalisation of such industries has changed irreversibly.

I agree strongly with my hon. Friend that steel workers have also undergone a change of opinion. My contacts with steel workers confirm that most of them realise that the change in the steel corporation in recent years have been beneficial, and they look forward to privatisation.

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath) *rose*——

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: The debate is showing signs of arousing passions that I thought were extinct in the Labour party. It is good to see history repeating itself.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If the terms of trade were to change against the steel industry, and if it were suddenly to move into a period of international pressure, which could happen under any Government, and if it suddenly were to be losing a lot of money, does the Minister rule out the possibility of bringing it back into the public sector? Would the Minister's attitude be to let it go and to lose it, or would the state have a new role to play in those conditions?

Mr. Clarke: I must not spend too long discussing issues of principle, though they are interesting and I would like to spend as much time as possible on them. As the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) appreciates, whether a company is nationalised or denationalised, it cannot be immune to movements in trade and changes in the market place.

Essentially, the well-being of a state corporation and its employees or a private sector company and its employees depends upon the market and the conditions of trade and how well the company thrives within them. A private sector company has to react when market conditions move against it. History shows that the great private corporations in Britain are more effective at doing that than the nationalised industries, which are usually constrained by the Government not to react until it is too late. That was the case with British Steel, with disastrous consequences, from which we took some years to recover.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Clarke: In a moment. I should like to make a little progress. No doubt this theme will be raised throughout the debate.

I shall be interested to see whether the Labour party is in favour of renationalising our key modern industries. That would be quite a surprise, even to people who voted Labour at the last election.

The Bill heralds the start of a new chapter in the history of the British steel industry. It will lead to the end of the saga which began in November 1948, when the Minister for Supply the right hon. G. R. Strauss, during the Second Reading of the Iron and Steel Bill, said:

"There is general agreement that this Bill is profoundly important and vehemently controversial . . . the great majority of the people will share the Government's view that if our country is to prosper and our people to live a higher and a better standard of life, this Bill is essential."—*[Official Report*, 15 November 1948; Vol. 458, c. 53.]

That is what was said 40 years ago, and I put it to the House that the wheel has now turned full circle. The Bill is not vehemently controversial. It is, however, an important Bill that will allow British Steel to escape from the political arena and return to the mainstream of British industry in the private sector.

The Iron and Steel Act 1948 and its successor Acts did not achieve all that was hoped for. Thirty years of intervention one way or another could not keep market forces at bay. This is no criticism of the men and women employed in the industry. Despite their best efforts, they were trapped in an industry which was repeatedly obliged by successive Governments from both sides of this House to take decisions which satisfied politicians and which often did not accord with commercial realities. They were also in part the victims of the downturn in the world economy after the mid 1970s. But as a nationalised industry answerable to politicians the corporation lacked the flexibility to cope with the new challenges imposed by that recession. The net result was that the corporation became increasingly hopelessly ill-equipped to compete in the market place. As hon. Members will recall, in the late 1970s it made increasing losses, culminating in 1979-80, in a net loss of nearly £1·8 billion in one financial year which had to be paid for by the taxpayer. That catastrophe was in large measure attributable to the refusal of previous Governments to allow the corporation to face up to commercial realities and take the necessary decisions, painful though they inevitably were.

When the necessary steps were finally taken, they were sometimes more painful than they need have been if a more gradual, market-oriented approach had been adopted from the outset. I readily acknowledge that the price of BSC's present success has been high in terms of job losses. But it is counterproductive to put our heads in the sand and pretend that market forces do not exist. We cannot ignore the market in the private sector, and we cannot afford to do so in the public sector.

Mr. Cryer: When the Minister talks about the reaction of the steel industry, the reaction is to sack workers. Has the Minister made any calculations about the cost to the public purse of putting workers on the dole, the loss of tax revenue, and the cost of unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit payments to the several hundred thousand people who have been put on the dole as a consequence of his Government's policy?

Mr. Clarke: In the short-term, such costs obviously have been incurred, but what was done was not done as the hon. Gentleman characterises it. Workers were not simply sacked; surplus capacity was closed. Redundant plant that would never again make products of a quality that would sell was closed. There was investment in good quality plant and alteration of working practices to ensure that plant again became competitive.

The hon. Gentleman was a Minister in my present Department when the last Labour Government refused to face up to the fact that anything needed to be done until the very last years of their term of office. For a time Labour Ministers forced the corporation to invest in new capacity based on fanciful market forecasts. The Labour Government pursued such a policy when it was obvious that they were being unrealistic. They refused to turn around until they took some faltering steps by closing the plant at Ebbw Vale and some other plants right at the end of their period of office.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): The Minister spoke at great length about the huge losses that were incurred during the period of public ownership. Will he accept that those huge losses and all the financial sacrifices throughout that period, which have led now to a profit, were made by the taxpayer? Can he explain to the taxpayers why, when their money was used during the hard period to subsidise losses, they are not to get the profits now being made, which are to go to a few of his friends in the City of London?

Mr. Clarke: The taxpayer will get the benefit of the proceeds of privatisation and will get the value of what the company is worth on the market. I have never understood the extraordinary argument which is sometimes made by Opposition Members that billions of pounds' worth of losses made over the years are somehow an asset which the taxpayer now owns instead of being money which the taxpayer has waved goodbye to for ever. The Opposition seem to think that somehow the new owners are capable of compensating the taxpayer for those losses. In a good flotation the taxpayer will get the value of the British Steel Corporation as it now is as a result of what has been achieved over the last few years.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I always spend too long opening debates by giving way too often. I will give way again in a few moments, but I should like to proceed on this theme which is obviously of interest to Opposition Members.

I want to explain what has been done since we inherited the problem to get the corporation back to its present much healthier state. Basically, what we have sought to do is to give the corporation greater freedom to get on with its business even though we as Government remain the owners of it on behalf of the state. The corporation has responded magnificently. The enthusiasm and the commitment of the management and the work force have brought their own rewards. The management and the work force—not the Government—have through their own efforts brought about a remarkable transformation in the fortunes of the corporation.

The corporation recently announced half-year profits of nearly £200 million and all the signs are, and all the reports I am getting indicate, that this success will continue. That is an impressive record and I am delighted to pay tribute to all involved in the British Steel Corporation. In many ways I think that what has happened to British Steel is symbolic of what has happened to the British economy as a whole since 1979. The improvement in BSC's performance is all the more creditable for having taken place in the European market, where there is still substantial overcapacity and under a production quota system which has tended to restrict BSC.

The British Steel Corporation is well placed to consolidate its present strong position as the liberalisation of the European steel market proceeds. As the House knows, I shall have the opportunity of referring to where we are in the European steel regime in more detail in a separate debate later.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The Minister has talked about what happened in 1978-79 and attributed it to a nationalised industry here not understanding market forces. Can he explain what happened to American, German and French steel throughout that period? Did those industries not lose on a grand scale in exactly the same way, even though they were not nationalised?

Mr. Clarke: The losses and the consequences of the crash would have been less if British Steel had not been allowed to charge headlong to the buffers until far too late in the 1970s. Of course, there was a big downturn in steel demand, as I have acknowledged, in the recession, but all the indications were ignored for a long time by Ministers in the Labour Government who pressurised BSC not to take the decisions which were required to try to prepare for what was to come until far too late. The losses were thereby made much worse.

I have been asked how many jobs were lost in consequence. A large number of jobs were lost. I hope that Opposition Members are not about to assert that it would have been a sensible policy for steel to keep all those people on the books and to keep all the plants open. *[Interruption.]* Of course, it is the point. If Opposition Members intend to oppose the Bill by saying that they think we were wrong to shed all the labour from British Steel, are they really saying, as was said on behalf of the Labour party by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) not long ago, that nationalised industries should largely be looked upon as a way of creating extra jobs and that Government policy on nationalised industries should be to make them take on extra labour as a cure for unemployment? That folly—and it is folly—led British Steel into its problems in the first place. If the Opposition propose to oppose the Bill on the grounds that they still look upon nationalised industries as an employment creating machine, I fear they will take us back to where we used to be.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does not the Minister understand that the impact of what he did on Workington was to give thousands of men no hope for the future? Many of those men have never found work. I would have had no objection to the rundown of the steel industry if at the same time it had been accompanied by real measures of employment which insulated communities like mine from the ravages of unemployment. But it did not happen like that. The Government imposed a huge dollop of unemployment on my constituency and we have never recovered. We have schemes, but they do not give people the sense of identity with an industry which they had in the past. The Minister fails to understand. We wanted change in the steel industry. We understood it, but the Government gave us nothing in return.

Mr. Clarke: That is the issue between us. It is a great tragedy that Workington as a town reached the position where it had no future as a major steelmaking town for a variety of reasons which were not the fault of the people of Workington. Those plants could no longer produce steel that had a sensible prospect of being sold in the market place. Therefore, the future for Workington lies in finding alternative employment and new industrial activity of a kind which will give new hope to the town. As we have come out of the recession it has sometimes been difficult to find new jobs on an adequate scale for towns that are disadvantaged by geography and other problems, as Workington is.

As the British economic revival has speeded up, it has steadily had consequences on deprived regions, including steel towns. The more we succeed in getting growth in the

economy and in reviving attitudes which encourage enterprise, the better prospects we have of getting new business and new jobs in towns like Workington. It is happening. Unemployment is falling more quickly in the older industrial parts of the country. If the hon. Gentleman goes to places like Consett, Corby or Scunthorpe, which suffered terrible losses through the closure of steel plants, he will find large numbers of new enterprises, large numbers of new jobs and a whole new future.

One thing which we all appear to be agreed upon and which has to be accepted is that the British Steel Corporation is an example of a flourishing industry. It is a flourishing nationalised industry; it is not because it is nationalised that it is flourishing, but despite that. It is, in fact, an example of an industry which, through considerable efforts by management and workers, has made a success of itself despite being hampered by the inevitable constraints imposed on the commercial freedom of nationalised industries. It is an industry which now knows that its success is dependent on meeting the requirements of its customers. British Steel understands that it operates against a background of world over-capacity in steel and that if it is to prosper in that environment it must place itself in the forefront of new technology, provide the highest quality and operate to the maximum efficiency. This it has done, and will continue to do. British Steel knows from experience that it is no use relying on Governments. That does not work in the longer term.

The time has come to give the corporation the opportunity to stand alone and to give it the flexibility and independence that it needs to face up to the highly competitive international environment.

The Bill is short and is well precedented by other privatisation Acts. Its provisions are, however, somewhat technical and it may help hon. Members if I spend a short time explaining them.

The Bill itself does not bring about privatisation; it will enable privatisation to take place. The Bill provides, in clause 1, that all of the property, rights and liabilities of the corporation will vest in a successor company. That company will be a Companies Act company limited by shares which in the first place will be wholly owned by the Government. Privatisation will take place when the Government go on to exercise their ability to offer their shares for sale to the public.

The successor company will inherit the whole of the corporation's undertaking, both assets and liabilities. Technically it will be a different person in law from the corporation, but it is our intention, which is represented in the Bill, that it would be regarded for all practical commercial purposes as the same company representing an unbroken continuation of the corporation's undertaking. The vesting is required only to enable the flotation to take place, by changing the status of the corporation from a statutory corporation to a Companies Act company. This transformation amounts to a change in the legal constitution of the company, but does not affect the nature of its activity or the extent of its assets and liabilities. I make it clear at the outset, and this is important, that the corporation will not benefit from any special Government handouts in the process of privatisation, nor do we propose that there will be any write-off of debt.

After vesting has taken place, on a day nominated by order of the Secretary of State, which we call the appointed day, British Steel plc will be a public limited company wholly owned by the Government. The Government will then be able to sell its shares at any time, and decide the exact timing of that sale according to market conditions and the performance of the company. But for various technical reasons, including the passage of this Bill through both Houses of Parliament, I do not anticipate that it will be possible to contemplate selling those shares until the end of this year, at the earliest.

The corporation will not be dissolved immediately after vesting has taken place. It will continue in existence as a shell. This is necessary because some of the corporation's assets and liabilities are located overseas, and are governed by foreign law. United Kingdom law might not therefore be effective in securing the vesting of all those assets immediately on the appointed day.

The corporation will stay in existence until it has taken such steps as may be required to secure the effectiveness of the vesting of the assets and liabilities in the successor company. As soon as this process has been completed, the corporation may be dissolved by the Secretary of State by order, under clause 10. We are calling the period between vesting and dissolution of the corporation the transitional period. During that period, the corporation will have no powers other than those necessary to effect vesting of its overseas assets.

The successor company will require a capital structure that fits with the requirements of the Companies Act. Clauses 2, 3 and 7 of the Bill provide for that capital structure. At present the corporation has an accumulated deficit on its profit and loss account. That is not debt, as the corporation does not owe the money in its profit and loss account to anyone; it is simply a record of past trading losses that reflects the erosion of the original capital base of the company through its trading losses. It is open, in the private sector, to any Companies Act company to go to the court and apply for a reduction in its capital to write off such accumulated losses. The amount of capital shown on the balance sheet after a restructuring of that kind will then more accurately represent the value of the net assets of the company.

As a statutory corporation, BSC is unable to go to the court to apply for a reduction of its capital, so that will be authorised by the Secretary of State under clause 2. That clause further provides for the extinguishment of the public dividend capital that remains after the reduction. That will not, however, result in taxpayers' money being lost, because, in exchange, securities will be issued to the Secretary of State or to the Treasury, as his nominees, at his direction under clause 3.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Clarke: I should like to finish with this point. Only the public dividend capital will be extinguished. The successor company will be obliged to continue to meet the terms of any loans from the Government or outside bodies that are vested in it.

Sir Giles Shaw: On the question of treatment of the company's debt and the accumulated loss, I understand my right hon. and learned Friend's reluctance to eliminate the debt. He is describing the somewhat complex and awkward proposal of a company that is about to float being required to continue to take a debt of the order of £700 million, and presumably accumulated losses substantially greater than that. Does my right hon and

[Sir Giles Shaw]

learned Friend think that there will be difficulty in achieving the return on the assets, which I believe the company clearly will have?

Mr. Clarke: It will require capital restructuring. I have been endeavouring to describe the nature of capital restructuring that the Bill will facilitate. The accumulated losses on the profit and loss account will need to be written off, in just the way that a private sector company with this kind of trading background would seek to have authority to do, by an application under the Companies Act.

What we are not intending to have is straighforward debt write-offs. That would amount to an attempt to subsidise the corporation by the back door, which we have no intention of doing. We want to give the corporation a proper capital structure. It would be behaving as we would expect it to do if it was in the private sector and able to operate under the Companies Act, by seeking to get its capital structure to reflect its present capital assets and liabilities, and to wipe off these long-standing losses in the profit and loss account.

To the extent that the nominal value of the securities issued to the Government in exchange for cancellation of the Government's investment in the corporation is less than the value of the capital extinguished, the balance will go to make up a statutory reserve of the successor company. That is specified in clause 7. The nominal value of the shares will have to be no more than their sale issue price at the time of the flotation, because the Companies Act forbids the issue of shares at a discount. In practice, it is usual to set a nominal value significantly lower than the anticipated issue price.

Private sector companies generally have a mixture of share and loan capital and reserves. The process of restructuring the balance sheet of the corporation is complementary to the vesting provisions of the Bill. Instead of a nationalised corporation funded by public dividend capital, the successor company will be a Companies Act company, with capital and reserves similar to other Companies Act companies.

The remaining provisions of the Bill are subsidiary and technical. Clause 4 allows the Government to invest in securities of the successor company to maintain the proportionate level of any residual shareholding, if one is retained. The Government's securities in the successor company may be held by nominees, under clause 5. The Government may fix a limit on its future investment in the successor company, under clause 6. Clause 8 provides for the Government to lend money to the successor company while it remains in the public sector. Clause 9 allows the Government to impose temporary restrictions on the borrowing of the successor company. Clause 11 contains provisions relating to taxation of the successor company. Clauses 12 to 17 and schedules 1 to 3 contain other supplementary provisions.

In deciding whether to invest in the new private sector company, potential investors will obviously have to form their own judgment about the track record of the corporation and, in particular, the prospects of the new company. When I came to the House last December and announced our plans for the privatisation of the corporation, I was able to report the good news about the corporation's impressive half year profit. I regard that figure as a reflection of all the hard work that has been put in by the employees of the corporation, which helps to make it one of the most profitable steel producers in the world. Its productivity has improved every year since 1980.

Its selling prices have risen much more slowly than inflation. Exports are up in absolute terms and as a share of total sales. Capital expenditure has increased steadily since 1982, and customer service has been given much higher priority than before. All that has resulted in great improvements in the quality of the product and the efficiency with which it is produced and dispatched. The results are plain for all to see, and they are all the more impressive for having been achieved in a difficult market.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Is the Minister aware that at a recent meeting with the parliamentary Labour party the chairman and chief executive of the corporation said that, after it was privatised, they would have to reduce the proportion of material exported, because its price was so poor that it would not enable them to maximise profitability?

Mr. Clarke: That would depend on movements in international steel prices. We shall have to see what happens to steel prices when European quotas come to an end, as I am sure they will in the next few years; and possibly in six months' time—I shall be dealing with that later tonight—and also what progress is made in getting rid of the excess capacity in other parts of the world.

The fact is that the record of achievement that I am reading out has not been achieved by other European steel corporations, many of which still have vast overcapacity. Once that excess capacity has been reduced, we shall see how the markets shape up.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Minister has clearly recognised the enormous contribution to the achievements to which he has referred by the work force. In view of that contribution to success, could he not give some reassurance to the work force, before he sits down, that their terms and conditions of service will be no worse under the private operation than they have been heretofore?

Mr. Clarke: The employees of the corporation will continue under the contracts of employment that they have now. As I have said, for all purposes, the new company will be the successor, with all the assets, liabilities and contractual obligations of the previous corporation. I can happily give that assurance.

I hope—and I am not pretending to describe how it can be done today—that we shall enter into discussions to reassure the work force that their accrued pension rights will not in any way be affected. We shall no doubt have plenty of opportunity to discuss pensions between now and the flotation, perhaps in Standing Committee, if not in discussions. It is also our intention, as everybody knows, to move on to the prospect of offering the employees—who, I quite agree with the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), have made a substantial contribution to the present position—the prospect of having some shares in the successor company and a share of future profits.

The corporation knows that, if it is to survive and progress and protect its business as a whole, it must continue to change and adapt to suit the needs of the market. To do that, it must continue to take decisions on

a commercial basis. Fortunately, here again, we have been able to give reassuring news to the House. BSC has been able to give its commercial judgment of the future for its five integrated plant, including Ravenscraig, which has given rise in recent years to a quite unnecessary level of political controversy north of the border.

Dr. Reid *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I am going to say more on Ravenscraig, so perhaps I had better leave Scottish interventions for a moment or two.

I remind the House that the corporation has been able to say that, subject to market conditions, it expects that there will continue to be a commercial requirement for the steelmaking and continuing casting capacity of the corporation's five integrated plants for at least the next seven years. The hot strip mill raises other problems because there is surplus capacity in hot strip at the moment throughout Europe, and British hot strip mills are running at very low capacity indeed. But, even there, because of the strength of BSC's present position, having reviewed the position thoroughly, the corporation has concluded, on the basis of commercial judgment, that the Ravenscraig mill will continue to operate until at least 1989. */Interruption.]*

I look forward to hearing which plants the Opposition are prepared to guarantee against market conditions, which ones they are going to reopen and how they are going to put the clock back to the days when BSC was operated on the basis on which they operated it.

The commercial judgments that I have given are some of the best news that has been given to people working in the Scottish steel industry for very many years and they reflect the advances that I have described.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South) *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. I am aware, of course, that a report published last week by the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), with the support of the local Labour party and his council, tried to cast doubts on the future of Ravenscraig. I have to say, as an Englishman who now makes frequent visits to Scotland, that I have the greatest difficulty sometimes in coming to terms with the nature of the Scottish political debate. The Scottish Labour party appears to thrive on trying to represent to the world that Scottish industry is in a desperate state of decline and is loss-making. When it gets the commercial assurances that I gave a moment ago, which I have described as among the best news that has been given to the population of Motherwell and west central Scotland for many years, the Scottish Labour party spends its time desperately trying to find someone who will cast doubts on the good news, no doubt to reinforce the unworthy position that it took in the last election when it tried to represent Scottish industry as on the verge of collapse and its members as the only rescuers of it. I see absolutely no point in members of the Scottish Labour party going to outside bodies which cannot have full access to all the commercial information available to BSC to try to rubbish good news about the commercial prospects of the steelworks.

Dr. Bray: Will the Chancellor acknowledge that the so-called undertaking, which reads:

"Subject to market conditions, there will be a commercial requirement for steelmaking at Ravenscraig for at least the next seven years",

is not an undertaking at all, but an economic forecast? And, given BSC's forecasting record, does he think that it means very much?

Mr. Clarke: The previous three-year undertaking was subject to market conditions. Of course it is subject to market conditions. It is the best commercial judgment that can be made. There is no other sensible proposition to put forward. The hon. Gentleman has great expertise in economic policy and is one of the more erudite Members of the House. If he suddenly got to his feet and gave in ringing tones a guarantee about the future of an industrial plant regardless of market conditions and commercial considerations, he would destroy his reputation with me and with most other people. I should regard him as an idiot. Any politician who says that his political party can guarantee the future of an industrial enterprise regardless of market conditions is an idiot. Anybody who believes such a guarantee has only to look back over the history of nationalised and private sector companies in the last few years to know that such guarantees are worthless pieces of paper, given by people who do not understand how the steel or any other industry works.

The reason why I criticise the hon. Member for seeking to undermine what he calls the undertaking is that it is extremely good news that the management, which is in the best position to know and at the moment is the most successful management in steelmaking in western Europe, is able to give as its considered commercial judgment that it will require steelmaking at Ravenscraig for the next seven years — subject, of course, as any sensible management has to say, to market conditions remaining satisfactory.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): In view of what he is saying, will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland gave a guarantee that he had an assurance that the mill would stay open for three years, and that he was very proud to boast about his record on that? It is well known that the management of British Steel wanted to close Ravenscraig. If it had done so, how could Ravenscraig now be there to contribute profits? Was not that guarantee necessary and beneficial to the steel industry?

Mr. Clarke: The assurance on which my right hon. Friend relied and, to the extent that I was pressed about it, I relied as well when I went to Scotland during the election, was subject—*/Interruption.]* No doubt I left a trail of devastation behind me, but on the assurance, I was on very sound ground. Not only was that three-year assurance expressly subject to market conditions, but it turned out, despite all the doubts heaped upon it by the Opposition, to be a valid assurance. It has been lived up to, to the deep disappointment of the Scottish Labour and Liberal parties. The assurance expired at the end of three years, but was replaced by the much better assurance that we now have, that Ravenscraig steelmaking is required, in the commercial judgment of the corporation, for the next seven years, so long as market conditions allow.

Mr. Salmond: With regard to the Minister's foray into Scotland during the general election, I seem to recall that on a previous occasion he said that it had substantially benefited the Opposition parties. The right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to worthless pieces of paper. Was he referring to such things as golden shares? Is not the

[Mr. Salmond]

scepticism in Scotland regarding the Minister's seven-year guarantee for Ravenscraig based on a realistic assessment of the investment patterns in the steel industry, which most certainly leave Ravenscraig vulnerable?

Mr. Clarke: There is a £15-million investment going into coal injection plant at Ravenscraig at the moment. Investment decisions are best made by the commercial management of a company, having regard to its market needs and its judgment of the best way of serving them. The moment politicians of whatever party — Scottish National, Liberal, Labour or Conservative—start to get deeply immersed in the investment decisions of a corporation, one gets into difficulty. While this corporation continues to be nationalised, all major investment decisions above a certain size have to come to me and, unless there is some obvious flaw in them, naturally I shall tend to approve those proposals by the corporation between now and the date of flotation.

One thing that I shall certainly not do is start arguing with the corporation that its proposed investments should be altered for political reasons contrary to the commercial interests of the corporation, because I believe that, if it acts contrary to the commercial interests of the corporation, it acts contrary to the interests of the work force. If the work force at Ravenscraig looks at the assurances that it has had, which have been lived up to, it should be very cheered by the assurance which it now has of the seven-year future in the circumstances that we have given.

I do not think that the hon. Member for Motherwell, North is doing a service to British Steel or the Scottish economy as a whole by seeking to advertise the economy of his region as being much more fraught than it is in the judgment of the major employer in the town.

I have looked at the report, and it recommended that the Government should consider—and I stress that the recommendation was no more than that we should consider it — the separate sale of the plants at Ravenscraig, Dalzell and Shotton. I emphasise Shotton, because this is sometimes referred to as a separate Scottish privatisation. It is nothing of the kind. It is a Scottish and a part of Wales privatisation. Perhaps a Welsh hon. Member will catch your eye during the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I understand that the trade unions at Shotton are horrified by the suggestion. There is not much Welsh support for the amazing idea that Shotton should be swept into a separate company.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: As I have referred to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, I had better give way.

Mr. Jones: I can only say at this stage that if I am lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall be able to give the House the view of the Shotton steel workers. I would rather it was me than the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but in the interests of brevity I must tell him that my steel workers wish very much to remain in one unit with the BSC if there is privatisation.

Mr. Clarke: That is rather as I thought, and the hon. Gentleman will be glad to know that that was my reaction to the report. We considered such an option—indeed a whole range of options for dividing the corporation up or privatising it as a whole—in detail with our merchant bank advisers and with the British Steel Corporation before our initial decision to privatise it as a single entity. I am not questioning the bona fides of Arthur Young, which is a reputable and expert consultancy company. However, it did not have access to some of the commercial information. BSC could not be expected to reveal that information because it would have been of value to BSC's competitors had it leaked out—as tends to happen even with the best will in the world. Nothing in the report issued last week cast any doubt on the conclusion that we had already reached on the basis of the better information to which we had access—that it was in the best interest of BSC, its work force and, indeed, the taxpayer to maintain the corporation in its present form into the private sector. I should make it clear that it remains the Government's intention to privatise the corporation as a single entity.

The privatised British Steel will use its independence to respond even more effectively——

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): Before the Minister passes on from Ravenscraig, let me ask him whether the seven-year guarantee — perhaps assurance would be a better word — will be repeated in the prospectus of the company at privatisation?

Mr. Clarke: Subject to there being no sudden changes in market forces or commercial judgment between now and then, the answer is yes. We said when it was issued that it would in effect be reflected in the prospectus.

The privatised British Steel will use its independence to respond even more effectively to the needs of its customers. By doing so it will contribute enormously to the economy, through both its domestic activity and its export earnings. The British Steel Corporation belongs in the private sector and it is there that it will best prosper. The Bill represents a historic opportunity and I commend it to the House.

5.32 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): The Government's reasons for bringing forward legislation are often obscure, but never more so than in this case. None of the reasons advanced by the Minister, either today or on other occasions, stands up to examination. His difficulty is that the true reasons are reasons of dogma, partiality and cowardice, and therefore cannot be stated.

The Minister puts his case in terms of the industry's success. It is that success, he says, that now makes privatisation both possible and desirable. Yet that argument is a total non-sequitur. There is no causal connection between success and privatisation. Success has been brought about with no help from privatisation and does not depend on privatisation for its continuation.

The success is of course undeniable, and it is very welcome. In terms of productivity and profitability — though not in terms of output or market share — the steel industry has indeed recovered and is now among the most successful in the world. Let us be clear how that success has been achieved. It has been achieved at very considerable expense to the taxpayer and as the consequence of very great sacrifices and contributions by the work force.

The Minister declined to estimate in his statement of 3 December how much the taxpayer has contributed over recent years, but £5 billion seems a not unreasonable estimate and that is confirmed in a written answer given

by the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 15 December. In other words, the public purse has provided the necessary investment on which the industry's recovery has depended. There is no way that private owners would have been willing or able to provide the money needed to carry the industry through difficult times and to emerge stronger at the other end. If public investment was the precondition not only of the industry's success but of its survival, experience, and particularly the experience of the past 10 years, also gives the lie to the argument that the industry cannot function efficiently under public ownership. It is precisely under public ownership that the industry has made its gains in productivity and efficiency. It does not need privatisation because essential improvements are still awaited. They have already been achieved, and it is not possible to argue, on the basis of experience, that they cannot be maintained or extended under public ownership.

As so often with the Government's privatisation measures in recent years, this privatisation is produced to take advantage of industrial and commercial success, not to provide it. The steel industry provides perhaps clearer evidence of that than any other. The history of the industry shows clearly that it is under private ownership that the industry gets into difficulties, fails to invest, takes refuge in price cartels and begins to operate against the public and national interest. Under public ownership it has made the necessary investment, put its house in order and begun to serve the national interest and guarantee its future; so much for the argument that privatisation is needed to grapple with the industry's problems.

Mr. Coleman: Would my hon. Friend like to contemplate how the British steel industry could have succeeded had we not brought into public ownership the 14 predecessor companies in 1967? Does my hon. Friend think that had those companies remained the British steel industry could have succeeded in modern conditions?

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend is right. The investment record — in particular the investment record of those private companies in 1967 — shows exactly what would have happened to the steel industry in the difficult conditions that it faced subsequently had it remained in private ownership.

If there is no argument from practicality, the Government's real reasons must be those of dogma — a belief in the principle, without reference to practical evidence, that it is simply wrong for the Government to be involved in the ownership and management of the steel industry. Yet that argument is equally unsupported by reason or practice. The notion that the Government can stand aloof from the future course of the steel industry is plainly nonsense. That is mainly because the industry is by its very nature extremely cyclical. Private owners will be very happy with their investment as long as the industry, its markets and profits are buoyant, but private owners quickly become disenchanted when the industry has to face tough times. It is then that the necessary investment fails to be made, and the industry gets into further trouble. Only public ownership provides the vision and long-term approach to make the counter-cyclical investment that is required.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Will the hon. Gentleman say whether it is now Labour party policy to renationalise the steel industry after it has been denationalised?

Mr. Gould: Of course, I expected that question to be asked at some point, although it is wholly inappropriate to this part of my speech. However, for the reasons that I have yet to develop fully, Opposition Members and the trade union movement strongly believe that the steel industry is most appropriately owned in a form of public ownership. We shall decide that form and the order of priorities by which it is to be secured when we return to power and we have no intention of having our agenda dictated by Conservative Members this afternoon.

It is impossible to expect the private purse to finance the investment that the industry requires when the going is tough. That is inevitably so.

The industry's current and foreseeable need is for annual investment amounting to about £300 million. That can be financed at present levels of profits, but, as one of my hon. Friends said earlier, it would require only a slight change in market conditions or comparative costs to throw that into jeopardy.

The industry is cyclical because it requires substantial investment in expensive plant to compete, and it can provide a return on that investment only if it is used at or near capacity. If it is required to run below capacity for any length of time, unit costs rise alarmingly and profitability is immediately threatened. That threat occurs all too frequently because the industry is sensitive not only to movements in its own costs and to the intense competition which it inevitably faces, but to the level of demand in the industrial economy as a whole.

A cold summer can mean a lower than expected demand for tinplate because less beer is sold; an industrial dispute in the car industry can reduce demand for hot rolled coil; and that is to say nothing of such matters as movements in the exchange rate which, at the time of the 1980 steel dispute over a possible 2 per cent. increase in overall costs, managed to raise British prices by 40 per cent. over Japanese prices without anyone in the Government appearing to notice. Of course, the customer did notice.

That vulnerability to cyclical movements is exacerbated by the international, and particularly the EEC, context in which the industry has to operate. The EEC concludes in its latest report that there is still 30 million tonnes overcapacity in the EEC and that a further 80,000 jobs will have to be shed. The present reaction of the British industry is, understanably, to take the high ground — to say that in view of its present strength it is not dependent on EEC regulation of the industry and that it could well expect to survive and flourish in a free market. That is why the net of the quota system is widely welcomed, with our support, as providing a real opportunity for the British steel industry to make progress. There is certainly a powerful case at present for resisting any further pressure for cuts. We only wish that the Government had taken that line a little earlier because the British industry has already taken its medicine and a good deal more.

No one can be confident that the present advantages that we enjoy in terms of cost and efficiency can be maintained over a long period, particularly given the uncertainties introduced by privatisation. It is impossible to say that within a short time, for the cyclical reasons that

[Mr. Gould]

I have given, we shall not again be fighting for the industry's survival. In those circumstances, the notion that the Government can wash their hands of the industry, particularly at a time when other EEC Governments are becoming increasingly involved with their steel industries, simply cannot be sustained.

The question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) is relevant and must be answered. What would the Government's attitude be if they found the EEC context and market conditions generally as adverse as they have been at certain times during the past decade? Would they stand by and refuse to intervene or, as some of us suspect, would they be forced, for the reasons that I am about to deploy, to renationalise the industry, as they have done in other cases, notably Rolls-Royce? We are again forced to the conclusion that private ownership is at best a fair-weather friend. The Government and the taxpayer will again be called to the rescue, in both an EEC and a national context, when the going gets rough, as assuredly it will.

We can be confident of that conclusion because the steel industry cannot be allowed, when in private hands, to follow the course which would normally be followed when an industry ceases to be viable. The steel industry may, as the Minister explained, no longer be quite the commanding height that it once was — many of its customers have since changed to other materials — but let there be no misunderstanding that it remains a fundamental underpinning of our industrial economy and of great strategic importance to our future development. It is unthinkable that it should be allowed to disappear, be substantially reduced in size or pass into non-British hands. The loss of a sizeable indigenous steel industry would be a body blow to the British economy and would render us incapable of providing from within our own resources the basic materials needed by our armed forces in time of war. Public ownership remains the only guarantee that the steel industry will be sustained.

If the Government's ideological prejudices provide no acceptable rationale for the measure, their other reasons are no less disreputable. The privatisation will provide the usual bonanza to private interests who, having allowed the taxpayer to pick up that sizeable bill for so long, will now step in and expect to pick up the profits. That is to say nothing of the huge fees and commissions for which City institutions are already queuing up and which they will expect to charge for their part in this charade.

It may be, too, that the Government are keen to privatise because they are anxious to put a privatisation programme, much undermined by the British Petroleum fiasco, back on the rails, politically and financially. But it can surely hardly be the case, given all the boasting about how much money the Chancellor now has at his disposal, that the sale is needed to raise the cash. But some explanation is required for the unseemly haste with which this privatisation has been rushed forward.

It is only a matter of months ago that Ministers and British Steel were talking of a three or four-year time scale for privatisation, following a well-established track record of profitability. What has happened to change that perspective and to produce the current urgency? Do the Government know something that we do not? Is some window of opportunity about to close? Why have past statements been so quickly jettisoned? The Minister looks puzzled, but why is the measure now being brought forward with such haste when it was mentioned neither in the manifesto of less than a year ago nor in the Queen's Speech of a few months ago? We need some explanation for this sudden volte face.

It is for all those reasons that we believe that privatisation is a disastrous option to take. It subjects the industry to disruption and uncertainty at a time when it needs to build on the successes achieved by the present regime. It offers short-term profits to private investors at the expense of a fair return to the taxpayer and at considerable risk to the industry's future investment needs. Moreover, it does so without any measureable benefit to the industry itself. That is why we oppose the Bill. Let there be no doubt that we oppose the Bill outright. We shall fight it, with total support from the trade unions involved, throughout its passage through the House.

Quite apart from the threat to the industry as a whole, and the quite unnecessary jeopardising of its future, there is a specific threat to the future of the plants at Ravenscraig and Dalzell under the privatisation proposals. The Minister, in his statement to the House on 3 December, gave what he claimed was an assurance about their future. But, as has already been pointed out, a moment's consideration of what he said on that occasion will show that any apparent guarantee was illusory. He made it clear that the only firm guarantee about Ravenscraig runs out at the end of the year, in 10 months' time, and any further decision on its future will be made by the new private owners on commercial grounds and according to market conditions which they themselves, by virtue of their plans for reinvestment, or rather the absence of them, will largely control.

As I have already explained, the considerations to which the Minister is now prepared to entrust Ravenscraig and its future would have meant the closure of the whole industry at almost any time over the past decade. The only thing that has now changed is that the Government clearly hope that by divesting themselves of the industry through privatisation they will also succeed in divesting themselves of the political responsibility for what happens to it and its constituent parts. It is clearly the Government's hope that they will be able to leave to private owners and market forces a decision which, politically, they have been too lacking in courage to take themselves.

I must warn the Government that they will not succeed in that hope. Even if the Bill proceeds, I put the Government on notice that they will be held responsible for the future of the 11,000 jobs and £100 million worth of wealth-creating capacity in Scotland which depends on Ravenscraig. We shall not accept arguments to the effect that those issues are entirely a matter for commercial judgment. They remain issues of the greatest importance to the economic well-being of a whole community and as such their resolution is the Government's responsibility. That community, with the full support of the Labour movement, will fight, both politically and industrially, to save the plant, the industry and those jobs, and to make the Government face their responsibilities.

If the Government think that they can shuffle off their responsibilities by claiming that the decisions are for private owners and have nothing to do with them, they have another think coming. *[Interruption.]* The Minister may say that that is an empty threat. We shall see, but the fact that he can use such a phrase shows very well what is in Ministers' minds.

We want to know what the Minister will do when, as is all too clearly presaged in the weasel words of his 3 December statement, the private owners propose to close Ravenscraig. We want bankable guarantees, which the Minister ought to give now, on the maintenance of those plants and the reinvestment programmes that will be needed to keep them viable. Other specific questions need answers. The Minister has provided at least partial answers to some of the questions that I intended to raise, particularly on the writing off of debts, and I shall be interested to pursue that with him in Committee. However, there are other questions to be answered.

What provision is to be made to ensure that control of the industry remains in British hands? Is the Government's apparent indifference to the issue on the same level as their indifference to the growing Kuwaiti stake in BP, or does the Minister accept the strategic argument that makes British ownership and control of the industry essential in our industrial and defence interests? If so, what does he propose to do to safeguard the position? He has said nothing about that today. Will it be a golden share, or is the experience with Britoil too painful to repeat? Will he take a Rolls-Royce solution and fix a limit for foreign shareholdings, at 15 per cent. or a similar figure — something he appeared to rule out on 3 December?

What has been done—this question was raised by my right hon and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris)—to safeguard the pensions interests of the work force? Is there to be a rejigging of pension arrangements to suit the interests of new private owners, as we have seen in some other privatisations? What date is proposed for the flotation, and what form will it take? What is to be said about EEC quotas in the prospectus, and what will be the initial target investment level? The Government's plans for the industry — I assume that they must have plans—are meaningless unless we receive some answers to those questions.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will my hon. Friend also press the Minister vigorously about what will happen if the new company starts to make losses? The national interest is at stake. Steel is a strategic industry, and I feel that we are entitled to know what will happen to it. Will it be allowed to go to the wall in sectors in which the product is of strategic importance, or will the Government intervene? If they do intervene, in what form will they be willing to do so? They must have considered those matters in advance.

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend is right. This is the nub of the issue, and we have yet to hear anything sensible, helpful or constructive from the Minister on what is a vital and central problem.

We also need to know what safeguards will be provided for consumers and steel interests against unfair exploitation by British Steel in private ownership of its near monopoly. What guarantee will we have that British Steel will not become more and more a steel importer and marketer, rather than a steel producer?

The Bill is the product of suspect ideology, political cowardice and the Government's familiar readiness to provide goodies for their friends in the City at the expense of those whose livelihoods depend on a continuing and thriving steel industry. It is a product of a typically short-term attitude—the attitude that says that it is right to cash in on short-lived profitability rather than to make long-term provision for the industry's investment needs. It is the product of a cavalier approach to national security and to our industrial future, and of a blind faith in market forces which, as bitter experience should by now have taught us, is a recipe for disaster. It is because we care about our industrial future, about the steel industry and, above all, about those who work in it and have made such a contribution to its current success that we will oppose the Bill.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Many hon. Members with strong constituency interests are hoping to speak. I appeal for brief contributions.

5.54 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): It is interesting to hear the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) give such a weighty address about his views on nationalisation, denationalisation or renationalisation. I wonder whether he would use the same language when speaking to the Ford motor company in his constituency to find out its views on the long continuity of employment— to which, no doubt, he is wholly devoted.

It comes ill from the hon. Gentleman to castigate the Government, and to accuse my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster of dogma, partiality and cowardice, when we have just heard a fine demonstration from the hon. Gentleman of all three. My hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt), in a telling intervention, asked the hon. Gentleman what kind of policy he would pursue. I think that we can agree that the hon. Gentleman genuflected to dogma; he certainly referred with pride to nationaliation as a major part of the historical development of British industry. He was clearly partial as well, because he gave a partial response to my hon. Friend by suggesting that there would be some kind of public ownership, and he showed complete cowardice by refusing altogether to give any cast-iron assurance or guarantee on what exact form of public ownership would be used.

We have heard the Opposition Benches erupting into enthusiasm to try to obtain some kind of copper-bottomed guarantee on the future of a certain steel works in a certain part of the United Kingdom. I think that the hon. Member for Dagenham has let the side down pretty badly in entering the debate with a series of half truths. Not a single Scottish voter will sleep safely in his bed, wherever it may be.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has brought a most important measure to the House, and I congratulate him on his courage in doing so. He is wholly right not only in what he seeks to do, but in the manner in which he seeks to do it. It is amazing that the transformation of the British Steel Corporation has achieved such a turnaround from a scale of loss to a scale of profit unmatched in the private sector during a comparable period. I echo the view expressed on both sides of the House, as well as by my right hon. and learned Friend, that that significant achievement was only partially due to the Government's policy towards the British Steel Corporation. It was largely due to the fact that the management and work forces in the various plants took on board the crucial importance, following the lean and desperate uncompetitive years of the 1970s, of refashioning their operation — of going for productivity,

[Sir Giles Shaw]

customer satisfaction, price and investment. The management of BSC, led vigorously and effectively by chairmen of various kinds, have brought the company to its present profitable state.

I must pay a particular tribute to the corporation's existing chairman, the old anvil-hammerer of Wagnerian opera Sir Robert Scholey. Even he must now feel that the achievement of a privatised corporation is within his sights after so many years of trying.

Mr. Coleman: Let me put to the hon. Gentleman the same question that I put to my hon. Friend. How does he think that the achievement would have been possible if the 14 companies that were taken into public ownership in 1967 had still been operating in the industry?

Sir Giles Shaw: I think that the hon. Gentleman has provided the answer to his own question. Obviously, if those 14 companies had not been taken into public ownership, there would not be a Bill taking their ownership back into the private sector. I am quite willing to argue with him that the 14 companies might well have been replaced by 24 other companies specialising in the production of British steel and services.

We have to satisfy Opposition Members on the question whether the security of state control will somehow guarantee jobs and development to a greater degree than would the private sector. Sir Robert and his team have now reached a point at which it is possible to privatise the corporation, and I am glad to learn from my right hon. and learned Friend that that could happen in months rather than years. The sooner it happens, the better.

I pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend for deciding to privatise the corporation in whole. The British Steel Corporation, as presently constituted, is a major asset for the United Kingdom. However, its prime role in the marketing of steel and steel products is essentially not a United Kingdom role, but a European and international role. The only future for the British Steel Corporation, whether in public or private hands, is to be able to compete Europe-wide in a market that is sufficiently large for the corporation's present share to look comfortingly towards successive periods of growth. If my memory serves me correctly, it has a 2 per cent. share of the European steel market—that is a low share.

From the point of view of the corporation's future—I trust that it will be in private hands—Europe will be where its future competitive growth will mainly lie. There are two reasons for that. The first is the huge contribution that has been made by the work force and the management to restructure the corporation from within. The second reason relates to the consequences of those ghastly years of contraction, of obsolete plants being closed and, if my memory serves me right, of the loss of more than 50,000 jobs from the numbers employed in the heydays of the 1970s. All that has left the British corporation with a much higher rate of productivity and competitiveness than any of its European competitors. However, its only prospect of competing in the European Community is to maintain its present scale of operation.

I hope that none of my hon. Friends disputes the principle of the Bill. It would be sheer folly to divide and break up the corporation from its present size. Looking around the European market, at the giants of Thyssen and at the French and Italian companies and beyond them to Nippon, Pittsburgh and Bethlehem, one sees that those huge companies have grown to significant sizes and it is not possible to compete with them in the international arena for steel products and steel production unless the United Kingdom component is of a comparable size. Therefore, the single structure that my right hon. and learned Friend has chosen is the correct one.

I believe that the window of opportunity to which the hon. Member for Dagenham was looking is crucially to be observed. It is a window through which to see that as we move to a termination of the quota system within the European Community, the British Steel Corporation, in private hands, will be able to develop a significantly increased share of the European market. I must press my right hon. and learned Friend on the European issue. Obviously, I understand that that will be more closely addressed in the following debate, but perhaps my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will at least say that the background to the Bill must be that the steady and, I trust, orderly return to a market in steel and steel products in the European Community should be the proper context in which a privatised corporation can work. If that context is not both orderly and sensibly arranged, it will be difficult to make full use of the new assets that we possess in a steel company with high rates of productivity, competitive prices and a much improved product basis.

I sincerely hope that the development of a free market in steel will be accompanied by significant reductions in overcapacity of other member states. As the hon. Member for Dagenham rightly pointed out, the British Steel Corporation has substantially reduced its overcapacity in past years. With the possible exception of rolling mill overcapacity, it has eliminated all the overcapacity that previously existed, at vast cost to the taxpayer and vast sacrifice to its work forces. If we are to move successfully into the private sector, it is crucial that the European market for steel should likewise address itself to its overcapacity before the British Steel Corporation can rightly look forward to a more profitable future.

We face somewhat difficult positions in relation to debt and accumulated profit and loss. I understand my right hon. and learned Friend's point. I recall that the European provisions on competitive practices are such that a significant debt write-off might be seen as anti-competitive. However, I beg my right hon. and learned Friend to examine more carefully British Steel's position in terms of both accumulated debt and accumulated loss to see whether there is a formula whereby some of the indebtedness from either side can be reduced prior to placing the corporation in the market.

I would not wish shareholders or investors to find that their first act might be trying to write off from generated revenue huge amounts of accumulated loss. They may well make application for a redress of the balance sheet, as my right hon. and learned Friend suggests, but if this is a form of privatisation, it is a pretty miserable form of privatisation which has an albatross of that size slung round its neck.

In my judgment, the Bill is correctly timed. It is the correct decision. It is not a decision based on simple dogma or even on the expediency which the Government may have wished to use when finding themselves with a corporation on their hands which has made profits so

rapidly. It is in the correct order of magnitude that the corporation should take its place among the largest private steelmakers in the world. I wish it well.

6.5 pm

Mr. Bruce: If my calculations are correct, the Bill represents the fifth change of ownership for the steel industry in just over 40 years. Therefore, in some ways the House may not be surprised when I say that I hope that it will be the last, although some of the questions raised suggest that it may not be quite as definitive as that. It is apparent that the Bill has been brought forward in something of a hurry compared with the original proposals, for reasons that have not been fully explained to the House, other than that the industry now appears to be in profit and, of course, the privatisation of electricity looks like slipping further down the schedule, and the Government wish to ensure a rolling programme.

Speaking after the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), it is worth recalling that profitability has been achieved at a substantial price. That price would not have been freely available to a private sector corporation. I am referring to the public write-off of a £3·5 billion debt, which has been accompanied by dramatic reductions in capacity and in the work force. The British Steel Corporation employed 24 per cent. of the total number of people employed in the steel industries in the European Community in 1975, but now accounts for only 14 per cent. of employees. That demonstrates the degree to which the British Steel Corporation has reduced capacity at a far faster rate than any of our European competitors. If it is any small consolation to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, that is why I wholeheartedly agree with him that we have carried our share of the cut and should not have further quotas imposed upon us. Indeed, we should be able to benefit from a lifting of quotas which, I hope, will proceed rapidly.

It is a fair reply to the interjection from the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) to say that it is a reasonable challenge to the Labour party to ask whether it would renationalise the British Steel Corporation. It has certainly never been our view that one should wish to commit to change and to reverse policies for ideological reasons. However, the House must confront the possibility that the steel industry is crucial to the bedrock of our economy. What would a Conservative Government of the present complexion do if, after the flotation, given the considerable difficulties that steel has faced nationally and internationally over the years and the investment that has taken place, especially in Third world countries, our privatised steel corporation got into substantial financial difficulties?

I agree that nationalisation is not the only solution. However, I hope that whoever replies to the debate will give the House an assurance that there is a recognition that the strategic core of steelmaking capacity must be retained. I agree absolutely that ideally, in all reasonable circumstances, that core should be efficient, profitable and successful, rather than dependent on subsidies and acting regardless of proper rules of economic efficiency.

The reductions that have taken place mean that the British Steel Corporation now employs 59,000 people—that figure is a little out of date and the actual number of employees may have dropped—compared with 184,000 in 1975. The corporation produces about 12 million tonnes, although a 14-million tonne capacity is its stated aim. However, it accounts for only 2 per cent. of the European Community market and that is obviously well below the target that we hope it may achieve. Such are the general circumstances in which the Bill has been introduced.

We are also left with the problem of the carry forward of a £700 million deficit which has not been written off. Against the background of an external financing limit of minus £300 million, which suggests that the corporation will not, apparently, be allowed to carry forward a profit against the accumulated deficit, is the Minister satisfied that the rather complicated formula that he explained to the House meets the European Community requirements? I believe that that formula is rather transparent and I am not sure that our European partners will be ready to accept it. However, if that is the case, obviously it is proper that anyone buying shares in the new corporation should do so in realistic circumstances rather than simply writing off the accumulated debt.

Inevitably, representing a Scottish constituency, I speak with some concern about BSC's operations within Scotland. Indeed, the reasoned amendment tabled by my colleagues and to which I have put my name makes it clear that our main concern is not with the principle of the sale of the steel corporation, but with the future of the industry in Scotland and the rights of the employees to ensure that they have a substantial stake within it. I was rather disappointed that the Minister, in his fairly long opening speech, did not address himself to that problem. I believe that the opportunity for the employees to secure a substantial stake is something which the steel unions and the employees rightly expect. I hope that such terms will be offered and will be attractive to ensure that those employees secure a substantial stake.

I was interested in what the Minister said about the future of Ravenscraig and the future of the Scottish steel industry. If I interpreted him correctly, he said that the Secretary of State for Scotland's proud boast that he had used his influence to secure the future of Ravenscraig through a given period—conveniently, during the last general election — was a worthless guarantee. The Minister said that his right hon. and learned Friend's guarantee was not what he had claimed it to be and that had he been Secretary of State for Scotland — God forfend—he would not have secured such a worthless guarantee and nor would he have made such a substantial claim for it. At least we have no reason to complain that we do not understand the Minister's position.

The Minister should be aware that within Scotland there is much concern—private and public—about the sustained hostility demonstrated by the management of BSC in general and by the current chairman in particular to the continuation of Ravenscraig. It can be argued that, if the Secretary of State for Scotland's guarantee is significant and if he succeeded in persuading BSC not to close Ravenscraig, that plant would not otherwise be operating to make a contribution to the profitability that has enabled the Government to introduce the Bill. That being so, it is a little rich to expect the Scottish people and the Scottish steel industry to regard the qualified guarantees that have now been given with any great confidence.

When the Select Committee on Trade and Industry investigated Ravenscraig it uncovered accounting methods used by BSC to undermine the apparent profitability of Ravenscraig. The Chairman of that

[Mr. Bruce]

Committee said that once that information was unearthed it was a dead give-away of the management's objective: to undermine the apparent viability of the mill and secure its closure.

It is hardly surprising that the guarantees and assurances that have been given have a hollow ring to most people in Scotland. I believe that we are entitled to ask the Government to consider how we can overcome such reservations, given that the existing management has shown such hostility.

I do not wish to give a definitive solution—I accept that the hon. Gentleman representing Ravenscraig has put forward his own solutions; the Arthur Young proposal is one of them—but I believe that there are four options for the Scottish steel industry. A link between Shotton and the Scottish steel industry is one such proposal. I accept that the employees of Shotton may not be so keen on it. If that is the case, I suggest that an alternative option is to explore the viability of an independent Scottish steel company. I am not suggesting that that is the ideal approach, but such an independent company might be preferable to privatising the whole of BSC, whose management is committed to having no Scottish steel company.

Mr. Barry Jones: I know that the hon. Gentleman is speaking as a good Scot, but I emphasise that my people at Shotton see themselves as Welsh people and they want to be associated with their sister plants of Llanwern and Port Talbot.

Mr. Bruce: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's argument and I am aware of that dimension. The Shotton link is a possibility, but obviously such feelings would count against it.

I believe that the third option is for the Scottish company to be part of another European company, which would ensure a degree of competition. The fourth option, as the previous chairman of BSC mooted, is for the Scottish steel industry to join with a non-European company.

I am not suggesting that such options represent perfect solutions, but I find it rather depressing that the Minister is anxious to ensure that we privatise BSC in its entirety without exploring alternative ways, within the right hon. and learned Gentleman's ideology, to ensure that the Scottish steel industry has a viable future with a management committed to its survival and providing it with investment. While such a commitment is not apparent, I believe that it is difficult for anyone who is genuinely concerned for the Scottish economy to support the Bill.

The loss of a steelmaking capacity within Scotland does not only represent the loss of another few thousand jobs, but would tear the heart out of an already devastated economy. It is estimated that 5,400 jobs are directly involved with the steel industry and a further 2,000 depend indirectly on it. Indeed, many thousands more depend on the wider influence of that industry. British Rail, for example, is extremely dependent on the revenue it receives from steel operations in Scotland, as are other forms of transport and haulage. Against that background, a requirement to ensure the continuation of that industry should be regarded as paramount by any responsible Government. I agree that there may be several ways of achieving that continuation, but I am not convinced that what the Minister has offered is likely to prove the solution.

There is another national circumstance that must be considered. There is clear evidence that BSC, in its enthusiasm——

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The hon. Gentleman does not appear to be adducing any commercial or industrial argument against the proposal that BSC should be privatised as one entity. He appears to be founding his doubts against the proposal on the proposition that the present management is, in an unreasoned way, hostile to Scotland. I assure the hon. Gentleman that in all my contacts with the management I have detected no such sentiment. The present chairman and management of the corporation have issued their commercial judgment about its future. It would be most unwise to seek to fragment the corporation simply because of deeply held views in Scotland — with no basis in practice — that the management are hostile to the Scottish steel industry.

Mr. Bruce: I believe that that confirms what was said by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) as to why we should encourage the right hon. and learned Gentleman to make frequent visits north of the border. His lack of understanding of the situation certainly ensures that his remaining colleagues who represent Scottish constituencies will be rapidly extinguished from the House.

The record of the past three years demonstrates that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's argument is not true. If it was, the Secretary of State for Scotland would not have needed to secure guarantees and boast about them the length and breadth of Scotland. I am afraid the Minister cannot understand the depth of feeling about this matter.

One argument that may ultimately work in favour of the Scottish steel industry within the BSC—indeed it is already working to our advantage and has enabled a "qualified" assurance to be given—is that the mill that BSC wishes to close is now contributing significantly to the viability and profitability of the corporation. If that mill were closed, British Steel would be relying, even on its present targets, on 100 per cent. capacity from the remaining mills. Everybody acknowledges that that is not attainable.

In addition, if the British Steel Corporation's ambition is to secure an expanding share of the European market, it needs to invest in Ravenscraig to show that it recognises that that capacity is required. Hon. Members representing Scottish interests would start to have confidence in the British Steel management if the substantial investment required came forward. Investment is not an absolute guarantee and the sum mentioned by the Minister is merely an ongoing commitment rather than a long-term assurance.

The Government have failed to acknowledge the significance of the development for Scotland or to take account of the interests of the work force. They have not come forward with any imaginative ideas as to how the work force could be given a significant stake in the industry. I do not believe that changes of ownership per se are critical, but the Government are pursuing a hurried measure which they have not thought through and my colleagues will vote against it.

6.21 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): I am sure that the House was on tenterhooks, waiting until the end of the speech of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) to discover which way he was going to vote. As I understand it, at the last general election, the alliance manifesto was in favour of the privatisation of the steel industry. It may simply be a question of the usual problem of achieving agreement among the various parties for which the hon. Gentleman spoke.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman on one point—the importance of employee share ownership. Clearly, that has been an important part of the success of privatisation. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster rightly said that we are considering an industry that has shown a remarkable turnround in recent years. That is a tribute to the management and work force of the steel industry. For example, we now have one of Europe's few profitable steelmakers. A few years ago, the industry cost the taxpayer £5 million a day. The number of man hours per tonne of liquid steel has improved from a figure of 14·5 in 1980-81 to a figure of 6·2 in 1986-87 and, in the past six months, there has been a further improvement to a figure of 5·4.

Those improvements and the resulting reduction in costs have been shown in the performance of the entire corporation, including the three integrated hot rolled coil works at Port Talbot, Llanwern and Ravenscraig. Those improvements have been due to two factors—investment and new technology, and the spirit of competition which has clearly been a major factor in driving down production costs.

The forecasts made in respect of Ravenscraig and Dalzell are clearly valuable. They state that the hot strip mill at Ravenscraig, and the other mills, will continue in production at least until 1989, that steelmaking at Ravenscraig and plate rolling at Dalzell will continue for seven years and that, if British Steel wished to close Ravenscraig, it would consider any wholly private sector offer for the facilities. However, whether we consider them politically or as an expression of the corporation's commercial forecasts, they are valuable statements. In inevitably changing market conditions, few companies would be able to make such forecasts.

What is the best guarantee for Ravenscraig or any other steelworks? Part of any such guarantee is a management committed to the success of a particular enterprise. I do not go so far as the hon. Member for Gordon, but there have certainly been suspicions, justified or not, in the Scottish steel industry. Privatisation has brought to other industries, and can bring to the steel industry, substantial advantages of full commercial freedom and wider employee share ownership.

There has been some debate about the Government's intention to privatise BSC as a single entity. BSC is not a monopoly because of the level of imports and because it will operate in an increasingly free European market. I hope that Ministers will recognise that a number of people from different political viewpoints have questioned whether that is necessarily right. The proposal that Ravenscraig, Dalzell and Shotton be privatised as a separate company is not one that can be simply thrown to one side. It is not a proposal to privatise the Scottish steel industry, as the hon. Member for Gordon suggested. It has not been suggested by those who put forward the proposal that the tubes division of Clydesdale and Imperial steelworks would be privatised along with Ravenscraig and Dalzell. That would not make commercial sense.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) and others will no doubt speak with greater expertise on this subject. The Arthur Young team did not have access to the commercially confidential information held within the BSC. I do not criticise BSC for that, but there is still a case to be answered. It is not sufficient for the Government to say that they have all the secret figures and that those figures disprove the case. One needs a rather better defence than that.

I do not claim sufficient expertise to be able to say whether those proposals are necessarily commercially sensible. It might be commercially sensible to privatise Ravenscraig, Shotton and Dalzell separately. That might be sensible for the Treasury and it would certainly be in line with the Government's competitive philosophy. Clearly, there would be more competition in the industry. That might result in two companies which would have the same access to international associations, technology and marketing outlets, so it might not be a zero sum gain. There might be genuine benefits.

Mr. Barry Jones: My nightmare is that I may not catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before the debate is over. When I spoke to the leaders of the steel workers in Shotton, they said that if the industry is to be privatised—and they do not wish it to be so—they wish to see the corporation remain as one unit and they want Shotton to play its part there. I apologise for intervening. I know that the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) has to make a case, but I must also provide a voice for the steel workers in my constituency.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) is right to make that point. Inevitably, that is the initial reaction from Shotton. There might be considerable benefits for Shotton from the arrangement proposed. I do not claim that that is necessarily the case, but there is a case to be answered. I hope that when my hon. Friends on the Front Bench ask the officers in their Department to examine these proposals — including some of the suggestions made by the hon. Member for Gordon—they will not adopt a policy of asking how best they can shoot them down. I hope that the proposals will be looked at in a reasonably open-minded way.

I have no doubt that the time is right for my right hon. and learned Friend to bring forward this Bill. As the steel industry moves towards the challenges and opportunities of the private sector, we must, however, ensure that the structure is the right one for its long-term prospects, its customers and its work force.

6.30 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I know that many of my hon. Friends are alarmed about the effects of what the Government are doing on their constituencies. I want to express the alarms of my constituents about what could happen to the industry for the reasons most admirably stated by my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) at the beginning of the debate.

Whatever else is to be learnt from the past 20 or 30 years about the steel industry, it is clear that it cannot be left to have its whole status and future determined by market conditions—yet that is what the Government are

[Mr. Michael Foot]

risking. They have not answered that major point yet; indeed, there is no answer to it. Anyone looking back over the past 20 or 30 years will see the strength that the industry has been given by public ownership and the weakness that has been caused by trying to leave it to market forces. That does not mean to say that the Steel Corporation does not have to take account of market forces—of course it does—but it must do so in a proper context. The Government's Bill does not do that.

It so happens that I was introduced to the steel industry by Henry Spencer, a man who really knew something about steel, when I went to Ebbw Vale in 1960. He taught me everything I know about it, and about how private industry and public industry could co-operate. He taught me how necessary it was to have public backing and support when the steel industry had its back against the wall. He was also a great expansionist and believed it was essential that Government backing should be forthcoming so that the industry could properly expand. It was chiefly under his inspiration that the Llanwern works were built in Newport. I know that there was a lot of controversy about whether Ravenscraig should have gone ahead at the same time, but we in Wales certainly owed a great debt to Henry Spencer, to those who backed the project and to the works at Newport. The great victory in the industry that the Minister is celebrating today owes much to the foresight, investment and vision of the workers and managers, and of leaders such as Henry Spencer who wanted an expanding industry with the strength and backing in difficult years—as well as in prosperous ones —to enable it to grow.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's account of what happened in the 1970s was a travesty of the facts. He spoke of us steaming ahead to the buffers with no interest in what was to come. We wanted to secure an intelligent pace of changeover from the older industry to the newer. We knew that changes had to take place but we believed that if that were done properly we could be saved from the ravages that had occurred in the previous industrial revolution, when great industries were allowed to sink into decay and nothing was done to build up other ones at the same time. When we were faced with the rundown of the industry, thanks to public ownership we were able to make intelligent plans and to prepare for the future. That is what we wanted to do in all the great steel towns up and down the country.

Unfortunately, our chance of doing this on anything like a scale on which it should have been done was wrecked. When the Government came to power in 1979 they did nothing about steel. All they knew was what they had been told by the present Secretary of State for Wales, who had introduced a far more expansionist plan at the beginning of the 1970s—but they write that out of the history books now. In 1979 the Government arrived and wrecked our regional policy, cutting down the enormous grants that we believed were necessary by so much that the amounts of grant that we were giving to make the changeover in the steel towns are being written out of the records now. When the Secretary of State for Wales gives us figures today he tells us that we cannot take account of the £40 million that we put into Ebbw Vale to make the changeover in those days. So the idea that we were not trying to carry through an industrial changeover is nonsense, and the Minister should not dare to speak to the House in those terms.

We tried to carry out the change on a proper basis; we were carrying it through; and the Government who came in in 1979 wrecked it in one place after another. Shotton and all the other places quoted in the debate today were afflicted by the savage way in which the Government applied market conditions so ignorantly and ineptly in 1979, 1980 and 1981. If anyone seeks an authority on that, I tell him to go and ask the present head of the steel board, Sir Robert Scholey. He is a fine fellow and should have been appointed to the job seven or eight years ago. We would have been much better off if we had had him, instead of having to pay the huge sums that were paid to Mr. MacGregor to come in. I remember going to see Mr. MacGregor when he first came to run the industry. He told us that he could not be bound by the previous undertakings of the British Steel Corporation. Also, he did not want to have anything to do with building up new industries. He was opposed to the scheme that we, in the Labour Government, introduced for British enterprise. It was a way of trying to introduce other industries, with all the backing, knowledge and expertise of the Steel Corporation available to them. The Labour Government devised a fine scheme, but MacGregor said that he did not want it; everything should be done by the Government, and it was none of the business of the Steel Corporation.

I am glad to say that other persuasions eventually succeeded, and a similar pattern for building up new industries was then introduced into the coal industry by MacGregor on the instructions of the Government, who had to tell him how to do it. We had to deal with all these problems throughout the 1970s, and very difficult problems they were.

I am glad, as I am sure all those in the steel industry areas are, that the publicly owned steel industry has come through the fire as well as it has done. But it is at a much lower level than it was before, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham said. Sir Harry Spencer would never have dreamt that one would call successful an industry that was producing only 15 million tonnes, or whatever the figure is. Of course, the amount could be far greater if the Government had given the steel industry the support they should have given it over a much longer period. I had hoped that they would be willing to do so now, but the Bill offers us no such hope.

I ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman what guarantees he can give. He can give none, because he is handing over the business to someone else. Can he offer guarantees of the sort that we gave Ebbw Vale during the rundown of 1976 and 1977? We put £70 million then into the new tinplate plant. It is partly because of that that it enjoys the profits it now has, which have contributed to the profits from the rest of the industry. That is the sort of investment that was put in back then and we need that sort of investment again now in Ebbw Vale to sustain and expand our tinplate finishing plant.

The same applies to the steel plants that are represented by my hon. Friends. They all want to know how they will be able to obtain the necessary amount of investment in the future. It is a question not only of guarantees for Ravenscraig—although I am all in favour of that being clarified—but of how a range of different steel plants will receive their investment in the future. It is an industry

from which one does not receive short-term returns or short-term profits; one must have long-term reports and long-term investment to secure the improvements about which the Minister is now boasting.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The right hon. Gentleman is talking of a much bigger steel industry, 10 years after the problems that he and I have been describing. Is he asserting that 15 million tonnes is not enough? Does he realise that 32 million tonnes of excess capacity has been taken out of western Europe over the past seven or eight years, yet there is still excess capacity? Does he not recognise the damage that has been done in the past by plucking these fanciful aims of bigger capacity out of the air and then investing in completely non-viable steel plants?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I suggest to the Chancellor of the Duchy that some of these points could perhaps be dealt with by the Minister who replies to the debate.

Mr. Foot: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has given a completely false account of what we propose and of what has happened. We have not campaigned for a much bigger steel output. The campaign for bigger steel output was conducted by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales when he introduced his so-called plan in 1972.

It is not a tremendous feat to say, "We have an industry that is now producing 15 million tonnes." We could have produced more than that in any case. I hope that there will be proper provision for an expansion of the industry, which is something that nobody can calculate.

Only the insane Government of 1979, 1980 and 1981 could have inflicted such damage on the rest of our industry that the cut in steel demand was so excessive. There was a collapse in our motor industry. Much of British industry was allowed to collapse or was driven to the wall by the appalling exchange policy of the Government. The Government inflicted the biggest single injury on the motor industry. Some Conservative Members—not the right hon. and learned Gentleman—know something about the motor industry.

British industry was devastated, which is why the changeover in the steel industry was made all the more difficult. I am gratified, as are many others, that it has come through all those problems. All credit should be given to the workers and trade unions, who were able to carry it through. As I have already said, credit should be given to Sir Robert Scholey, who has been the real manager of the industry and who should have been appointed at the beginning, instead of bringing a fancy manager from across the Atlantic and paying him hundreds of thousands of pounds to mess up the industry before moving on to mess up the coal industry. If Conservative Members want to criticise what I am saying about Sir Ian MacGregor they should consult their right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, who was subjected to a long visitation from Sir Ian MacGregor.

The Government are unable to tell us how they will be able to guarantee a proper future for those steel workers who made such sacrifices and for the industry, which has come through all those difficulties. Much better prospects should be ahead for the industry. However, the Government cannot say anything about this matter because they are handing it over for somebody else to deal with.

The tests in the future will not be those that we quite rightly applied in 1976, 1977 or 1978—the tests for the long-term future of the industry which have led to the present levels of productivity. The Government are handing over those decisions to a few entrepreneurs—private capital—to make the decisions. They, like the old steelmasters, will not have any objective view of how they will serve the long-term interests of the nation.

That is what the Bill is about, which is why it is such a disgrace.

6.44 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), giving one of his inevitable performances as the Phantom of the Opera, carried us back to the heady days of 1963 when the British Steel Corporation's 10-year strategy for an output of 33 million tonnes was denounced by the Labour party as miserably inadequate.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister may be relieved to learn that I wholeheartedly support this measure. I say that as no doctrinaire partisan of privatisation. I still require to be convinced of the case for the privatisation of the water industry. I still have strong reservations about the apparent methods that the Government will use to privatise electricity. Furthermore, I am deeply suspicious of attempts to fatten up industries to make them more attractive to entrepreneurs. The steel industry is a conspicuous and welcome example of the opposite. It has been not fattened up but slimmed down to prepare it for privatisation.

I have not been altogether happy about the game of ping-pong that has been played with the steel industry in the past. First, it was nationalised, then denationalised, threatened and then threatened the other way. The world has moved on, and Socialist parties, with the exception of the British Labour party, are recognising the enormous advantages that can accrue from privatisation to workers in those industries. In that regard, we have the recent example of the National Freight Corporation, the privatisation of which has brought immense benefits to those who work for it. That particular debate, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister said, is over.

The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours)—who is no longer present in the Chamber—made a valid point, of which I know the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) is well aware, about the problems that arise when an industry is slimmed down to make it more efficient, resulting in enormous losses of jobs and the very large interval that occurs between the process of slimming down and the arrival of replacement jobs. In that context, I am not surprised that hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies express great anxiety about the future of Ravenscraig.

I should like to mention the experience that we went through in north-east Wales; I know that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside is particularly concerned with this matter. The hon. Gentleman put up a heroic fight on behalf of his constituents for many years to try to maintain steel production at Shotton. I, from a constituency that at that stage closely bordered Shotton, gave him what support I could. The hon. Gentleman's

[Sir Anthony Meyer]

reward has been reflected in the majorities that he has managed to maintain over a series of elections. He earned the grateful thanks of his constituents.

I am not criticising the hon. Gentleman — he will know that I have made this point before — when I say that in the long run he and I did a bad service to our constituents by delaying a decision that had to be taken. Had that decision been taken at the time that it was planned, the new jobs, which are now coming in to replace the jobs that we lost in the area, would have arrived much sooner and before the recession. Any hon. Member faced with a threatened closure in his constituency is bound to fight tooth and nail whatever the general arguments may be in favour of that closure against it. It is no criticism of the hon. Gentleman that he did so. My criticism is of Governments, in particular the Labour Government of 1974, for fudging the issue and postponing the decision. They are the guilty men. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Lord Beswick."] As my hon. Friend says, it was Lord Beswick who was the instrument of the guilt. I clear the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside from any guilt. It was a copybook example of how political pressures inexorably work against sensible commercial decisions in matters such as this.

There is a lot of talk about overmanning. In the course of looking into the steel industry, I went to Scotland and was taken to see the superb facility at Hunterston for handling ore imports. Alongside it is the magnificent direct production plant, which has never been operated from the day it was installed. I was struck by the ore terminal, which is one of the best equipped places I have ever seen. About a dozen men were standing on the quayside, and, looking at the clock, I said to the harbour master, "When are you expecting the next ship to come in?" He looked across the desk to his calendar and said, "I think it is on Thursday week." I said, "In that case, why are 15 men standing by the quayside?" He said, "That was the agreement we reached with the Transport and General. The ISTC were perfectly reasonable about this and said that they would send their chaps along when there was something to be done, but the only term on which we were able to open the facility was to have 15 dockers standing there, whether or not there is a ship."

Dr. Reid: Using the same logic, is the hon. Member saying that he will forgo his pay for those periods when he is at Westminster but is not speaking in the Chamber?

Sir Anthony Meyer: When I am not speaking in the Chamber, I am usually dealing with other parliamentry business. Those chaps were playing cards. It is a bit reminiscent of preserving the dinosaur hall at the Natural History museum.

Steel is no longer the dominant industry in Wales. Other industries, largely based on firms outside the country, have come in to take its place and Wales is moving steadily into the 21st century, but for as many years ahead as we can see steel will have an important part to play.

Shotton is renaissance; it has a new facility equal to any in Europe. South Wales has steel mills which are more competitive than any in the world. It is vital to ensure the future of the slimmed down Welsh steel industry. God forbid that we should think in terms of hiving off bits of it. It would be much better to keep the corporation whole, not as a shrine for the preservation of our industrial past but as a brightly gleaming beacon lighting the way to a new future for Wales based on an industry of the 21st century.

6.52 pm

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): I was not surprised to hear the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) say that he supports the Bill, because I remember that many years ago he urged denationalisation of the steel industry. I shudder to think what state the steel industry would be in today if his advice had been accepted.

We are debating a piece of pure dogma. It is the 11th commandment of the old Tory testament — thou shalt not make a profit and remain in the public sector. The Government consider that the only purpose of the public sector is to act as a hospital for lame ducks, to take over an industry which has been badly let down by its private owners because they have failed to invest adequately, then to put it right and restore its health so that it can be returned to the same private sector in which it suffered its earlier disasters. That is the Government's philosophy.

The industry has received substantial public funds. Much of that money has been spent on new capital investment, which was desperately needed when it was taken over in 1967. Another large chunk of money has been spent on closures and getting rid of over 100,000 jobs. The social pain of that is still being felt in steelmaking areas, including my own, where unemployment is 19 per cent., largely as a result of job losses in the industry.

The industry has gone through an appalling traumatic period, but at the end of it, thanks to the support it has received in the public sector, BSC has emerged as an efficient, competitive and to some extent profitable organisation. Let us not run away with the idea that the profits are enormous, because they are not, but at least it is profitable. Now it is to be restored to the private sector. Public pain for private profit is the keynote of the Government's philosophy.

Does anyone seriously believe that BSC would still be operating five integrated plants today if it had been in the private sector? Of course it would not. Would the stainless plant at Sheffield — which is now working flat out and bursting at the seams with orders, but which a little while ago was going through a difficult period — still have been with us today if it had been in the private sector? It would have been closed down. Even the works at Rotherham and Stocksbridge, which are part of United Engineering Steels — the biggest engineering steelmaker in western Europe — might have been closed during that difficult period a few years ago if they had still been in the private sector.

There has been a dramatic increase in the demand for steel, thanks mainly to the beneficial movement in exchange rates in the past year or two. Total output in January was 31·6 per cent. up on January of last year. In the Yorkshire and Humberside region — which includes the BSC plant at Scunthorpe and the BSC stainless plant at Sheffield, as well as the works at Rotherham and Stocksbridge — output is up by a staggering 49 per cent. My hon. Friends from Scotland will know that the increase in Scotland has been 35 per cent. But for the sustained campaign of my hon. Friends from Scotland, the trade unions, the Select Committee on Trade and Industry and the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), Ravenscraig would have been closed a long time ago.

Where would the capacity have come from to meet the great increase in demand which is taking place? It is absolutely unthinkable that the capacity would have existed if the industry had been in private ownership. There is no doubt that public ownership has saved the industry from virtual extinction, as it has saved other vital industries when private owners have badly let them down by failing to invest sufficiently to match foreign competition.

As BSC is showing a bit of profit — we are not talking about a lot — the Government are rushing headlong to privatise it. We have no assurances about future investment or the availability of capital for investment in the industry. Sir Rober Scholey, the chairman of BSC, whom I have known since he ran the Rotherham works, has said that £300 million a year is needed for new investment. On present profit figures, that is sailing very close to the wind.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) asked why there is such unseemly haste. I think I have the answer: the Government are determined to get the industry on to the market before the full impact of the electricity price increases hits it and reduces its competitiveness and profitability. They want to sell it to the private sector before the cut-throat price war starts in Europe following the phasing out of quotas. Given those two circumstances — the considerable reduction in competitiveness because of electricity prices going up, coupled with a fierce price war against companies which will still have backing from their Governments, whether legal or not — the Government want to wash their hands of the whole industry, and that is a disgraceful decision.

Meanwhile, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham pointed out, there is no assurance that there will be any restrictions on foreign ownership in the privatised British Steel Corporation, or whatever the company is to be called. I have had correspondence with the Under-Secretary of State for Industry on this matter which is of great concern to people in BSC and in United Engineering Steels where 50 per cent. of the shares still belong to BSC. They want to know what is to happen to those shares. I wrote to the Minister and he replied that it is difficult because of EEC regulations. I wrote back and said that there were EEC regulations when Rolls-Royce was privatised, and how did he manage to get round that and provide a 15 per cent. limitation on foreign ownership in Rolls-Royce? My right hon. and hon. Friends will be amazed at the Minister's reply, which was that in the case of Rolls-Royce there was an additional factor: it is a strategically important defence contractor.

I have pointed out that without steel Rolls-Royce could not make a single engine. I can hardly think of an industry more important to our defence capability than steel.

Mr. Hardy: My hon. Friend's point about strategic interest is vital. He will be well aware of what happened when Britain invented Chobham armour. There are now only two firms in Britain that can produce it. The Government have invited Thyssens to tender for that which we invented.

Mr. Crowther: My hon. Friend is quite right. The engineering industry in south Yorkshire has expressed serious concern about that. It is an important defence issue.

Our steel industry has been saved at considerable financial cost and even greater social cost in the areas where the jobs have disappeared. My constituents and I wish to know whether all the sacrifices have been made only to provide someone with some private profit. That is what is upsetting my constituents. It is disgraceful that, after all the pain it has suffered, this great industry is now to be put at risk for the sake of doctrinaire Toryism.

7.21 pm

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I have noted down some of the topics on which I have received correspondence in the past week. I have received letters about a prisoner in Iraq, the life peerage of the Chief Rabbi, school buses in my constituency, the local post office which is under threat of closure, clause 28, the National Health Service, education and badgers. There has been not one letter about steel nationalisation. There is a steel works in my constituency, and not one person has written to me in the past week opposing the Government's proposals.

Three weeks ago I received a letter from the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation telling me that it was not going to oppose the Government's proposals because:

> "The union could spend large sums of money and considerable resources, as other trade unions have, campaigning against privatisation, but such a campaign would be a futile gesture. Steel is no longer one of the commanding heights of the economy nor is it a public utility. Instead, the ISTC is facing up to reality and must apply all its resources to safeguard the interests of its membership"

— the interests of its membership in the industry being denationalised.

Mr. Coleman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Holt: I shall not give way.

We have heard a great deal of statistics. One can wage a war with statistics to make one's case either way but this is not a debate about statistics. It is a debate about philosophy, attitude, and perhaps about dogma.

It was quite interesting that when I asked the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) what was the Labour party's policy, he said that the Labour party would renationalise the steel industry, which is about to be denationalised. Nothing could be more damaging.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): The hon. Gentleman was not listening. Why does he not listen?

Mr. Holt: I was listening. That is exactly what the hon. Member for Dagenham said. He was unsure about the form, but he said that the industry would be taken back into public ownership. At least some of the more honest Opposition Members are nodding in agreement. That is what the Opposition Front Bench spokesman said, and that is what *Hansard* will reveal tomorrow.

Dr. Reid *rose*——

Mr. Holt: Perhaps the hon. Member for Dagenham will repeat what he said.

Dr. Reid: I shall repeat what he said. It is unfortunate that the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) cannot repeat, parrot-fashion, what was said earlier. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham said that in his view such a strategic industry for Britain should be under some form of social ownership. Had the hon. Member for Langbaurgh not been so busy shouting abuse he might have heard my hon. Friend's reply.

Mr. Holt: I heard specifically what the answer was and it will be in *Hansard*.

[Mr. Holt]

The debate embraces a philosophical attitude. Langbaurgh on Tees has a steelworks which for many years was a hallmark of inefficiency. Today, it has less than half the work force it had five years ago and is producing 120 per cent. of the steel it was producing then. That is a measure of the improvement of production at Redcar and other steelworks, which include the Skinningrove steelworks in my constituency in the years since 1979.

I do not wish to deal in statistics. We are about to decide the future of the steel industry for decades to come. The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) waxed eloquent but he did not say a great deal. However, he did say that there had been a missed opportunity during the 1970s and that there was not the investment that there should have been. I agree with that. One of the reasons for the lack of investment historically was the ping-pong effect of nationalisation and renationalisation that has constantly occurred. If the private sector is asked to put money into a private industry which is liable to be renationalised when there is a change of Government, it will not invest.

The country has changed in its outlook. Twenty or 25 years ago very few people owned shares and young people did not know what shares were. I have a son of 26 and a daughter of 22 who are shareholders in a number of industries. That is not amazing but it reflects the change of philosophy between my youth and theirs and the outlook in the country today. The present opportunity to put the steel industry back into the private sector will enable young people such as my son and daughter and many others to invest in that industry. They will do so and the investment for the future will be there. The only thing that can stop that is the possibility that there will be renationalisation, when the dead hand of the Minister knowing best will return to the steel industry, as it has in the past.

Opposition Members have suggested that we denationalise industries only when they are making a profit. If Opposition Members can find someone to buy British Rail I shall guarantee that the Government will sell it, but there is no one foolish enough to buy an industry in such debt as British Steel was five or six years ago. All the money that was poured down the drain achieved nothing but it caused a greater change when the change had to come about. It may have been easy to phase in the changes to modernise the industry, but because there was a failure to address the problem between 1974 and 1979 it was important that it was done soon afterwards. Today the industry is much more realistic in its outlook.

I heard recently that a strike had been threatened by workers in Redcar during the past few days. British Steel said to them, "Strike if you will. If you do, we will close the plant and it will stay closed." What happened? British Steel prevailed and the men knew that the management meant what it said. They did not strike. They worked, and as a consequence they have kept the plant open and their future is secure.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar) *rose*—

Mr. Holt: If the hon. Lady wants to make a speech, she should have come in and sat through the debate from the beginning, as I have done. Then she would probably be called and could represent her constituents in the same way as I am representing my constituents. I shall not give way to the hon. Lady. She has only been in the Chamber five minutes and that is not long enough for me to give way to her.

Everyone should know the history of the Langbaurgh and Teesside area. The steel mills were built there because of the juxtaposition of coal and iron ore. There is no iron ore left in the ground and there is not so much coal-mining. So we are concerned for the steel industry. The security of being in private hands will keep the steel industry on Teesside. If it were still to be in public ownership in the future, a "Yes, Minister" attitude might prevail over the Minister of the day who might be told to close this and that. I am delighted that, throughout the entire debate, although we have heard a hell of a lot about closing Ravenscraig, we have heard nothing about closing Redcar. That is because of the success of the complex on Teesside.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) hit the nail squarely on the head when he dealt with the contribution of the hon. Member for Dagenham. I would have liked to use his words because they were so apposite in the context of the hon. Gentleman's speech. It was a poor speech, but I suppose one can understand that. When one has not got one's heart in a subject but has the commitment, as the Front Bench spokesman, to say a few words, it must be difficult. Apart from the Labour party, the only people who now want to vote against the Bill are the Liberal party, despite the fact that it said in its manifesto that it would vote with us. The unions and the people want steel to be denationalised.

Five or six years ago, immediately after the rundown of the steel industry, there was a very depressed air in Teesside. People were walking round with long faces. Unemployment was terrible. Today there is a new outlook and a new attitude. There is no longer so much unemployment. The number of unemployed is dropping. In every ward in my constituency there was a reduction in unemployment in the 12 months from January last year to January this year.

We now have the Teesside Development Corporation, which is working closely with the British Steel Corporation. A new attitude has come about because management, the workers and—yes—the unions in that area, want the industry privatised. They know that that will give them the opportunities and the security they seek. So the Government are not premature in bringing forward the legislation. It is spot on. This is the first time that they could have brought the steel industry to the market place after the years of decline and waste of money.

Let us think of what we might have done with the billions which have been wasted on steel. How many hospitals might we have built? How many other improvements could we have made to the social life of the country? What did we do? We poured all that money into a small, narrow area to sustain what was at that time a badly managed industry. I refute entirely what the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent said. It was only when Ian MacGregor came into the industry that he was able to put some backbone into the management which made it fight the trade union and tell it, "You do your job and we will manage the business." That is what is happening today. The management of British Steel wants privatisation because it wants the challenge. Anyone who disputes that should speak to any senior member of the board. All board members will say the same thing. They are looking

forward to the challenge and the opportunity. The Government's proposals will create a steel industry for the future.

In years to come I hope that we shall be debating not whether to close down Ravenscraig but how to expand it, or how, under the private sector, it has been expanded. All the time one has to be realistic enough not to believe that we can produce steel for which there is not a market place. The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent said that there was no need to have a market place, because we do not have to sell steel and we are not in competition with other people. Of course we are, and within the EEC there will be even more ruthless competition. As a privatised industry, steel will be able to meet the competition because decisions will be made quickly and commercially and will not have to go through the procedure of ministerial approval and committees before we get anywhere, with the prospect of losing the market, the shares, the opportunities and the jobs.

That is the epitome of a nationalised industry. Invariably nationalised industries have been badly run. Today they are improving. One of the main reasons for the improvement has been the introduction of many trade union reforms, with the result that industrial relations are much better. In the steel industry in the sixties and seventies many days were lost through strikes. The position is not comparable today. After privatisation there will be even fewer strikes.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I am pleased to speak on behalf of my constituents because they believe, as I do, that the Government's decision is correct. The timing is right and we look forward to the expansion of the steel industry. That is what my constituents want. That is why I shall rejoice when I vote in support of the Government.

7.18 pm

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): I wish to make two declarations of interest. The first is that my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) and I are the only hon. Members who have attended the whole of this debate who served on the Standing Committee which saved the industry in 1967 by bringing it into public ownership. I am sorry that I have had to listen to the twaddle and claptrap that we have just had from the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt).

My second declaration of interest, which the hon. Gentleman cannot make, is that I represent the steelworkers. I am sponsored by the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation. I was authorised by the executive council, meeting in London last week, to say categorically and clearly in the House that the union is utterly opposed to the privatisation of the British Steel Corporation. That declaration was made last week by the executive council of my union.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Is the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman) prepared to tell us whether that is his view, or the view of the union that instructs him to say it?

Mr. Coleman: I assure the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) that I am an hon. Member of the House, and when I say something of that nature it is the truth. I challenge the hon. Gentleman to challenge me outside. If he says the same thing outside, I will take him — */Interruption./* I am not used to getting into fisticuffs of that sort, nor am I used to telling untruths. I assure the hon. Gentleman that what I said was declared last week in Swindon house, the headquarters of the union. Does that satisfy him?

Mr. Taylor: I merely wished the hon. Gentleman to make his position clear, and he has done so.

Mr. Coleman: We in the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation oppose the Bill because we do not believe that it would be in the national interest. The steel industry should not be taken into the private sector, as the Government seek. Nor is it in the national interest to disregard the fact that in the past 10 years about £5 billion of taxpayers' money has been expended on the British Steel Corporation, to make it the most successful steel industry in Europe, if not in the world.

That would not have happened had the arrangements for bulk steel production in Britain existing before 1967 still been in operation. My union says, too, that now the industry is showing itself capable of making profits, those profits should be returned to the taxpayer, not through tax cuts to promote the popularity of the Government, but in expenditure on the Health Service, pensions or some other desirable social requirements. That is how we say that the profits of the British steel industry and the investment by taxpayers in the industry should be spent.

Further, now that the steel industry is profitable, that profit should not fall into the hands of speculators, especially from overseas. I do not suppose, however, that that declaration by my union, the principal union in the steel industry, will influence Conservative Members not to swarm into the Aye Lobby to support the Bill. But nor will their action prevent me from demanding in this debate the safeguards that I want, and my union wants for the country and the people who work in the industry. We demand that, should the Bill become law, there will be no break-up of the British Steel Corporation. It must remain a single entity. It seems that the Government, the Secretary of State and I are on the same side. We in the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation say that the industry is best served by remaining one entity, because anything else will be a disaster.

We also say that whatever company the Bill spawns must be a wholly British-owned company, with a substantial Government investment. In other words, the Government must retain a golden share in the company. We have a right to demand that, because the taxpayers' £5 billion investment in BSC has made this publicly owned industry an attractive proposition, and the sacrifice in job losses in the industry that has gone on over the years must be taken account of, and that contribution recognised. Let the Minister tell the House that there will be a golden share in the company, and that he will undertake that the company will be wholly British-owned. We cannot accept any other objective. We demand that the Government make it absolutely clear.

We also point to the industry's importance to the defence interests of Britain. We demand from the Government that they make it clear tonight that those interests are safeguarded. It is vital that the House is assured on this point. It will be too late to make these demands if such needs arise. We must be sure that the nation's defence is not put at risk through the failure of the new owners of the steel industry to invest properly to keep the industry efficient, as it is now, or through cuts in

[Mr. Coleman]

capacity, especially if they are ordered by the European Coal and Steel Community, that could affect the British industry adversely.

Let us remind ourselves that never before has a bulk steel producer in private hands had to deal with the ECSC, which decides the amount of steelmaking capacity in Europe. It has the power to compel cuts. Conservative Members should remember that the circumstances of the British Steel Corporation are significantly different from the privatisations of British Telecom, British Gas, the water authorities or the National Bus Company. Hon. Gentlemen must remember that the European Commission has a say in steel matters and we are not masters in our own house. For that reason, British Steel might not prove to be such an attractive proposition.

While we are talking about the Commission, let the Minister tell the House tonight what will be the impact of lifting ECSC quotas in June 1988. It is important that we should know in this debate about the likely impact. I suggest that any investors would also want to know about that, and would think carefully about it before making their investment. They might be safer to put their money on a racehorse that I know about, which belongs to a co-operative of west midlands ex-steel workers. It is called "Springvale Campaign", and that name will not be lost on my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner).

Before I raise a matter that has a bearing on investors' interests in the privatisation of steel, and whether it would be such a good deal for them, can the Minister tell us the reason for the indecent haste that has overtaken the Government in selling off steel? From what the Trades Union Congress steel committee could glean as recently as 4 June last year, there was no intention to move as soon as this to privatise the industry. What is the indecent hurry? Perhaps the answer can be found in the Government's refusal to publish the full report completed a year ago by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Is there, perhaps, something politically unfavourable to the Government in the report? I expect that the Minister will say that the report contains commercially sensitive matters, and for that reason they are withholding publication. Surely, if that be the case, investors or potential investors have a right to know about it before they buy the shares.

I look to the Minister for two further guarantees. First, will he make sure that the future requirements of British manufacturing industries are guaranteed? We must take care that those interests are safeguarded, and the Minister must make the point clear. Nothing else will do for the British industry. It must have guarantees on this matter.

The other guarantee that we must have is that employees' pension rights and conditions will be protected. These have already been paid for through redundancies. Part of the arrangements whereby job losses in the industry were effected concerned employees' pensions and conditions. We must have a cast-iron guarantee on those matters.

I look to the Minister to give satisfaction on those points before the Bill becomes an Act. He has a duty to the workers in steel, who made a sacrifice. Perhaps Conservative Members did not realise it, but without the co-operation of the union that sacrifice would not have been made and British Steel would not be as healthy as it is today.

The Bill is a betrayal of the country's investment in steel and of the workers' sacrifices. It does not deserve a Second Reading and it ought not to get one.

7.30 pm

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): I have a strong stomach, but it was tested to the full when I heard the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) say that British Steel's success of the past few years was a great advertisement for public ownership. He claimed it was under public ownership that the success had been achieved.

What the hon. Member overlooked was that this success was only possible under public ownership because this Government had the courage to follow a commercial approach, to take commercial decisions and to apply commercial principles. The Government applied the principles of private industry to a publicly owned industry. Over the past nine years hon. Members opposite have opposed just about every sensible decision that the Government have taken in relation to the steel industry. They have shown hostility to every hard but necessary decision. They have sought to make short-term political capital out of every difficult long-term decision that has had to be made.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy said that in 1978-79 the BSC's annual loss was £1·8 billion. That was in a single financial year. That is equivalent to £35 million a week. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) was right to draw attention to the scale of the losses which were being incurred, the draining away of public wealth.

It puts current disputes over the National Health Service into perspective. In my own constituency of Ipswich we are shortly to open a new, ultra-modern 86-bed hospital extension, which cost £4 million. So the weekly £35 million drain that the steel industry was imposing on the British economy in 1978-79 was the equivalent of something like nine hospital extensions of that kind a week.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. In terms of the points that he has been making about steel losses in the past, does he think that it is justifiable that those billions and billions of pounds of public money which were invested in steel to get it into the situation it is in today should simply be written off, because the price the Government will get for BSC will in no way compensate for that public investment? BSC should be kept in public ownership so that the profitability that came from that public investment can go towards repaying it.

Mr. Irvine: The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe should remember that that trough in 1978-79 was the culmination of 12 years of steel in public ownership, and that what has happened since has been the application of commercial principles to a nationalised industry. Left to the policies, dogmas and doctrines of his party, the steel industry today would still be uncompetitive, overmanned, under-capitalised and fundamentally weak.

The great opportunity that privatisation will give to British Steel will be to enable those commercial disciplines to be maintained. At the same time, it will bring British

Steel freedom from Treasury control. It will give it greater flexibility. It will make it much more likely that British Steel will be able to take part in effective joint ventures with overseas corporations.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East) *rose*——

Mr. Irvine: I should like to give way, but many hon. Members, particularly on the Opposition side, also want to speak.

The one baleful shadow that I see is that of the European Economic Community quotas. I acknowledge that there was a time when those quotas were necessary as a short-term measure to deal with the problems of over-supply while the steel industries of the various European nations were putting their respective houses in order. But the short-term value of those quotas has ended. At present those quotas are simply protecting the inefficient and at the same time penalising the efficient. Now, fortunately, British Steel is numbered among the most efficient companies in Europe instead of, as formerly, among the most inefficient. Those quotas are holding back British Steel from making full use of its capacity.

I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to make every effort to ensure that those quotas are phased out, and quickly. The shadow of those quotas needs to be removed from the scene. For all that, I am confident that this Bill, by making it possible for privatisation of the British steel industry to take place, will usher in a new era of prosperity and dynamism for the industry.

7.37 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): In 20 years of public ownership, after much effort and expenditure, the steel industry has been transformed from the chaotic and rundown state under private ownership that my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman) and I knew 20 years ago into what is today the most efficient and profitable steel industry in Europe, under a public ownership that could continue indefinitely.

Why, then, oh why throw it all again into the melting pot? The Opposition are totally opposed to the privatisation of the steel industry, which will contribute not a thing to the efficiency of the industry. It is a quite unnecessary threat to steel communities which have suffered huge job losses and which were looking forward to a period of stability in which they could build up employment again in more diversified local economies.

Nowhere are we more opposed to privatisation than in Motherwell, where Ravenscraig and its associated plants, which are fully competitive by world standards, have for years been picked out by BSC as next in line for closure. The privatisation announcement on 3 December set BSC free to take the decisive, irretrievable step next year with the closure of the hot mill, leading progressively to the loss of 11,000 jobs on top of our present level of 18 per cent. unemployment in Lanarkshire, much of it from past steel closures.

The threat is so grave that, out of common human concern and responsibility to our constitutents, my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) and I have had to concentrate on finding means of averting it. We have had to seek means within the letter and the spirit of the Government's competitive, free-market, private-enterprise policies, which they have the majority to carry through Parliament. We cannot afford the luxury of political posturing. It is a matter of survival.

Motherwell district council asked Arthur Young, the management consultants, to examine the impact of the privatisation of BSC on the future of Ravenscraig and Dalzell works in my constituency. I have deposited a copy of the report in the Library and I have copies for any hon. Member who does not have one already and who would like one.

The report concludes that, if BSC is privatised as a single entity, even allowing for a 30 per cent. increase in United Kingdom manufacturing output over the next five years, it would not be in the interests of BSC as a commercial enterprise to keep Ravenscraig open beyond 1991 or Dalzell beyond 1994. The director of the CBI in Scotland, Mr. John Davidson, described the Arthur Young report as "highly professional and interesting".

If Ministers are bothered about the date of the next election, I agree that uncertainties about the market and BSC's response could certainly shift the dates of the closures by a year or two, but the final closure of Ravenscraig is inevitable once the hot mill is closed and the plant allowed to run down. The increase in profits of BSC as a single entity from the closure of Ravenscraig would be about £100 million a year, and shareholders would want to know why Ravenscraig was not closed.

However, the Arthur Young report offered an alternative. It rests on the nature of the competition that the BSC faces. The present proposal to privatise BSC as a single entity assumes that the competition comes from Europe. That is the view as seen and presented by the chairman, looking out. It is part of the truth. Certainly European competition has set, and will set, the general price level, but the competition that has so effectively reduced costs within BSC, particularly in strip products, has been the fight for survival between works, as every hon. Member who represents a steel constituency knows. Ask any steel worker or steel manager.

That is the reality. That competition would be brought to an end if privatisation took a form that simply allowed BSC to close Ravenscraig. The pressure would be off at works level. No amount of comparison with a distant and different Nippon Steel, Thyssen or Krupp would have the same effect. Look at the struggle in Ford, even within the same company, to make comparisons stick between Dagenham and Saarlouis. Would Wales have won with such brilliance at Cardiff on Saturday if Scotland had not been 17-10 in the lead at half-time?

The Arthur Young study found that, by maintaining the competition, with Ravenscraig, Shotton and Dalzell forming a separate group, the competition would need to bring about only a 5 per cent. higher level of sales, and 6 per cent. lower variable costs than would otherwise have been achieved by a single entity, for the combined profits to equal what a single entity BSC could achieve by the soft option of closing Ravenscraig. Is competition worth no more than 5 per cent. on sales and 6 per cent. on operating costs? Production, employment, incomes, technical progress, and the contribution to the balance of payments from increased exports and reduced imports would be higher with the competitive solution. No direct jobs would be lost in north or south Wales, and the number of indirect jobs would, of course, increase. The only people worse off would be Sir Robert Scholey and the board of the British

[Dr. Jeremy Bray]

Steel Corporation. With a smaller corporation, £85 million a year of profits would go into the new company. Is it any wonder that Sir Robert Scholey does not like the idea, and did everything that he could to block even the study?

Let me deal with some objections. The force of objections is somewhat diminished when we have heard them coming first from Sir Robert Scholey — with his knowledge, but also his interest in the matter. They should nevertheless be fully considered. We have no interest in deception or in patronising obscurantism. First, people who argue that size gives strength have not followed all that has been happening in recent years. I quote from this week's *Fortune* business magazine, in an article on "Corporate Strategy for the 1990s":

"Most of the classical justifications for large size have proved to be of minimal value, or counter-productive, or fallacious. McKinsey's Bergsma goes through the list: Access to capital? That era is past. Better information? New third party providers are making information available to all. Economies of scale? Flexible manufacturing systems are driving out advantages of size. Markets for many corporate functions have developed — transportation companies, purchasing specialists"—

and so on. The BSC has cut its research and development by 40 per cent. in real terms since 1979. For all its size —perhaps because of it—BSC makes practically no use of outside contract research. It recruited only two first-class honours graduates into its research departments last year. BSC is almost alone among large industrial companies in having no employee serving on any research council or research council committee. BSC could do with some pretty stiff technological competition in Britain. That is as important for the industry in south Wales and the Port Talbot laboratories and on Teesside and at Scunthorpe as it is in Shotton and in Scotland.

Secondly, it is argued that the two companies would not compete because—apart from Shotton—BSC is not in coated sheet. In fact, with its strip mills, BSC is most of the way there, and Shotton would not and should not accept hot rolled coil from Ravenscraig that is not fully competitive — any more than it does today. By the competitive solution, we would at least maintain the present level of competition, while BSC seeks the soft option of reducing it by closing Ravenscraig.

Thirdly, the Minister said that his consultants had access to commercially confidential information to which Arthur Young did not have access, and that they reached different conclusions. The Minister can do better than that. He personally denied that access and has refused to give information on the advice that he has received. As for the fig leaf of commercial confidentiality, Sir Robert Scholey would describe the position of a rugby ball in midfield as commercially confidential if he thought that would help his case. Remember that he has £100 million a year at stake. Sir Ian MacGregor will tell the Minister, as he told me, that cost estimates can be synthesised from the standard industry sources, and Arthur Young used them.

There is always room for argument about timings, capacities and forecasts. However, there seems to be no doubt about the principal points; first, the proposed closure of the hot mill, which all informed people agree means that the end would be only a matter of time. Secondly, there is no doubt that the proposed Ravenscraig-Shotton-Dalzell group would be viable. That leaves as the only major question the extent to which continuing competition in the United Kingdom would continue to improve performance, and that must be a matter of judgment. With BSC having scarcely begun to tap modern advances in material sciences, there is still plenty of room for improvement.

Finally, Shotton workers would not like it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) knows, I have been there and have discussed the proposal with their trade union representatives. Like my hon. Friend, they have made their opposition transparently clear. I like the idea of industrial democracy. Perhaps we could have a vote on privatisation. The new group would give Shotton a much higher profile, with the head office and sales department of a sizeable company, with a full research and development laboratory, able to provide an outlet for the considerable untapped technological potential in new materials in north Wales and Merseyside.

It will take time to win acceptance, as change always does. I was told that Shotton would prefer a management buy-out. Well, why not? Why limit it to Shotton? With the shortages in hot rolled coil that were already developing last year, about which Ministers do not seem to have heard, it would not be sensible for Shotton to be without secure supplies. It is far too static a view to think that Shotton could rely on simply shopping around for spot supplies of hot rolled coil that could quickly cease to be available. Ravenscraig is the present and most appropriate source, and with it comes the strength of Dalzell's position in plates.

Mr. Barry Jones: On Saturday, Scotland's first quarter of play was some of the most robust and brilliant that I have ever seen. I know from my hon. Friend's remarks about his visit to my constituency to talk to my steel workers that he is an honourable and truthful man. Since I do not know whether I will catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, I can only say that my steel workers remain unconvinced and have urged me to emphasise their Welshness and their wish to keep their link with Llanwern and Port Talbot.

Dr. Bray: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's attitude and position. As an Englishman with the privilege to represent a Scottish constituency, and having been to school in Wales, I do not regard the Welsh or the Scots as a racist people. We all need time to work out just what our interests are on these matters.

Rugby is not the only thing that Scotland takes to Wales. Scottish financial institutions, not to mention Scots, are already playing a considerable part in industrial development in Wales, just as Welshmen are in Scotland. We even have them in Ravenscraig. Why be dominated by a London-based BSC, when one can run oneself better in Shotton? I would lay a fair bet with my hon. Friend that it would not be long before people were saying that, if privatisation had to happen, the new materials group was the best thing that could happen to Shotton.

I have been upbeat and buoyant because the alternative does not bear thinking about. The Arthur Young study has told us that Ravenscraig and Dalzell will not long survive the birth pangs of a BSC privatised as a single entity. But an operation can save them, and the parts of BSC can live. At the very least, that is a proposition that should be properly examined, not just by the Minister and his advisers, but by all the people who can make it come true. It will need time to be examined.

We are not talking about a conflict of interest between Welsh and Scottish steel workers, nor even about giving the steel industry in Scotland a chance of survival. For the Government, we are talking about whether the competitive free markets in which they believe are good for economic growth, or only for the shortest-term profits of restrictive private monopolies. Is not properly structured competition good for jobs and economic growth as well as for profits?

For the Opposition, we are talking about whether we can organise a market economy to achieve economic growth. The Arthur Young report has made it impossible for us to hide our heads in the sand, or make strutting cuckolds of ourselves by demanding assurances and making promises of support for Ravenscraig which we know to be empty.

In Motherwell, we have moved very far and very fast to glimpse a chance of survival. The proposal for the new group has the support of all political parties in Scotland, as reflected in the speech of the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), certainly in and outwith Motherwell, according to soundings that we have been able to take. It has the support of the trade union representatives of the 3,200 steel workers at Ravenscraig.

Lest my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside should feel left out, let me say that the trade union representatives of the 700 workers at Dalzell, demonstrating—I believe, of course, only for Scottish steel trade unionists — some of the vacillation and parochialism which is not the strongest aspect of trade unionism in the steel industry, and clinging to hopes of survival on their own which are denied even by their own management, have long worked on the principle of being against anything that Ravenscraig is for.

We all need time to work things out. With no mention of steel privatisation in either their election manifesto or the Queen's Speech, and no consultation before announcing the proposed single entity, the Government must now allow time for thoughts to be gathered. It was only last Thursday that the Arthur Young report was published. Nothing that the Minister or the Government can say will now stop the Ravenscraig-Dalzell-Shotton option being examined.

If Ravenscraig is to be killed, it will die with dignity. But the House will understand the politically explosive effects in Scotland if our largest fully competitive industrial unit were closed with the Government having denied the test of the market, in which they believe, of a course which would have allowed both Ravenscraig and it competitors to continue.

7.57 pm

Mr. Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) and to return to him the compliment that he kindly paid to me. He spoke with knowledge, commitment and compassion on his subject and did not baulk at the difficult issues involved. It is tempting to follow him a little further about where the political opportunism lay. Perhaps it was on the Opposition Front Bench. It is even more tempting to explore the difference between social ownership and public ownership and how that is to be made clear to the electorate in due course. However, I came late to the debate, for which I apologise, and many hon. Members are waiting to speak. Certainly those points will have to be explored on a future occasion.

This is an emotional evening for me because I resigned from my minor post with the Government in 1981 on the issue of British Steel unfairly competing, with taxpayers' subsidies, against private steel companies. The debate has shown Opposition Members to have selective memories when they claim that only public ownership could save jobs. They have not alluded to the number of people working in private steel mills, particularly in the west midlands, who were put out of work by that self-same public company and its subsidies.

I do not wish to go over those battles, but I am afraid that the journalist triumphed over the historian in the entertaining remarks of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). It was his Government who shirked, or deliberately avoided—at any rate, he cannot deny that they postponed it—the issue of the Beswick report and the steel mill closures that it recommended. That was deliberately put off until the inevitable election. To claim that those plants were viable and, indeed, should have been expanded is an entertaining scenario for the right hon. Gentleman's constituents, but it cannot hold water with hon. Members.

The right hon. Gentleman also referred to the motor industry. Savage reductions have been made in our capacity and output, but the defects in quality and consistency of output rather put the boot on the other foot, leading to the decline in demand on the steel mills —despite the efforts of some, particularly at Llanwern, to improve the quality of their products.

Where do we go from here? A number of difficult points are outstanding. The hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman) in particular drew attention to such problems as the EEC quotas. It should at once be stated that those quotas have not always been favourable to manufacturing industry. I am one of those who have been trying to secure the admission from abroad of high-tensile steel which cannot be obtained elsewhere for the manufacture of motor car wheels. Steel quotas have not always helped our industry to modernise itself or to improve its products.

As far as I am aware, the United States has not yet been mentioned. Many perils face our exports of steel products to that country, and the Government will still have to be involved in questions of trade. That is, I think, part of the assurance that Opposition Members have been seeking. It is not a matter of the Government removing themselves altogether from the steel scene, because they still have onerous responsibilities. It would be as well if my hon. Friend made that point in his reply.

The idea that the industry has succeeded only because it is in public ownership really cannot be sustained, and takes no account of the continuing unfair basis of competition with companies in the private sector—and even the basis on which the Phoenix companies, such as United Engineering, should work. That firm is of particular concern to me as it has a large plant in my constituency. We still have such firms as Walter Somers, in open hearth die steel, competing with Sheffield Foregemasters on a very uncertain basis, with the latter's access to the taxpayers' pocket.

I welcome the Government's early step to resolve the problems. I have argued all along, even when the privatisation of steel was not possible, that steel in public ownership must operate on a basis of company accounts so that it can be seen where the subsidy has gone and the basis of competition can be understood.

[Mr. Hal Miller]

I believe that this step had to come. It gives the workers so ably represented by the hon. Member for Neath the chance to take a stake in their own industry, and enables suppliers, consumers and the public to do the same. That is the sort of public ownership that we want, which is why I heartily support the measure.

8.5 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Having intervened in virtually every other speech, I hope that there will be no interventions in mine, and I can promise a brief speech.

Let me say to the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) that, even given the Government's current highly dubious unemployment figures, 10,000 are now unemployed in the travel-to-work area of Shotton. The male unemployment rate is 18 per cent. I calculate that several thousand of those are my constituents, who have not worked since they lost their jobs when the Shotton steelworks were closed in 1980. That was a tragedy. The workers did not wish to surrender; nor did I, and nor did a single one of our local authorities. I felt that it was our duty to fight, and to propose new steelmaking at the Shotton works. Notwithstanding progress in the creation of a new economy, the existing unemployment figures proved right those of us who had wanted to fight.

On Saturday, I met members of the Shotton steel committee representing the works. They had told me in a letter that they wished to make a public statement. They write:

"We are convinced that any hiving off of the industry into smaller groups or units would not be in the best interests of the BSC as a whole or any works in particular. Having suffered the ravages of closure of the major part of the works with its subsequent loss of jobs on an unprecedented scale, we now feel that having weathered all the storms of the last eight years, we are now in an extremely strong and healthy position. The order book is full, investment is guaranteed and we have first class products which are in an expanding market. This can only bode well for the future. To maintain and continue this success story we need the security of the corporation as a whole, for future investment, continued research and development and marketing expertise. To this end we see no benefits by isolating ourselves from the mainstream of the industry. Job security, safe working conditions, fair wages, good pensions—these are what we seek and hope for our members. And we feel that these aspirations, plus the future prosperity of the Shotton works, with its benefits to the community, are best served by our continued association within the BSC and not by fragmentation of the industry however well meaning these proposals may be."

In an encounter on Saturday in my surgery in Connah's Quay, that letter was given to me by Joe Gibson of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, Ron Hill of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and Bob Butt of my own union, the Transport and General Workers Union. They told me that they did not want a management buy-out.

I want to emphasise briefly the achievements of the work force at home. Locally, we are seen as the "jewel in the crown" of the corporation's empire. We have slimmed down hugely; we have had immense demanning and have increased productivity at an astonishing rate—all under the leadership on the shop floor of local trade unionists who have sweated blood in difficult conditions. My constituents at Shotton can rival any Japanese or German work force for productivity. I cannot praise them too highly. They have made every sacrifice. I know that about £100 million in a decade has been invested in the Shotton works. Management and labour have collaborated effectively to compensate for the loss of 8,000 jobs in 1980, between Christmas and Easter. Arguably, that is the biggest ever loss of industrial jobs in Western Europe. It all happened in just three months. That is why my colleagues from the Shotton works came to see me last Saturday and gave me their considered thoughts. I support them to the hilt and respect all that they seek to do and all that they say.

I see the Bill as a step in the dark. I want to know what will happen to the privatised company if world trading conditions take a turn for the worse. Would the Government bail out that company?

I also have a question on imports. Is the Bill designed to lessen importation, or not? I advise the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Miller), that the Government told me that in 1986 our nation imported over £1 billion of foreign steel — mostly strip. I know the hon. Gentleman's interest in the motor industry and advise him, in addition, that in that same year, 1986, Britain imported 1 million motor cars at a cost in excess of £4·5 billion. Every car that is imported into Britain is foreign steel and foreign strip. Every right hon. and hon. Member knows that our balance of payments is in an unhealthy state. However, there has been £5·5 billion worth of imports which, as time goes by, I predict will prove to be an immense strain to the British economy. Does the Bill presage more imports or fewer?

I now address the subject of pensions. I seek a categorical assurance for my constituents at Shotton steelworks that the corporations' employees will not lose out. They tell me — I agree — that satisfactory arrangements are vital. Can we be sure that foreign companies will not be allowed to obtain a major shareholding in the new company? Like my hon. Friends, I see the steel industry as Britain's strategic industry. We need to guarantee that if the steel industry is privatised, a foreign company or a foreign power will never have leverage on our fundamental industry. I note that there are already cracks in the Government's approach relating to other privatised industries. Only earlier today in the statement, we had an example of that. I hope that if the Minister catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, he will address that national point.

I ask again, "Will there be genuine consultation and negotiating procedures, nationally and locally, about the future shape of the industry, and about wages and conditions of service?" When I talk to my steel workers, I know that they want me to seek guarantees about health and safety. We want more not less work in that vital area.

On training, can we be sure that there will be more, not fewer, apprenticeships? Economically, the future of Britain in the next century is related to the way in which we tackle training. We need more not less training in steel in the years ahead.

On research and development, if the industry is to prosper in the next century we need to know what the privatised company is prepared to invest under that heading because it is of crucial importance.

I ask the Minister to express concern for the environment because throughout Britain our citizens are now demanding improvements. Would a privatised profit-conscious company cut corners with regard to the environment? I hope not.

I notice that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury is in his place on the Treasury Bench. I should like to say to his face a word of thanks for the manner in which he has delivered speedily over £500,000 to constituents of mine with regard to top slice tax relief that should have been paid in 1980. He efficiently delivered it late last year, which is much appreciated in my constituency.

Finally, we will listen with care and interest to what the Minister says about the writing-off of debts. Your wish, Madam Deputy Speaker, is for short speeches; I hope that mine has been reasonably short. I warn the Government that this is a step in the dark and even at this late stage they should think again.

8.15 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) spoke with passion, concern and great authority. Many Opposition Members have represented constituency interests strongly. I do not have a constituency interest, but for five years before I became a Member of this House I worked for the Association of British Chambers of Commerce which, in their individual capacities, have shown concern for individual steel plants and the effects of their closures, and in their national capacity have shown continuing concern for manufacturing industry and its competition. Indeed, through that work I learnt about the point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Miller) about the importance of the private steel companies being able to compete with British Steel.

I welcome the Bill because it is long overdue. Indeed, since calls for nationalisation are normally greeted with cheers by the Opposition, and calls for denationalisation — I hope that we can occasionally use that now outmoded word — are greeted with applause by Conservative Members and, I believe, by the country, I am somewhat surprised that this measure was not forecast either in our election manifesto or in the Queen's Speech, but perhaps we will have a response to that later.

In my election address on the subject of privatisation —call it what one will—I said that the interest of the consumer was paramount. I had in mind not only the two great privatisations of the previous Parliament—British Telecom and British Gas — on which continuing vigilance by this House and its Select Committee will be necessary, but also the two major privatisations that are predestined for the rest of this Parliament—electricity and water. I advise my right hon. Friends that I cannot guarantee that I shall take an entirely uncritical approach to those. However, I believe that steel is a relatively straightforward case.

I disagree strongly with those Opposition Members who have claimed that the value of public ownership has been proved by what has happened since 1979. Let us look at what has happened since 1979. Until my right hon. Friends took the industry by the scruff of the neck its history in public ownership had been one of political interference. It had been forced to keep open non-viable plants and, by 1979, West Germany, with a steel production work force only 50 per cent. higher than that of Britain, was producing more than twice as much steel. Indeed, profit figures have already been mentioned. In 1979-80 BSC lost £1,784 million but that loss has now been converted into a profit.

The measures that have been taken to bring BSC back into a competitive position have required unpleasant actions in a number of areas. I pay tribute to the success of the enterprise zone and the creation of new businesses in Corby that have led since 1985 to a 51 per cent. fall in unemployment.

I would remind the House that fewer steel workers now expect to remain in the steel industry for the rest of their working lives. The other day I met a taxi driver in my constituency—I have no idea of his political allegiance — but he had been made redundant from the Scunthorpe steelworks six or so years ago. He had had a difficult time in regaining a viable living. However, thanks to the enterprise allowance scheme, he has now set himself up as a taxi firm in Taunton. That is a success story for the Government's employment measures.

This is a historic occasion because the ownership of the steel industry has moved backwards and forwards from public to private ownership since the war. I have had an interest in such matters for some time. I should like to make two points with reference to the historical perspective. I do not believe that everything that the private sector does is good and, many years ago, there were occasions when private steelwork owners were open to criticism. Correlli Barnett, in his book, "The Collapse of British Power", states:

> "The evidence given before the Iron and Steel Industries Committee in 1917 portrayed a generation of industrialists in whom ignorance vied with complacency. These were men for whom their own old curiosity shops of foundries represented the summit to which progress might aspire and for whom the sophisticated metallurgical science of foreign competitors was not a matter worthy of the attention of a British iron or steel-master."

Mr. Austin Mitchell: That is what we will go back to.

Mr. Nicholson: No, not at all. We need to be aware of history and be warned by past events.

Let us consider another lesson from the past that points to Government policy regarding the economic conditions in which industry operates. I quote from a book which I had the honour to edit, "The Leo Amery Diaries". On 19 November 1925 his diary read:

> "Committee of Civil Research which is now getting near the summing up stage on the Iron and Steel business. Philip"——

Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, then President of the Board of Trade—

> "summed up ably and temperately in favour of a safeguarding inquiry;"——

the aim was to give a tariff to the industry.

> "Winston"——

then Chancellor of the Exchequer—

> "naturally to the effect that the evidence had obviously shown that we could not grant one"——

an early Cabinet split—

> "I as naturally in the opposite sense comparing all these efforts to wriggle out of the proper and obvious solution of all our difficulties to bluebottles buzzing in a fly trap."

Those quotes demonstrate the position of the industry and the economic circumstances surrounding it.

I hope that privatisation will help us regain at least part of the 40 per cent. of the market that we have lost to foreign imports. I emphasise that the success of the industry depends upon the Government's attitude, for example, to exchange rates. Those rates caused us considerable difficulties in 1980 and I hope that the Government will address that point.

The Iron and Steel Trades Confederation journal for February 1988 states:

> "The union could spend large sums of money and considerable resources — as other trade unions have —

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campaigning against privatisation. But such a campaign would be a futile gesture. Steel is no longer one of the 'commanding heights' of the economy, nor is it a public utility. Instead the ISTC in facing up to the realities of the situation must apply all its resources to safeguarding the interests of its membership"

I am sure that that is correct and that shows that certain trade unions—more and more, I hope—do not take the strongly ideological opposition to this measure that I fear has been adopted by Labour Members.

8.24 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): If the Bill is passed unamended, it will be a death warrant for the Scottish steel industry. It will send, virtually unencumbered, a corporation into the private sector whose senior management's antipathy to the Ravenscraig complex is well known and well documented. It is a relatively simple matter to map out the bleak future for Scottish steel if the Bill is passed. Indeed, the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) did so extremely professionally.

Over the next seven years successive parts of the Ravenscraig operation will be closed as alternative capacity becomes available elsewhere. First, the strip mill, then one of the blast furnaces and finally the rest of the operation — no doubt in good time to meet the ministerial promises of seven years' iron and steel production at Ravenscraig.

In Scotland we know when bad news is coming. It is preceded by statements from Tory Central Office entitled, "Good news for Scotland". Indeed, it was with that banner headline that the Tories greeted the closure of the Gartcosh finishing mill. I have absolutely no doubt that someone is beavering away at this very moment attempting to interpret the Britoil announcement as more good news for Scotland.

In December the Minister suggested that hon. Members representing Scotland should be pleased with the equivocal assurances of seven years steelmaking at Ravenscraig, yet it is another example of the Government's track record of deceit. If the Minister wishes to prove us wrong he should re-word the guarantee to include all steel operations at Ravenscraig, Dalzell and Clydesdale.

Bevan said "Why look at the crystal ball when you can read the book?". In Scotland we do not need a crystal ball to divine the intentions of the BSC. We need only to refer back to 1982 when it had to be prevented from closing Ravenscraig by political intervention. Those were the days when Scotland still had a Secretary of State who considered it part of his responsibilities to fight Scotland's corner in the Cabinet. The right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) may have lost more battles than he won, but he is infinitely preferable to his successor who has not lost a political battle because he has fought no fight at all.

Let us consider the absurd spectacle of the Secretary of State, in what was billed as a major speech and, apparently, in all sobriety, proclaiming the virtues of privatisation for the Scottish economy—that in the week that has seen the sell-out of its largest company, Britoil, because of the Government's failure to keep promises made at the time of its privatisation. The Bill aims a dagger at the heart of the Scottish steel industry as a result of more privatisation.

The decision to sustain Ravenscraig in 1982 was clearly correct. The work force has broken production record after production record. Ravenscraig has been operating at well above design capacity. It has been crucial to the build-up of profitability in BSC and that, of course, has made viable the privatisation we are discussing. Unless the Bill is stopped or substantially altered, those efforts will be rewarded by a long lingering death for Ravenscraig over the next seven years. Just as BSC was wrong in 1982, so it is wrong about Ravenscraig in 1988. As an integrated unit Scottish steel could face an outstanding future, responding to the revival of the oil market in the 1990s. As a peripheral plant in a privatised BSC there is little or no prospect for survival.

The implications for the loss of the steel industry go far beyond the direct and indirect impact on the economy and beyond the social consequences for individual communities. When uncertainty surrounds Scottish steel all business, which uses up primary material, is under threat. What country will develop or expand a steel dependent industry when there is a clear danger that a steel rundown will remove Glasgow as a basing point for pricing steel products? The effect will be further to catapult industry towards the midlands, which is the hidden agenda behind the Government's pursuit of steel privatisation.

There is a case for the privatisation of steel. It is not a case which I support, but it is one which is arguable. There is only the poorest case for the privatisation of steel as a single unit. If the BSC is sold as a single entity with dominant market control in the United Kingdom, its capacity will inevitably be reduced below the level which will pertain if it is kept in the public sector or sold as two or more competing units. Over time, the new privatised BSC will reduce output to maximise profitability and will meet excess demand through further imports.

Such is the option open to a company sent into the market with neither the constraints of public accountability nor major domestic competition. The measure smells of opportunism, the chance to make a quick buck in a tidy fashion without the complication of having to think things through. Privatisation in that form will be bad for all the steel industry. Ravenscraig could well be the first casualty, but, most certainly, it will not be the last.

Our colleagues in Plaid Cymru are extremely worried that a free market force will further emasculate the industry in Wales. Since the war, the number of steel workers in Wales has dropped from over 100,000 to under 20,000. As in Scotland, whole communities are dependent upon steel and their future is in the balance.

In its aftermath, the Bill will bring political changes. The threat to the Scottish steel industry may convince many Labour supporters, and perhaps even a few Labour politicians, that the state of the United Kingdom is not compatible with the health of the Scottish economy. The remaining Tory Members from Scotland face a dilemma this evening. Here is a measure which is both anti-Scottish and anti-competition. It is against not only the principles of the SNP, the Labour party and the alliance, but what should be the economic principles of the Conservative party.

I offer the remaining Tory Members this warning, or at least I would do if there were any in the Chamber tonight. If, as Opposition Members suspect, the Bill is the preliminary closure notice for Scottish steel, it will most certainly be the final closure notice for the Scottish Conservative party.

8.31 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Steel, iron and ironstone have been an integral part of the economy of my constituency. We appreciate how important the Bill is for the constituency and the future of steel work there.

In our debate, we have discussed whether steel workers welcome the measure. My predecessor was a Conservative Member and, in the last general election campaign, the future of the British Steel Corporation and the question of privatisation featured prominently. Before the campaign started, my predecessor was all for privatisation and demanded that it be brought forward as soon as possible. Quite amazingly, during the campaign, he changed his tune and said that there would be no privatisation during the life of the next Conservative Government, and that privatisation was many years away. Ministers who visited my constituency during the campaign repeated the message that the BSC would not be privatised for many years.

We can already see what has happened, in the first Session of a new Parliament. If the Government can be so dishonest towards the electorate, particularly when the manifesto and the Queen's Speech made no mention of the proposal, how can people trust the Government? During the election campaign, it was evident that the people of Glanford and Scunthorpe trusted the Labour party more than the Conservative party to defend the interests of steel workers and the future of the steel industry. I do not intend to break faith in the confidence that those people put in me when they sent me here to represent their interests.

I want to talk about the interests of steel workers and of the industry. The Bill makes no mention of pensions, protection of jobs or protection against foreign takeovers. It makes no mention of giving the work force a share in the benefits of the industry. Perhaps the Minister will tell us whether he wants to see speculators in the City take all the short-term benefits or whether he intends to give a free issue of shares and a share in the industry to the people whose productivity has made a turnround possible.

In some ways, Scunthorpe has recovered from the shattering blow of the steel closures. Eighteen thousand people were employed in the steel industry there. The current figure is 7,500. That was a tremendous blow to the town. Is that tremendous sacrifice to be thrown away when the industry is now back in profit and Scunthorpe is breaking all productivity records and is capable of competing with any other steelworks? Are we to lose the sacrifice of all those families who lost breadwinners when they were put out of work?

In a reply, the Minister told me that, since June 1979, £5,151 million have gone into the BSC. All that is to be written off. Let us make no bones about that. That debt is to be wiped off to enable the industry to be sold. When the industry is in profit, as a result of public investment, it is wrong and irresponsible to write off that debt and not to keep the steel industry in public ownership to make its contribution to paying back that investment.

I fear very much for the future of the industry. In world and European terms, the BSC is not the largest steel producer. The advantage of public ownership is that it evens out the cycles which affect the industry. When the flotation is announced, will the Government warn small investors just what a high-risk investment it will be? The problem of over-production in Europe has still not been resolved. The industry is vulnerable to currency fluctuations. It is a high-risk investment and does not compare with the natural monopolies of British Gas and British Telecom, which were privatised at some considerable loss.

It has been argued that the measure would free the industry from state interference. I wrote to the Minister and asked him how much the BSC advertising campaign was costing. He replied that that was a matter for the board and not for him. There does not seem to be much control when the Minister allows a public corporation to spend its money in a way which blatantly advertises privatisation through its slogan, "The shape of things to come". I do not oppose the BSC marketing itself. It has had a considerable achievement and should be proud of that.

Those people who work in the industry in Scunthorpe are proud of their achievements and their contribution to the industry. It is an act of irresponsibility to write off those debts when the industry is in profit. My constituents tell me that the Humber bridge board, which affects my constituency, has debts of £300 million. It costs £1·50 each way to cross the bridge. It is affecting the economy of the region, as it represents a cost barrier, yet the Government refuse to write off the £300 million debt when they think nothing of writing off a £5 billion debt.

Those are the Government's priorities. That is hypocrisy. The Government are prepared to plunge steel into the uncertainty of private ownership for short-term gain and pure ideological commitment. When steel is doing so well, why not keep it as it is and let the people who work in the industry have some security and let taxpayers enjoy the returns on their investments over so many years?

8.39 pm

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I shall be brief because many of my hon. Friends want to participate in the debate. I want to put on record my response to the cheap political jibe from the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt). I am learning to know and hate his jibes. I was not in the Chamber because I was serving on a Committee, and it is difficult to be here all the time.

Let us be straight about what the Bill is about: short-term profit. It is about selling off the assets of British Steel cheaply. Steel communities such as Redcar know what it is to have seen the industry made lean in previous years. My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) put the point succinctly earlier when he said that we are suffering public pain for private profit.

The hon. Members for Langbaurgh, for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) and for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), all of whom inhabit the Conservative Benches, have frequently told us that the workers on Teesside are sitting and longing for privatisation to arrive; they are desperate for privatisation and the chance to buy shares. If the matter is put to them in terms of quick money and profit, people will respond in the way that Conservative Members tell us they will, but it is important for Conservative Members who represent Teesside to realise what has happened.

I quote some of the differences between the current prices of shares and the issue price for privatisation. The issue price of British Petroleum was 363p, its current price is 248p; for British Gas, the figures were 135p and 130p respectively. For BAA, the issue price was 245p, and the

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currrent price is 104p. So Conservative Members should be straighter when talking to workers on Teesside about what the price of shares will bring them in the long run——

Mr. Fallon *rose——*

Ms. Mowlam: I shall not give way, because Conservative Members did not.

Let us examine the issues of privatisation that concern the workers on Teesside. I shall explain the worries they have expressed in my surgeries. They are concerned about guarantees of their pensions, terms and conditions—the Bill offers none. As my hon. Friends have said, the workers see public money being spent for private profit. Clause 14 clearly explains that public money will pick up the cost of advertising. The Minister will not tell us how much that will cost, now or during privatisation. In answer to a parliamentary question on 18 January we were told that the advertising cost for British Telecom was £11·7 million; for Britoil, £3·1 million; and for British Gas, £11·5 million. So we have some idea of how much public money will be wasted on the privatisation.

We have also heard quite a lot about the debts that will be written off to make British Steel a more profitable bet for the private sector. The Minister shakes his head, so we look forward to hearing from him why this privatisation will be different. Why will it be different from 1980, when £100 million was written off for the National Freight Corporation, and when £160 million of Government loans were written off for British Airways? Perhaps it will be different because the Government already wrote off £3,000 million for British Steel in 1981, and another £1,000 million in 1982. Perhaps the Government have managed to write off some debts through the back door already.

I am a new Member and I do not completely understand clause 5, so perhaps the Minister will clarify it for me. It states that the Government will be appointing —I presume, after the Bill becomes law—nominees for the purpose of the issue or allotment of securities. If the DTI's press notice of 1 February is correct, I presume that that has already been done. I know that my hon. Friends have already asked this question, but the answers were unsatisfactory. Has clause 5 been pre-empted before the Bill came before Parliament?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman) said, the ISTC has fought hard, nationally and locally, to show what British Steel can do, along with workers and management in the industry. On Teesside, we want economic progress and not financial speculation. That will be achieved by leaving British Steel where it is now—in the public sector.

8.45 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) who made an eloquent, passionate and committed speech on behalf of his constituents. It was based on his expertise in the steel industry and on a feeling that pervades the whole of Lanarkshire and Motherwell —of fear for the future of the jobs, families, community and steel workers, because of the threat to Ravenscraig. His eloquence stood in marked contrast to the Minister's speech.

The Minister started off with a philosophical ramble around the privatisation houses. He informed us in the course of discussing old battles that the battle is now over and won and the ideological tussle finished. I do not want to get into a philosophical dispute with him, but he is mistaken if he thinks that. He mistakes minutes for hours. Although he may have made advances in the past few years, if it comes to the choice between unfettered free enterprise, irrespective of the consequences for human beings, and a planned, sensible intervention in the economy, in the course of time the Minister's philosophy will be washed up on the shores of history like the anachronism it is.

There is some nostalgia in the debate, because there have been battles. In my case, the nostalgia is bitter, because almost a quarter of a century ago my predecessor, in his maiden speech, argued strongly for the necessity of returning British Steel to the public sector because of the desperate need for investment, job security and long-term security for the industry. Today we are debating the very opposite — the Government's dogmatic insistence that the publicly owned steel industry, no matter how healthy, profitable, productive and efficient, should be returned to the private sector and hived off for private profit to the Government's friends in the city.

Privatisation is a bad deal for the taxpayer, the work force, Scotland and Britain. In the first instance, the taxpayer will, as usual, get the worst deal. As was admitted earlier today and is recognised on all sides, the taxpayer subsidised the steel industry through its loss-making period and through rationalisation to the tune of £5 billion. The same ordinary taxpayer, for whom the Government shed crocodile tears in their publications and propaganda, has footed the bill for the massive investment that accomplished the turnround in British Steel's fortunes. That long-suffering taxpayer bore the burden of redundancy payments and the benefits paid to unemployed workers thereafter, and it is our friend the taxpayer who will continue to pick up the tab for any future cost of maintaining labour shed by the British Steel Corporation.

With such commitment, sacrifice and financial investment being made by the taxpayer, it might just be expected that he could expect some return now that the television commercials every evening bear testimony to the strength and profitability of the British Steel Corporation — but no such thing. The Government and their financial friends have entered upon a peculiar sort of contract with the British taxpayer. It can be summed up as, "Heads we win, tails you lose." The sell-off of British Steel also represents the sell-out of the British taxpayers.

Another group has also been sold out by the Government. They have invested all they have in the now profitable British Steel Corporation. In the main, they have little capital to invest; they do not have huge bank accounts and cannot sell Picassos to buy block shares in the new corporation. I refer to the work force of the corporation, who have invested their lives, energy and efforts in making BSC the prosperous concern that it is today. They have accepted cuts in numbers, moderation in wage increases, flexibility in work practices and increases in productivity. What will be their share of the BSC bonanza?

What is in it for the steel workers at Belshill, Motherwell, Llanwern, Port Talbot or elsewhere? Will there be guarantees that their future and plants will be

secure, or will there be, as there often has been in the past, the inheritance of ambiguity and threats of insecurity, which has always come when steel has returned to the private sector? Those workers and their families, particularly in my area, where the threat is greatest, deserve, at least, a guarantee that their future will be secure. The Minister refuses to give such a guarantee.

My constituents work in the shadow of the Ravenscraig steel plant at the less popular plant — less popular among the press — at Clydesdale tube works in Bellshill. Over the past few years, they have been struggling against a decline in their main market, which was directly related to North sea oil activity. In addition, as the Minister will know, fluctuations in the exchange rate have worked against them. They have suffered from a desperate lack of investment in their mills.

Despite those losses of market and difficulties with the exchange rate, the workers and management — to give them their due — at Clydesdale can take some pride in the fact that the order book is filling up, the shift pattern is increasing and losses have been cut steadily. Only yesterday we learned that over the past three months the books have been balanced.

Under public ownership, contingency would be made for short-term fluctuations. There is no evidence in the history of private steel ownership that a position such as that at Clydesdale would be sustained, even though it is suffering in the short-term from factors outside its control.

To safeguard the United Kingdom's strategic position in supplying the North sea oil industry, the Government must give an assurance that substantial production will continue at Clydesdale in the long-term. Indeed, recently the Minister — to give him credit — and the chairman of BSC were able to confirm a more optimistic long-term future. Will that view still be taken when Clydesdale, along with the other plants, is pushed out of the public sector and into the quick-buck private sector? Will we be able to intervene in the long-term interests of the work force, the local community or the British people? Will we be able directly to influence the management about the need to maintain future investment? We will not be in a position to do so, and the Minister knows that only too well. Part of the reason for privatisation is to avoid those obligations if BSC were to remain in the public sector.

The Chancellor of the Duchy told us — no doubt we will hear it again — that he recently came to the Dispatch Box with what he was pleased to call a guarantee for the future of Ravenscraig and the Dalzell works at Motherwell. He made a statement to the House and waved his papers in the air and said:

"subject to market conditions, there will continue to be a commercial requirement for steel making at Ravenscraig for at least the next seven years . . . there will be a similar requirement for plate rolling at Dalzell."—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1987; Vol. 123, c. 1107.]

That was an extremely convincing performance; the Minister is not without charm. I had to push continually from my mind the analogy of Neville Chamberlain waving a piece of paper and promising peace in our time. We were promised steel in our time, subject to market conditions.

I have learnt that a Conservative Minister — Mrs. Thatcher's lieutenant — calling upon market conditions is rather like Pontius Pilate calling for the hand towel and soap. Effectively, that was not a guarantee but a timetable for execution laid out by the Minister for those who had eyes to see.

The paper was as worthless as that waved by Chamberlain. Had he been more honest, the timetable for Ravenscraig could have been summed up as "legislation in 1988, flotation in 1989, amputation in 1990 and termination in 1991". That sums up the Minister's statement. The Bill is a further extension of that.

Market conditions — which were referred to as a get-out for the Minister — were dealt with to some extent by my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South. We could not gain access — primarily because of the intervention of the Minister and the chairman of the BSC — to all the available market conditions criteria and information. My friends on Motherwell district council employed Arthur Young and Company to commission the study that was referred to earlier by my hon. Friend. Time prevents me from elaborating on that study, but the case has been made for an investigation of it in greater depth by the Minister and his Friends.

The Minister referred earlier to the fact that, along with merchant bankers, the Government investigated various forms of privatisation. There is a duty on the Minister — if not tonight, at least in Committee — to make the evidence, conclusions and details of that investigation available to the Committee so that we can ensure that every option has been explored.

The Minister described public sector interest in steel as interference. He blamed us for taking an interest and accused us of lobbying the management of BSC. If it had not been for that lobbying and interference and the political messing about of hon. Members, Ravenscraig would have been closed in the early 1980s. It has been kept alive only by that political pressure. If the Minister boasts of the guarantees that were extended politically by the Government on the one hand, he can hardly decry political interference on the other as being something associated with the public sector that is detrimental to BSC.

We have all heard the lesson before, but the ultimate irony of the statement that the Minister made in December was that it was couched in effusive congratulations — as was his speech earlier — for the record-breaking performance of BSC's workers, which is right. BSC made a profit of £190 million in 1987-88, which is an increase on the profit for 1986-87 of £187 million, and is in stark contrast to the massive losses of the 1970s. I have already mentioned the efforts of the Clydesdale work force, the ability of the Dalzell plate mill to produce a quality of steel that is unavailable elsewhere — which is vital to our defence industry — and the regular achievement of new production records at Ravenscraig.

During 1987, no fewer than nine of the 15 records for production in different parts of the plant were broken. Significantly, one of the only records that was not broken was that for the coke ovens, which was because no amount of physical ingenuity or effort of the workers could overcome the desperate need for further investment. Those factors explain the profits which now make the BSC such an attractive investment for the private sector.

Inherent in the Bill is the abdication of the Government's responsibility to steel workers and their communities. The potential effect of the productive rundown of the Scottish steel plants after privatisation would be disastrous for the communities to which they belong, not only to the steel workers. It is only natural that in highlighting those issues I should have concentrated on the interests of my constituents, but the implications of the Bill are bad for all steelmaking areas in the long term. This

[Dr. John Reid]

cannot be seen as just a Scottish problem; it poses serious problems for workers, steel consumers and local communities throughout Britain. The transfer from public to private ownership will affect future investment and the strategic trading interests of the United Kingdom.

The Government may win the vote tonight, but the real decisions will be made by the British people over a much longer period. In the long run, the privatisation of steel will be judged not on whether it fits the dogma of Conservative Members, was mentioned in the Tory manifesto or fits the philosophy of free enterprise. Privatisation will be judged according to whether it advances the national interest, provides sufficient investment to maintain the industry, protects a strategic industry through short-term cyclical downturns, continues to satisfy the needs of customers and is responsive to the needs of employees and communities. By all those criteria, the Bill and its sponsors will be found wanting in the long run.

9 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport East): I thought that my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) was filibustering. In making such a long speech, he has not advanced the cause of Ravenscraig.

his is the second time that the steel industry has been denationalised — or privatised, to give it its more fashionable description. I remind the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster that the last time the steel industry was handed over to private enterprise it was hardly a success. The steel industry lagged behind its European counterparts in technological advancements and suffered from lack of investment, which is why the Labour Government renationalised it in 1967. The industry today, relatively speaking, is thriving, albeit in a slimmed down state.

The taxpayers provided the resources for the rescue operation and essential new investment, and it seems now that the City is hoping to reap the profits. The operation is being carried out with undue haste, first because although British Steel is presently on a high, the industry is cyclical and subject to booms and slumps. Secondly, the Government, in order to pursue their doctrinaire ambitions, must keep up the revenue from various privatisation measures. Steel, being profitable at present, can play its part in the process.

Little concern has been expressed about the sacrifices made by the work force. In 1976 BSC employed 210,000 people and it now employs 72,000. The communities in which steel workers live have suffered badly from closures and redundancies in the past decade. I recall the traumatic experiences at Llanwern in my constituency, culminating in the slim-line operation seven years ago. That works has risen like a phoenix from the ashes, and I pay tribute to Mr. Bill Harrison, the works director, who has done a wonderful job, as has the whole work force.

I find interesting the attitude of the BSC higher management to the Government proposals. This is one of the few occasions when I have to disagree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) — after all, we are all a mirror of our experiences. To say that Sir Robert Scholey and the people surrounding him are in favour of the privatisation would be an understatement. Sir Robert Scholey has held important positions over the years in our publicly owned steel industry, but he hardly seems to be a supporter of the principle of public ownership, if his recent utterances are anything to go by. Over the years some Opposition Members have questioned whether the industry was in the right hands. That is a lesson for a future Labour Government.

Sir Robert Scholey's henchman, Mr. Llowarch, at a meeting of the parliamentary Labour party's steel group which I attended, indicated that a privately owned British Steel Corporation, to maximise its profits, would reduce exports below the 40 per cent. now being achieved. That is hardly a patriotic sentiment, bearing in mind our parlous balance of trade. In the same vein, that gentleman believes that British Steel would prefer to reduce capacity to the level where it would have to import steel during periods of high demand in the United Kingdom economy. There is no need for steel workers to look into the crystal; they can read the book. They are being warned about what lies ahead.

Of course, the trade unions' attitude must be considered. Mr. Roy Evans, the general secretary of the ISTC, pointed out that the trade unions have always been in support of public ownership of the industry and have advocated it since the 1930s. That sentiment means little to the Government. I agree with the unions that privatisation should be as a single entity. At least we can be glad for small mercies because the Government appear to accept that principle.

What assurances can the Government give about job security for the future? The Chancellor of the Duchy skated over that issue. Would the Government rescue the steel industry if, yet again, it got into financial difficulties? There is the vital question of the pension rights of the work force, and thousands of people who have been forced to leave the industry. There is a good deal of concern over that issue. I know that there were tremendous problems with the privatisation of the royal ordnance factories. The Government should be more forthcoming. We certainly need more solid assurances.

The Bill marks the end of an era. It will put the industry back into all the uncertainties and inefficiencies of the past. It will have an unsettling effect on the steel communities throughout the country which have suffered so much in recent years. It is an unnecessary Bill and Opposition Members are quite right to oppose it.

9.8 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I rise in my customary position as number eleven in the batting order to bring to the attention of the House some points which have already been made. I shall put them into context and I hope that the Minister will be able properly to consider them. I made some points in an intervention, but I am sure that he did not understand what I was trying to say.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) referred to a meeting between the parliamentary Labour party steel group and the two most senior managers—the chairman and the chief executive—in the British Steel Corporation. We asked them what changes would be brought about by the privatisation of the industry in the style of management, in the options for investment and in the way they went about their business.

They made four points. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East has already mentioned that they thought an export quotient of 40 per cent. was too high and that if they wanted to maximise profit, they would

bring that down. Another point they made, which would have serious consequences for the balance of trade, was that they would not want to run the industry at a capacity capable of meeting all demands. It is a cyclical industry. They would want to use imports at times of big demand because that would be more profitable than maintaining a capacity which would cover all states of demand. I hope that the Minister will deal with the consequences of that for the balance of payments.

Thirdly, they mentioned that there would be an attempt to buy stockholders so as to reduce competition in the middleman sector of the industry. The Minister must give attention to that. Is this what privatisation is about—the reduction of competition in the wholesaling part of the industry? Does he give credence to that suggestion? Does he think that it is worth supporting? Is privatisation about taking greater control of the wholesale part of the industry? Will that be good for consumers or will it simply give greater power to manipulate prices for the benefit of profit but not for the consumers of steel?

The last point that they made was one that I think we would all agree with, that finishing end investment should take priority over steelmaking investment for the foreseeable future. That is not controversial.

In the last two or three weeks, in the press treatment of privatisation, two other mysterious announcements have been made by Sir Robert Scholey. I hope that the Minister will deal with these in his reply. The first is that he plans a lot of joint ventures with other EEC steelmakers. Again, will we see a great reduction in competition throughout Europe if future investment is not contemplated so much by the BSC on its own but only for joint ventures with the Italian, French or German steelmakers in plate mills, section mills or whatever? Will this lead to a reduction in competition which will not benefit consumers? After all, we hoped that privatisation might bring benefits for consumers, if the Government meant what they said.

There has also been a strange reference by Sir Robert to workers' shares. He has said that he wants some form of employee share ownership within the industry on a long-term basis, where workers would not have the option of selling their shares. We asked the steel unions if they knew anything about this and they said that BSC had not said a word to them. What kind of privatisation is it which is presented constitutionally to the House, with other bits being leaked to the press which have not been discussed properly with the trade unions? The impression is that the interests of the workers are paramount, yet the trade unions have not been consulted. Is it part of the kidology with which the measure is presented?

We are told that privatisation is supported by workers and that it will benefit consumers. Yet it will really mean a reduction in competition, and, through a phoney mechanism which has not been discussed with the trade unions, workers will be told, "You will love this. We will not ask your permission to do it but you will have funny money shares which you will not be able to sell. That is why we have not bothered to consult the trade unions about it, because they might have had strong views."

That is not a good way to approach the privatisation of such an important industry. It reveals that the Government are in a rush to privatise the steel industry. I was interested in the comments of the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) who made the point that this was not in the Queen's Speech or in the Conservative manifesto. The measure has been brought in because of problems with electricity and water privatisation. The hon. Member for Taunton was right to suspect that it has been slotted in well ahead of schedule, long before it was planned and long before it is proper from the point of view of investment. It is a rush job. There is every danger that it will be a botched job. For instance, for how long has the British Steel Corporation been making a profit? Roughly 18 months. Its finances are healthy and its performance has been magnificent. There is no question about that, but it has been in profit for only 18 months.

Would an investor honestly think it proper to take on an industry that has been in loss for most of the past 15 years and suddenly makes a profit once in that time? It has been helped by the fact that many of its investments have turned out to be very good and currency movements have turned in its favour, with the pound – deutschmark – dollar triangle working exactly right for most of BSC, barring the tubes division.

On the basis of 18 months' profitability, would it not have been proper to hang on for about three years of solid profitability before thinking about its sale? Its absence from the Conservative manifesto indicates that. There would be a much healthier price-earnings ratio after three or four years of continuous profits, and the investors and taxpayers could see how BSC had resisted changes in currencies and the trade cycle. If there is to be a downturn in the economy, as most commentators believe there will be next year or the year after, how will British Steel respond to that? Will it still be profitable, or is this sale an example of political opportunism, combined with "short-termism" in the City?

Although the Government will probably be able to sell British Steel this year, will they get the proper price for it? They will get the proper price only when purchasers can see three years or four years of continuous profitability. If the sale has to wait until the next general election, so much the better—for the taxpayers, who will know that they are getting the proper price, and for investors, who will know they can put a reasonable valuation on the industry. They would see that this is not just a fly-by-night job, dreamed up to fill the gap left this year because of the Government's difficulties with the privatisation of electricity, and because they do not know what to do about the nuclear power programme and the electricity industry, as they cannot privatise both. They are having difficulties with the water industry over splitting the regulatory side from manufacture. That is political opportunism. The Government needed a privatisation in this financial year. Steel made a good profit so the Government said, "Let us pull a rabbit out of a hat. Let us bring the steel industry down the slope to privatisation."

But the Government will not get a proper price-earnings ratio for the sale of BSC because the record of profitability is so short. That is why I believe privatisation now is an appalling way to deal with an asset of huge importance to taxpayers and, above all, to the communities that depend on it and the workers in the industry. This unholy rush will leave the management in charge of the industry and determined to shrink it for the sake of profit maximisation, rather than to expand it for the good of the country's balance of payments, the communities, and the workers in the industry.

9.17 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): The debate started with the Minister mourning the fact that steel is the

[Mr. Donald Dewar]

stuff of political controversy and is very often in the eye of the storm and subject to pre-emptive strikes from Governments of the Left and the Right. I suppose that that is self-evidently true, but I am not sure that it advances the argument very far.

At times, this has been a slightly quaint debate. For example, the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) appeared momentarily in our midst to argue that those who work in the industry wanted it to be privatised. He offered personal testimony of that fact. I suspect that the hon. Member for Darlington is the sort of man who imagines that his constituents want the poll tax, so I am not entirely convinced by his arguments.

The Minister, in his opening, showed a touching interest in our intentions as a party when we return to power. I have to say to him that the question is not whether it is right to renationalise steel in a few years' time, but why we should privatise it now. Why sell off a major industry in the way that the Government propose? For the right hon. and learned Gentleman to complain about our political approach is a piece of cheek. He smells dogma in our midst. Considering the Prime Minister's ruthless charge, he doth protest too much.

I thought that the Chancellor of the Duchy was in a very illogical position. He gave much space to management achievements within British Steel and how it had triumphed despite what he described as the restraints of the public sector. He went on, very properly, to draw attention to the advances in productivity, efficiency, the export record and a very large number of factors in the undoubtedly excellent performance of the industry in recent years.

If that is common ground, the question that then shouts out for an answer, and was not answered, is why in those circumstances do we privatise. Is the industry unable to modernise itself? Has it got a poor efficiency rating? The answer, of course, is no, and the Minister very fairly said no. We have come through — and many Opposition Members almost personally bear the scars, at least in constituency terms — a dramatic, indeed a traumatic, period, with perhaps 1980 being the low point in that cycle. But in Consett, Corby, Scunthorpe and Workington, and in various places in Wales and Scotland, we have seen the most horrible and horrific social consequences of closure. These have been borne with considerable courage by those communities, which have worked through them, in many cases, to a position of success, which has been recorded in recent figures.

It is extraordinary to remember that in 1974 in my own area, in the south Clyde region, British Steel directly employed 24,500 people, and today it is under 5,000. If one looks at results — and again this point has been made — man hours per tonne of liquid steel have come down in eight years from over 14 to under six. As for profit — and the Minister referred to this with some satisfaction — in 1986-87 it was £178 million, and in the last half-year for which figures are available it was about £190 million.

So again I ask: why the change? Why plunge this industry into confusion and uncertainty? Why must we have privatisation when we have a successful steel industry that is beating some countries such as Germany, where it is already a private sector operation? It really is an odd belief that is offered by the Minister and one or two of his supporters that in some way we want to do it because, while putting the industry into the private sector, we can sanitise it, withdraw it from political controversy and hand it over to the clean, ethical, sharper world of business.

Anyone who looks at the industry, at the politics of the European Economic Community and at the problems that will arise over steel quotas in the next few years will know that there are probably many sacrifices still to be made. There will certainly be attempts to force us into further cuts in capacity. In particular, there are difficult issues with the talk about contraction of another 7 million tonnes in European terms. It is living in the land of make-believe to imagine that somehow steel can be extracted from that political climate and handed over to commercial interests which will run it in some way beyond controversy and in tune with the wider needs of the country.

I do not think that the case has been made out, and certainly, as a Member who comes from Scotland and represents, in this at least, all the steelmaking areas, I can say that there is a deep resentment about the uncertainty and the difficulties that lie ahead after privatisation.

For Ravenscraig in particular — to concentrate on that for a minute or two — we have the so-called guarantee of steelmaking for a seven-year period. This has been presented on occasion as if it were immutable, bankable and copper-bottomed, but of course it is open to considerable qualification, as the Minister has conceded. It is "subject to market conditions", and the Minister says, after all, this was true of the old guarantee. But the difference is a fundamental one. As has been pointed out again and again by the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) in his capacity as Secretary of State for Scotland, under the old arrangements, under the guarantee that is about to expire, it was a political decision that was keeping Ravenscraig safe. It was said again and again that if there was any threat it would have to be considered at Cabinet level. It was that political element, properly paraded as a badge of honour by the right hon. and learned Gentleman, that was the key to the matter.

If that is replaced by what is no more than a business projection in the private sector, without that political backing, it is an illusion to pretend that it is on the same basis as what has existed up to now. I do not believe for a moment that, without that political hold, we can face the future in a privatised steel industry with any great confidence.

I do not want to weary the House with a long history of the relationship between Ravenscraig and the management and higher management of British Steel. However, I was amazed that the Minister failed to understand that there was a problem of credibility in that respect. I do not think that he is a stupid man, although he is many other things. On this occasion, he was being disingenuous, and indeed probably perverse. Anyone — I do him the credit of assuming that he is someone in this respect — who has examined Select Committee reports over the past six or seven years, who has read the press reports and who has met and talked to Sir Robert Scholey, as many of my hon. Friends and I have done, knows that there is an inherent hostility and a feeling that there is an excess of capacity and that for all sorts of geographical and, perhaps, almost mythical traditional reasons it is assumed that Ravenscraig is the plant at risk.

Few believe that that situation will change as if by magic simply because privatisation has been brought in by

fiat of the Prime Minister. The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) recognised that fact at least, and I am grateful to him. He said that the guarantees given were valuable. Perhaps we can compromise on that. They may be worth something, and I am relieved to hear, on the small print, that the guarantees will be included in the prospectus when privatisation comes, if we reach that stage.

I put it to the House that there is still a substantial problem that will not go away and to which any honest hon. Member representing steel interests will have to address himself. What happens now? Are we to turn over the steel industry—Ravenscraig and Dalzell in particular—to a future in which the profit motive rules and in which an opportunity to increase profits from £400 million to £500 million a year will be taken, whatever the social cost and the cost to the public interest? We must ask ourselves the genuine question how we can expect the directors of a public company to reconcile their loyalty to their duties under the Companies Acts with their wider social concerns and economic responsibilities to the community.

The best protection for Ravenscraig or any other steel plant in this country is the defeat of the Bill. Opposition Members aim to retain, if at all possible, a structure that allows sensible balanced decisions in the public interest to be made and controlled in the House. As realists, we have to face the fact that the scheme that the Minister has espoused may be bulldozed through, and there is no doubt that he is determined to pursue that course. If that happens, there will be a great deal of anxiety and dismay in my area and in many others.

I fully understand the arguments advanced by my hon. Friends the Members for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) and for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) about the report produced by Arthur Young. That report has been with us for only a few days but it is clearly intended as a serious contribution to the debate. It is right as a general principle that this House should consider every option if this misconceived scheme of privatisation is to be pushed through. As my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North argued effectively and forcefully, it would be wrong to slam the door on any contribution to the debate before it has been properly examined, and the report cannot yet have been properly examined.

I resent the Minister's implication that those who have the genuine concerns of Ravenscraig at heart have been rushing around in a desperate search for someone to rubbish good news. If that were true, it would, indeed, be a cynical exercise. However, very few people view privatisation as good news and no one is interested in rubbishing anything. We are interested in finding correct solutions and some protection for a fundamental industry that provides the livelihood of a whole community.

Our opposition is fundamental. If privatisation goes ahead we shall continue to fight to save the industry—whether Ravenscraig or any other major plant. I must protest against the idea that the proper realism shown by my hon. Friends from all parts of the country about the difficulties and dangers should be condemned by Ministers as defeatism or an attempt at knocking copy. Again, it was the hon. Member for Eastwood who recognised the reality of the arguments and the difficulties. The sooner that that kind of common sense prevails in the thinking of Government Front Bench spokesmen, the better for everyone in the debate and in the communities which depend upon the steel industry.

Of course, I accept, as was said by my hon. Friends the Members for Motherwell, North and for Motherwell, South that, with the closure of the hot mill at Ravenscraig, the whole plant will be in great difficulties. That is true. But we do not want the closure of that hot mill. Perhaps the Minister would turn his mind to his guarantee for strip production at Ravenscraig. He referred to 1989 with an air of pride, but 1989 is tomorrow for the steel industry in terms of its planning. The greatest contribution that he could make towards giving some credibility to his good intentions would be to take the decision now that strip mill production should continue at Ravenscraig.

Given British Steel's profitability and record, there is no case for the closure of major capacity. If I may pray in aid an unlikely ally for me, I was interested to see this week in *The Economist*—a magazine which is not hostile to the idea of privatisation; I would not pretend that it was—that there is a survey of the industry and the article concludes:

"That should not mean closing British plants, now efficiently run and unsubsidised."

That is right. There is no such case, whether it be in a nationalised or a privatised industry. That is our approach and that will be our attitude to any threat, whether it be in Ravenscraig or South Wales, in Teesside or any other part of the country where that threat may materialise.

The Under-Secretary of State has a number of questions to answer. There were some extraordinary doubts in the speech of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, which was remarkable for what he did not have to say. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) asked him specifically about the timetable and form of the flotation. It is right that the Minister should lift the lid of the box a little way and let us see what creepy crawlies are within. It is important that he should be a little franker than his senior colleague was about exactly what is proposed.

Several of my hon. Friends have properly pressed the Minister about the matter of control and ownership. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) fairly and frankly put the point of view of his work force and also raised the whole question of foreign ownership and control in a privatised industry.

Mr. Barry Jones: My hon. Friend also heard our views from Wales on what might happen with regard to organisation after privatisation.

Mr. Dewar: Yes, indeed. My hon. Friend made a concise and straightforward speech, as is his style, but the point that I was making concerned control and ownership and it is important that the Minister should say something about that.

We know from the statement made in December by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster that the control or restriction of foreign shareholdings did not instantly appeal. He said that almost in an aside. It is owed to us to know whether there have been second thoughts on that or whether that is the Minister's last word.

I can understand the scepticism of hon. Members from both sides of the House on this issue, given the Government's record. Indeed, that scepticism must be in a remarkably healthy state on the day in which the capitulation over the independence of Britoil has been

[Mr. Dewar]

announced from the Dispatch Box. The whole concept of the golden share has been well and truly devalued. But there are, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham said, other possibilities. For example, there is the 15 per cent. limit in the Rolls-Royce equity.

No one would question the fact that there is genuine public anxiety about the possibility of the kind of opportunistic raid upon a privatised British Steel Corporation that has been carried out, largely in conditions created by Government incompetence, by the Kuwaiti Investment Office on BP. It is important that the Government explain exactly where they stand, and, if the alarming silence in the Chancellor's speech is to be taken as meaning that there will be no control, no attempt at protection or safeguards, I must give warning that that is a serious matter which will be open to widespread criticism far beyond the Opposition Benches.

Our position on privatisation is clear. I make that point because, with all respect to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce)—whose speech entertained me greatly—I have to say that I had considerable difficulty in understanding where he, or indeed his party, stands on the privatisation issue. *[Interruption.]* I am a simple person: I simplify all great and complex matters, and I shall always think of his party as the Liberal party.

The hon. Gentleman outlined three or four options that might become relevant after privatisation, and was careful to make it clear that he advocated none of them. It may well be said that he could have advocated all of them, and what he said would have been as important and as relevant.

What I found even more remarkable was that the hon. Gentleman was very unclear about his attitude to privatisation itself. Fortunately, those of us with long memories can remember the Liberal party's election manifesto, and also the exchange of letters in Scotland between the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) and myself during the election. In a letter written on 18 May, the right hon. Gentleman made it clear that he was in favour of the privatisation of the steel industry. I suppose that that is no surprise. The Liberal amendment welcomes the Bill because

"it paves the way for the successful flotation"

of British Steel. After all that, all that I can do is congratulate the hon. Member for Gordon on managing to get himself into the right Lobby at the end of the day, for it seems to me that the confusion in that camp is remarkable.

Let me conclude by saying that I fear that the Government will show a brittle inflexibility on the issue. It is remarkable—this point was fairly made by the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson)—that no mention was made of the measure either in the election manifesto, which I had remembered, or in the Queen's Speech, which I had not remembered until he reminded me. I believe that it has been pushed through with indecent haste.

With a group of my Scottish colleagues, I went to meet the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster shortly after his appointment, in the aftermath of the general election, and we went to see him again in January. He gave us some hope at that time. He went out of his way to say that strategic decisions about investment and structure in the steel industry would not be conditioned by privatisation considerations. The impression that was given was of a lengthy time scale. The right hon. and learned Gentleman did not disguise the fact that privatisation was at the end of the road as the Tories saw it, but our clear impression was that it was way down that road, perhaps several years away. That impression was gained not only by me but by all my hon. Friends at that meeting, many of whom are in the Chamber now.

It is extraordinary to discover that we are now debating the Second Reading of this Bill—a Bill which has been introduced with a haste which means that almost every interest will be bulldozed, and which will exclude any consultation, any imagination or understanding of the fears and problems that will arise. The only argument for the Bill can be stated in the language of short-term financial gain; there is no other logic. I also hold that it is hardly an honourable exercise, even in terms of popular capitalism.

I was amused by the suggestion of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster that investors would be able to form their own judgment on the merits of investment. What will really happen is a ruthless hard sell, glitzy and cynical, with all the ethics of the most primitive of market places—television, advertising and all the drama and promise of profit with no proper consideration of the risks and difficulties.

This is a shoddy measure which promises destabilising uncertainty. It is totally irrelevant to the real interests of the industry, and it is based on dogma. The Labour party is unequivocally, implacably opposed to it, and we shall vote accordingly.

Mr. Morgan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to be licking and sealing 28 envelopes during a debate on a very important topic? Will it not give a very bad example to new Members such as myself—reverse Privy Councillors, as we like to refer to ourselves—and is there not an office for the purpose in the Duchy of Lancaster?

Mr. Holt: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you say that it is not in order for Opposition Members to eat in the Chamber?

Mr. Speaker: I hope that we shall all keep the standards of the Chamber.

9.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry (Mr. Robert Atkins): We have had an interesting debate today and to that extent I am delighted to be able to summarise it in the short time available to me. Indeed, I am pleased to have less time, because that has allowed other hon. Members of all parties to make speeches that they would not otherwise have had the chance to make.

I must confess that, having sat here throughout the whole debate, I am fascinated by the fact that although this was supposed to be one of the most controversial issues facing the Scottish Labour party, prior to the wind-up speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), there has not been what one might call a full complement of the Scottish Labour party present this evening.

To make progress, I should like to try to summarise the debate—*[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members would keep quiet, I might be able to answer some of the points that they have raised during the debate. If they are going

to shout all the way through, they will not get the answers until they choose to serve in Committee. The sooner they learn that, the better for all concerned.

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who opened the debate this afternoon for the Opposition, gave the lie to the new trendy Socialism to which I noticed the hon. Member for Garscadden referred at the culmination of his speech when he talked about "glitzy", show business, television, walking on cliff tops and a variety of other things. He even mentioned red roses which, dare I mention it, were pinched from my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and those other Lancastrians who deserve to wear them— *[Interruption.]* It is no good Opposition Members ranting. I shall answer the debate in my own way, and if they do not like it they can do the other thing.

The hon. Member for Dagenham raised several questions to which he wanted answers. However, he will understand only to well that many of those questions cannot be answered immediately becaue, as he knows, the Bill is an enabling Bill, and not one to privatise the British Steel Corporation, as it is presently stated. In those circumstances, some of the questions that he asked—for example, about the date of flotation, pension arrangements and share arrangements generally — will be considered, answered and discussed in Committee when we get there.

However, there was one question about the so-called golden share. I emphasise what my right hon. and learned Friend stated: we think that there might be a case for an anti-takeover provision, but we are not yet persuaded that specific restrictions on foreign ownership are necessarily required. On consideration, that view may change, but at the moment that is what it is and what we believe it should be.

The hon. Member for Dagenham gave us the new Socialist leadership's views on life. He thinks that he might renationalise the British Steel Corporation, but does not know how. Despite the image of yuppie Socialism, he is still in favour of clause 4, but is not entirely certain what he will do, or how he will do it, if he comes to renationalise.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that the Ravenscraig-Shotton-Dalzell issue is not one for commercial judgment. We beg to differ. We think that the achievement of the British Steel Corporation has come about because of commercial judgment, which is why we believe it to be important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), who apologised for not being here for the wind-up speeches this evening, made a speech that we all recognise as one of considerable knowledge, having held this post as the Minister responsible for the steel industry before the previous election. My hon. Friend welcomed the Bill and made an effective contribution, especially in his remarks about the hon. Member for Dagenham, whom he squashed most effectively. My hon. Friend, more than most, understands the industry. He asked questions about the European regime; the House will be aware that my right hon. and learned Friend will deal with that matter in detail after this debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey and others asked about the so-called writing off of debts. Let me make one thing absolutely clear: no subsidies and no writing off of debts are involved. Anyone who says so has got it entirely wrong.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) thrashed around looking for options to evade the commitment that he gave in the alliance manifesto during the last election. The hon. Member for Garscadden also made reference to that. We — I suspect that Labour Members share our view — were conspicuously unimpressed by the difficulties he had in changing the view he held at the election. His performance summed up the many alliance and Liberal parties that we presently have in the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) spoke with some knowledge and authority about the issues as he sees them. I intend to answer the points that he and other hon. Members have made.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The Chief Whip is making notes.

Mr. Atkins: It would help if Labour Members, having posed questions, tried to listen to the answers. At this time of the evening the House would expect a Minister to try to answer the debate. People who have made contributions deserve comment upon them. Labour Members who have asked questions will get some answers if they belt up. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]

The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), who has an emotional and lifelong commitment to nationalisation, made a speech with which I cannot take great issue because of his stance over the years. We will just have to agree to differ over the conclusions he draws. I defer to his experience and knowledge in this issue because he represents a steel constituency and he speaks with authority on the matter. None the less, I disagree with him.

Much reference has been made to the Arthur Young report. The Young report looked at the Ravenscraig-Shotton-Dalzell option, but without, as hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, all the facts. Because of the commercial confidentiality involved in providing the information to Arthur Young, my right hon. and learned Friend believed that it was not right to provide all the facts, and I agree.

It must be borne in mind that the Government must look at the industry as a whole, whereas Arthur Young was commissioned to look at the industry as it particularly related to the Ravenscraig-Shotton-Dalzell option. Incidentally, even the Arthur Young report commented that there was no need for substantial capital expenditure on the RSD option over the next five years. Reference was made earlier to the fact that there should be more capital investment, but even Arthur Young has discounted that argument.

For reasons of confidentiality, Arthur Young was not privy to all the information available to BSC, the DTI and its professional advisers. The Department and its advisers had no hard and fast rule in the early stages about the break-up or whether the corporation should be sold as a single entity. Indeed, Samuel Montagu, which examined the matter closely in the spring and autumn last year, made it quite clear in its conclusions that it was firmly against the break-up of the corporation.

Throughout the debate, reference has been made, especially by the hon. Members for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) and for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), to the involvement of Shotton in the RSD option. I can do no better than to reiterate what the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) said, in a number of interventions

[Mr. Atkins]

supported by other hon. Members representing Welsh constituencies, in supporting what Mr. Joe Gibson, the chairman of the joint unions committee at Shotton, said:

"We feel that our destiny must continue to lie with the big unified BSC and not with any carved-up small units as suggested. We feel that this would be in our best interest and probably be so in the long run for Ravenscraig too.

We see our future as staying with the corporation rather than splinter groups. We are happy about our future and we have expansion and good investment".

That effectively destroys the arguments by Scottish Members, including the hon. Members for Motherwell, South and for Motherwell, North. The unions disagree with them.

Dr. Bray *rose*——

Mr. Atkins: Time is pressing, and I should move on. It is also the case——

Dr. Bray *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the Minister does not give way, hon. Members must not persist.

Mr. Atkins: It is also the case that the executive of the ISTC——

Dr. Bray: Chicken.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is no good hon. Members shouting in that disgraceful way.

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman is behaving like a headless chicken.

It is also the case that the executive of the local ISTC rejected the studies sponsored by Motherwell district council and backed by local Members of Parliament. Supporters of the idea argued that it would make for a viable, integrated company and remove doubts about the plant's future, but union representatives, particularly from Shotton, doubt the scheme's feasibility. The executive argued that, if British Steel is to be privatised, it should be sold as a single unit. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may not like that, but I am only telling them what they have already been told and what has been expressed publicly by Opposition Members from Wales about what they think of the division as proposed in the Arthur Young report. Hon. Members may not like it, but it happened to be the case.

Let me remind the House of the solemn assurance given by the BSC in December:

"Subject to market conditions, BSC expects that there will continue to be a commercial requirement for steel making and continuous casting capacity of the five integrated plants for at least the next seven years."

That is exactly the same as in the previous two three-year extensions.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was right when he suggested that the Labour party is turning over every stone in an attempt to find something nasty to say about the very plant that it wants to keep open. The hon. Member for Motherwell, South has even resorted to seeking advice from so-called Right-wing groups, such as the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Institute. It seems slightly odd that he has to resort to his opponents to try to justify his case. The continual knocking of Ravenscraig and what it stands for is scarcely likely to help Opposition Members, but that is largely what we have come to expect from them.

About a month ago, I had the honour to lead a trade mission to Poland, during the course of which I visited Huta Lenina, which is the largest steelworks in the country. It employs over 30,000 people, using equipment more than 30 years out of date. Some of the expert business men who were in the mission with me reckoned that the figure of 30,000 could be cut to 10,000 because that was all that was needed to run the plant more productively, effectively and profitably. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to listen to what the Minister has to say.

Mr. Atkins: The Poles who met us at the steelworks wanted to know about the British Steel Corporation and why it had achieved such efficiency. They wanted to know what equipment the British Steel Corporation was using — *[Interruption.]* I am fascinated by Opposition Members. They have made great play of the Bill being controversial and of how concerned and upset they are, and all they can do is giggle and laugh about the issues that they claimed were serious. That sums up the fraudulent, synthetic opposition to this important Bill. We shall not forget the attitude Opposition Members are adopting— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must ask the House to listen to the Minister answering the debate.

Mr. Atkins: The attitude of the Poles who were running a steel works to the success of the British Steel Corporation is a measure of the scale of the achievement of the work force and management of the corporation and one of the chief reasons why it is right that the corporation should once again be returned to the private sector.

During the debate on the nationalisation of steel in May 1965, the then Minister of Power, Mr. Fred Lee, took as a central theme the following:

"The crucial test of our proposals is whether they are well designed to meet the challenge of the future to which I have been referring."

A subvention by Government and taxpayers of £8·6 billion in public dividend capital since 1967 suggests that those proposals were not as well designed as that Minister suggested.

Later in the same debate, which I had the pleasure of watching from the Gallery, in a rare flash of far-sightedness, George Brown said:

"It has always seemed to me that if it is attempted to impose State control on people who have to earn their living by reference to the profit motive, one is bound to get the worst of all worlds."—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1965; Vol. 711, c. 1582, 1689.]

So it has proved.

If I may return to the theme of the speech made by my right hon. and learned Friend in opening the debate, British Steel must be given the freedom to take its own business decisions. It needs that freedom if it is to be sure of building on the solid commercial base it has now created for itself. It needs to know that it can take decisions quickly, without having to revert to Government at every turn. It needs flexibility and independence if it is to withstand pressure of an increasingly competitive international market. The British Steel Corporation has made outstanding progress in recent years. It has transformed its business into a modern, efficient and profitable organisation, which can compete successfully in world markets.

Hon. Members who understand the steel industry know full well what has been achieved in recent years. If they

deny the success of the achievements of the work force and management, they fly in the face of the facts. I recognise that the corporation was not restored to health without a painful process of rationalisation; it would have been less painful, perhaps, if the necessary steps had not been shortsightedly delayed. My right hon. and learned Friend has described the efforts that have been made and the splendid results that have been achieved. I join him in congratulating the management and work force of the corporation on those results.

A number of the points raised by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides deserve and will get consideration as the Bill goes through Committee. But our record on privatisation, of British Aerospace and a variety of other companies—Rolls-Royce, the British Airports Authority —has been more successful than anyone would have expected, and gives the lie to the suggestion by Opposition Members that the British Steel Corporation will be anything less than a great success in the private sector. The time has come to embark on the next step in the transformation of the corporation into a successful commercial enterprise and to return British Steel to its right and proper place—the private sector. The Bill will pave the way for that step, and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 280, Noes 219.

Division No. 192] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Cartwright, John
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*

Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alan Howarth and
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ray Powell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Ways and Means Motion may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

BRITISH STEEL BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the British Steel Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(i) any expenses incurred by the Treasury or the Secretary of State in acquiring securities of the successor company (within the meaning of the Act) or rights to subscribe for any such securities;

(ii) any administrative expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of the provisions of the Act;

(b) the payment out of the National Loans Fund of any sums required by the Secretary of State for making loans to the successor company.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

WAYS AND MEANS

BRITISH STEEL BILL

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the British Steel Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the imposition of charges to corporation tax by provisions of the Act relating to the restriction of tax losses available to the successor company (within the meaning of the Act);

(b) the payment of any sums into the Consolidated Fund or the National Loans Fund. — *[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

Steel

10.14 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Trade and Industry (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8560/87, the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 1st December 1987 and 4127-88 on steel policy, 8803/86 and the proposals described in unnumbered Explanatory Memoranda submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 7th July 1986 and 15th July 1986 on trade with the United States of America in certain steel products, 8993/86 and COR 1 on aids to the steel industry (1984-85), and the proposals described in the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 19th October 1987 on delivery levels of certain steel products of Spanish and Portuguese origin onto the rest of the Community market; supports the Government's commitment to a Community steel regime which provides a framework for a steady return to free market conditions; and endorses the Government's agreement of measures which place a temporary limit on steel exports to the United States of America, thus safeguarding access to the American market.

As the House has now satisfactorily sorted out the problems of the British Steel Corporation privatisation, it is obviously a suitable occasion to go on to this debate where we concentrate on the international, particularly European, aspects of the steel market. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members, particularly those beyond the Bar, who are not staying for the debate please leave quietly?

Mr. Clarke: The debate arises from four European Community documents and four explanatory memoranda relating to the steel industry, which have been recommended for debate by the Select Committee on European Legislation. I apologise to the House for the fact that it was necessary in the best interests of the United Kingdom to agree to decisions on two measures, those concerning the future European Coal and Steel Community steel regime, and the RESIDER programme, before a debate could be arranged. Hon. Members who have followed the decisions that we took at the Council meetings before Christmas will accept that on both subjects the Government entered into an agreement which is non-controversial and is accepted on both sides of the House as in the overall interests of the United Kingdom and the steel community.

The documents as a whole deal with the international steel regime. The most important subject which they cover is the European steel regime based on quota shares of the market and an arrangement which protects steel producers against a catastrophic fall in prices. The European quota regime was introduced a few years ago when the European steel industry was going through a period of acute crisis. The regime is generally a tribute to the work of Commissioner Davignon and was brought into play at a time when there was huge excess capacity throughout the European Community. Prices were at risk of collapsing altogether. The likely reaction to a collapse of market prices at that time would have been that the various member states would have gone in for a competitive arrangement whereby each tried to cover the losses of its own industry, and they competed with each other by offering subsidies to try to sustain their industries.

The purpose of the system when it was introduced was to try to keep supply and demand roughly in balance to prevent prices from falling to ruinous levels while surplus capacity was removed. The arrangement was always meant to be temporary; it was never intended to be timeless. The aim was to try to create orderly marketing arrangements within the European Community to win time for the necessary changes to take place and for restructuring to be carried through.

As is so often the case with temporary arrangements, the arrangements have lasted for some years. In my discussions with my European colleagues, whether they be Ministers from other member states or people connected with other sections of the European steel industry, I find that inevitably some people are from time to time tempted to regard a quota regime as being desirable in the longer term. Certainly there are those within the steel industry who like to think of the industry as one which is naturally cartelised and is best arranged on that basis. It has the attraction, particularly for the weaker steel producers, that by such means prices are kept artificially high and the businesses can be kept open at levels of capacity far above those which would be necessary for viability if open market conditions were ever restored.

It is certainly not my view that the regime should be permanent or that cartel systems are desirable in anyone's interests. I do not think that it is in the interest of steel producers to try to share markets between basically inefficient producers. Certainly it would not be in the interests of steel users, and we must remember that in this economy, as in any other, more jobs are created by the use of steel than by its production. Anything which artificially inflates the price of steel from the steel producers is of no advantage to the general economy of Britain or Europe.

Therefore, once the temporary arrangements have served their purpose, it is necessary to go back to the reasonably free market conditions described by my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) in the previous debate as desirable and in the interests of consumers and the industry generally. We have reached a stage where the system is beginning to cause more harm than advantage from the British viewpoint. Consumers face higher prices than they would otherwise do, and sometimes encounter shortages, and certainly constraints on the supply of the raw material because of the quota effects on the market.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): That is the effect of the European Community.

Mr. Clarke: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that that is the great danger. When I meet some of the more robust defenders of the quota arrangements in the European Community, they seem to believe that we should set up a sheepmeat regime for the steel industry as a long-term process. The Government are against that proposal, as it is not in anybody's interests; nor is it in the interests of BSC.

In tonight's Second Reading debate I think we all agreed, in discussing the interests of the BSC, that it will thrive in freer market conditions. It is now among the most profitable and efficient steel producers in western Europe. Indeed, BSC's production costs are substantially lower than those in the United States of America, and in other leading European steel-producing countries. We are

looking for a return, in the most orderly fashion possible and as quickly as possible, to essentially free market conditions.

A key problem, however, which is at the root of our debates this evening and on other occasions about the arrangements dealt with in the documents before us is over-capacity. The European market remains dogged by massive over-capacity in European steel production, which means that plant is still in place, providing only temporary jobs, and capable of producing steel that can never be sold in a free market. That is so even after the great restructuring of recent years. Over-capacity is estimated by the European Commission at 30 million tonnes, which is not much less than the amount of over-capacity already cut out as a result of processes in the past six years.

There were reductions of 32 million tonnes between 1980 and 1986, which I shall not trouble the House with this evening. We have made substantial progress in the past two years. Coated sheet and reinforcing bar were liberalised from quota from the beginning of 1986. Galvanised sheet was also liberalised at the beginning of 1987, and, on the Commission's proposal, we finally liberalised wire, rod and merchant bar, which are known in the trade as light long products, from 1 January 1988. The quotas are steadily being removed.

BSC is now the only company in the country affected by quotas, as the private sector steel producers are not affected by them any more. The great problem that remains concerns products usually described as flat products, such as hot rolled coil, cold reduced sheet and plate and also heavy sections. In those products, there is over-capacity of about 21 million tonnes out of the total of 30 million tonnes that I referred to.

Originally, the Commission proposed for these products a new production quota system from 1 January 1988 to last for three years. I was not the only Minister who found the original Commission proposals distinctly unattractive. That was the starting point of discussions by the Council of Ministers before Christmas 1987. I am glad to say that they reached agreements that will bring us steadily closer to the end of the quota system, on terms that we would find acceptable and attractive.

The discussions at the Council of Ministers on 21 September 1987, which was the first meeting that I attended after the long recess, brought unanimous agreement that substantial excess capacity still remained in Europe. The Ministers at least agreed on that as a good starting point, and it was decided that new quota arrangements should not be established for 1988 and beyond unless enough guarantees of capacity cuts were reached to ensure the future viability of the European steel industry. Having agreed that we saw no case for quotas continuing without excess capacity being reduced, I regret to say that in September there was little prospect of the Ministers present at the meeting agreeing on how that excess capacity should go.

Therefore, the Council agreed that we would invite the Commission to appoint three persons, who almost inevitably became known as the "three wise men", to advise by mid-November on how adequate commitments might be obtained. The idea of going to three outsiders with industrial experience certainly appealed to me. It was a German proposition put forward by the German Minister Martin Bangemann, and strongly supported by me on behalf of the United Kingdom. The three wise men thus began their consultations.

After the consultations with steel producers and Governments, the wise men reported that firms were not ready to give commitments to the level of capacity reductions that were being sought. They failed to come up with the necessary commitments. I am glad to say that the wise men recommended a phasing out of quotas to provide a gradual return to a free market.

That was the background to the Council of Ministers which I attended on 8 December, which considered revised proposals from the Commission along the lines of the wise men's recommendations. Quotas for flat products and heavy sections would be phased out over a six-month period, but with a possible extension until 1990 for some products if adequate guarantees of restructuring could be obtained.

In that Council I pressed for the earliest practicable return to a free market and for progress with the further restructuring which was necessary for the long-term stability of the market. The Council at that stage simply deferred the final decision on the future steel regime to a further Council meeting to be held on 22 December. The Commission was asked to make a further effort itself to secure from Governments clear and credible indications of willingness to reduce capacity by a sufficient amount. That took us to 22 December.

At that stage, after a long discussion, the majority of the Council were satisfied that we had at least got promising indications of willingness to remove excess capacity in plate and heavy sections, but some members, including me on behalf of the United Kingdom, were extremely anxious that we should not simply roll forward the quotas because we were making promising progress towards restructuring. We wanted the quotas extended for a very limited period while those indications were turned into some practical and credible signs that closures would take place in the countries in which they were needed.

The result was that we finally agreed that it was worth while to maintain the quotas on the products in question for six months, during which time binding guarantees of capacity reductions would be sought. If such guarantees, amounting to 75 per cent. of the over-capacity, were forthcoming, quotas would continue until 1990.

For hot rolled coil and cold reduced sheet, we put precise figures. We agreed that there should be a possibility of prolonging these quotas, provided binding guarantees of 7·5 million tonnes of capacity reductions in hot rolled coil were given by 10 June. I pressed hard to have these precise figures for capacity reductions required in the Council's conclusions, and they are there, as hon. Members will see if they look at the reports that I have given to the House in the past.

I believe that, if that very demanding target of 7·5 million tonnes is achieved, we shall have taken a very worthwhile, major step towards achieving a healthy and viable Community steel industry. If we do not get that restructuring put firmly in place as a commitment by our June meeting, under the terms of the Council's conclusions quotas for these categories will end. I must also say that, as a legal point, prolongation beyond June is dependent upon the Commission's being satisfied that the conditions of the treaty are met—in other words, that a state of manifest crisis, to use the terms of the treaty, still exists for hot rolled coil and cold reduced sheet.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman make it clear that the 7·5 million tonnes which he is seeking in capacity reductions will not involve closures in the United Kingdom or include the output of the hot mill at Ravenscraig? Secondly, can he explain how it came about, if there was that 7·5 million tonnes of excess capacity in Europe, that there is currently such a shortage of hot rolled coil in Europe, and why the delivery period has gone up to 17 weeks?

Mr. Clarke: I can give the answer that the hon. Gentleman would prefer. There is no question of the British Government offering any undertakings of closures to meet any of the targets. One obvious reason for that is that I wish quotas to be phased out as quickly as possible. Therefore, there is no way that I shall go to the Council of Ministers offering to restructure to help to achieve the targets. If other countries want quotas to continue, they will have to come up with the necessary closures.

Secondly, for all the reasons discussed in the previous debate, it is obvious that the British industry is far more advanced in the necessary restructuring than any of the other European industries. Therefore, no one could reasonably look in our direction. We believe that people should look first to the unprofitable centres of production and consider taking the difficult steps needed to get that unprofitable production off the market and permanently closed down.

I have no ready explanation for the shortages of products from mills. Sometimes supplies of products are interfered with by the quotas, which inhibit the ability of companies such as the BSC to move in quickly when there are delays in supplies, because it is not possible——

Dr. Bray: All the hot mills are working flat out at the moment.

Mr. Clarke: I do not think that the hot mills are working flat out anywhere in western Europe. They are working flat out up to their present manned capacity. To the best of my knowledge and belief—I shall look into the matter because the hon. Gentleman is extremely well informed in these matters and almost as close to the steel industry as I am—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I say that I am closer only because I am a Minister in the Department. I do not believe that the United Kingdom hot mills have been working up to their full capacity for many years. The problem in the British industry is that our hot rolled mills normally work at a lower capacity than those elsewhere in western Europe. We shall leave it to the corporation to decide that problem in future years. Everything depends on the ability to respond to the market, which will be helped if we can get rid either of excess capacity in western Europe or of quotas, or preferably both.

Let me return to the Council's conclusion of 22 December. If sufficient guarantees of restructuring are not received by 10 June, quotas for all products will end on 1 July 1988. I am determined to stick to those conclusions and I hope that the other Ministers will do likewise. In my experience, Council meetings sometimes start as though the conclusions of the previous meeting had never been reached. In practice, we have built on previous conclusions, and the conclusions of 22 December were agreed by us all to be binding on all member states.

I have already said that I shall not offer any restructuring for the United Kingdom. I believe that if sufficient capacity reductions are not given voluntarily to retain quotas, the ordinary pressures of the free market will force out the less profitable capacity, leaving profitable and efficient producers such as the BSC to take advantage of the opportunities in a more competitive market. We must ensure that we do not then return to competition in state subsidies. To ensure that companies do not cheat by falling back on subsidy, I shall continue to urge the Commission to enforce the ban on state aids as strictly and effectively as it has hitherto. I am sure that Commissioner Peter Sutherland is determined to do that.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): The Minister says that under the existing decision, if the commitments are not delivered by 1 July, quotas will simply stop. Could not the Council, by a majority at its next meeting, decide to extend quotas once again? The Government would not be in a position to veto such a decision, made by majority vote.

Mr. Clarke: It is not like that. I shall give my hon. Friend my understanding of the position, and if I get it wrong I shall correct myself by letter. The Council is governed by the treaty of Paris and not the treaty of Rome with which my hon. Friend and I are reasonably familiar.

As I understand it, if the Commission put forward a proposal, that proposal could be carried by a majority. However, if the Commission put forward no proposal, there is no way that the Council could impose its own regime, except unanimously. If the Commission takes the view that there is no need or legal basis for further quotas and that the undertakings have not been forthcoming, it would require the unanimous vote of all the member states represented in the Council to overrule the Commission's decision. There is no prospect of my failing to support the Commission in that situation. I am quite sure that at least one other Minister—the Dutch Minister—would not move from his position either.

Only if the Commission is induced, contrary to our conclusions at the last Council, to put forward proposals despite the fact that the commitments have not been forthcoming, will we reach the position where in certain circumstances majority voting will be an issue. Given all my dealings with Commissioner Narjes, it would be extremely unlikely if, at this late stage, after all the meetings that I have described, any such proposition were forthcoming.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: My right hon. and learned Friend may be in danger of being too optimistic, despite the super fight that he is putting up, bearing in mind that in paper 640 of 30 November, the Commission made it quite clear that it did not agree with all the conclusions of the three wise men.

Mr. Clarke: Yes, there is always the danger of being over-optimistic. I am always startled when I get to these Council meetings to find that one or two Ministers will launch upon their contributions as if they had never been present, let alone agreed to the conclusions of the previous Council. But, as we go through the various meetings, they steadily realise that time is running out on that kind of proposition. The expectation that every Minister took away from the previous Council was that, unless commitments to a restructuring of the size that I have described are forthcoming, quotas will come to an end. I have no doubt that some will fight a rearguard action.

I do not want to be over-optimistic, but at the moment I feel extremely confident that we have taken the

important step towards getting these restructuring commitments. Removing all that spare capacity from Europe would get to the root of the problem more than anything else. Without restructuring, there will be no quotas but a free market, and, as I have said, no competing state aids within that free market.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): The Minister referred to the danger of state subsidy if the quotas are ended because there is no agreement. I am relieved that the Minister is not prepared to concede extra cuts in our own quota, but is he aware that there have been allegations that the Italian steel industry has already been trying to get around the regulations by such means as giving unrealistic delivery dates with a built-in delivery penalty, thereby not making the delivery date and paying the penalty price as a way of subsidising the price of steel? How would the Minister deal with such examples?

Mr. Clarke: I shall deal with the document on state aid in a moment. I have certainly heard such allegations and others. The Commission investigates and enforces the present arrangements. This is a tricky area because several corporations are in such a desperate state that their Governments are seriously tempted to go into state aids. I am glad to say that, whenever this is discussed, in the end the Council unanimously confirms its commitment to enforce the ban on state aids. In the end, it is up to the Commission to ensure that everybody in practice is following that. If there is any solid evidence to support what the hon. Gentleman says, which I do not find too surprising, I would be happy to look at it because we are keen that the ban on state aids is enforced.

Mr. Morley: As the Minister will be aware, such evidence is hard to come by, but does he not agree that it is better to have an orderly return to a free market rather than a sudden end to quotas with dangers of the type to which I have just referred?

Mr. Clarke: These things are alleged to be going on within the quota regime. There are some horribly loss-making businesses in western Europe at the moment, as the hon. Gentleman will know. At the moment it is quite important that the ban on state aids is properly policed and enforced. Of course, we are in favour of an orderly return to the end of quotas. Those were the words used by my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw). I am quite happy to agree to that. Occasionally, that word is used by people who really mean a slow return to a free market and who rather resist the end of quotas. If we do not get this restructuring, 1 July is a perfectly suitable date to bring the quota regime firmly to an end.

Let me briefly touch on the other documents, to which I hope I shall do justice without taking up too much time. One concerns the regional fund. As an integral part of the effort to remove the Community's over-capacity, the Commission has also proposed to introduce a regional programme under the European regional development fund, which will provide assistance for steel closure areas.

That programme rejoices in the name of RESIDER. The Commission also proposed to set up a scheme of special social measures, predominantly funded from the European Coal and Steel Community budget, directed at aid to early retirement and re-employment. In order to cover a funding shortfall for these social measures, the Commission proposed to transfer a sum to the ECSC budget from the general budget of the European Communities.

The RESIDER programme was agreed in principle on 22 December, and adopted on 2 February. I welcome its adoption. The programme provides for some 300 mecu —about £208 million—in the European Community for various measures for small firms, similar to the existing business improvement services produced by the Community in the past, and for infrastructural development. We expect it to support my Department's enterprise initiative. I am anxious to see that as many areas of the United Kingdom as possible will qualify, but it is still too early to judge which those areas will be.

However, the Council did not agree to the proposed transfer from the European Community general budget to fund special social measures. The Council urged instead that the Commission should fund any shortfall in resources for 1988 from the ECSC reserves. On behalf of the United Kingdom, I opposed the budget transfer in view of the tightness of the EC budget, and because I remain to be convinced that the sums required could not be found from the ECSC reserves which I consider to be more than ample for any ordinary purpose, and for this one. I shall continue to oppose any such proposal from the Commission for a budget transfer.

A document has been recommended for debate on state aid. As I mentioned earlier, the continuing strict enforcement of the ban remains an important and integral part of the regime. Document 8993/86 contains a report from the Commission on the application of the rules on aids to the steel industry as required under the previous aids code. The report covers 1984 and 1985, the final years of the old code. The current aids regime imposes a general ban on subsidy to steel.

A document has also been selected—EM 19 October 1987—on the position of Spain and Portugal, which are soon to be integrated fully into the internal ECSC steel regime following the end of their transitional arrangements. In the case of Spain, the arrangements expire at the end of this year; those for Portugal expire at the end of 1990. The memorandum of 19 October 1987 concerns one aspect of the transitional arrangements for Spain and Portugal—the establishment of the permitted levels of deliveries of Spanish and Portuguese steel products to the rest of the Community market.

Restriction of deliveries is permitted during the transitional period, while the Spanish and Portuguese steel industries are restructured and subsidy of their industries is permitted. The Commission proposed in July 1987 to raise the respective delivery limits for 1987. The accession treaty provides for such an increase if the Commission is satisfied with the progress of Spanish and Portuguese restructuring plans. The proposal to raise the limit for Portuguese deliveries was quite acceptable, as their level is negligible and we believe that the industry is genuinely making efforts to restructure.

The increase in Spanish delivery levels, however, caused the United Kingdom and other member states some concern, as we were not satisfied that Spanish restructuring was proceeding as it should. In spite of our repeated requests, insufficient information has been provided concerning progress with restructuring plans, or showing that Spanish firms will have achieved viability by the end of the transitional period as required by the accession treaty. The Government were not prepared to

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agree the increase, but our position was unfortunately not shared by enough member states to prevent a majority. The increase in delivery levels was accordingly agreed by the Council of Ministers in November 1987.

The final documents—I apologise for the number of documents, but they have all been selected by the Committee for debate — concern the European Community's trade in steel products with the United States. United Kingdom exports of steel to the United States, like those from the rest of the Community, have been subject to some form of quota restriction since 1982. At that time, the EC-US steel arrangement was limited to 10 categories of steel. It has been subsequently extended and now covers 36 categories, semi-manufactured steel products being the most recent addition in September 1986 —and also, incidentally, the most difficult to agree.

In early 1986, the United States imposed unilateral restrictions on Community exports of semi-finished steel products. The Community, in accordance with our rights under GATT, responded by introducing retaliatory measures against imports from the United States. Trade disputes are always extremely unfortunate, and we in the United Kingdom took the view throughout that, in the event of the Community and the United States concluding an agreement on European Community exports of semi-finished steel products, it would no longer be sensible for the Community to maintain its retaliatory measures.

Such an agreement was reached later that year. Under it, I am glad to say, both the Community and the United States agreed to repeal their unilateral measures. The agreement has enabled the United Kingdom to send more semi-manufactured steel products to the United States than was possible under the unilaterally imposed United States quotas. There was in effect a 50 per cent. increase in Community quota for 1986 and annual increases until the end of the arrangement. The Government considered it sensible to enter into that arrangement. The extension to the EC-US steel agreement came into effect on 15 September 1986.

The arrangement is one of several that the American Government have entered into with other steel-producing countries. At the moment, all are due to expire at the end of September 1989. As the House will be aware, political events due to take place in America between now and September 1989 might affect the outlook. Taken together, I believe these measures represent good progress towards our objective of a more open world market for steel. We have taken the necessary steps to safeguard continuing access to the American market for producers of semi-manufactured steel products. Liberalisation of the internal European market is well under way, and might, with good luck, be completed by July. We continue to press for the removal of excess capacity and the enforcement of the rules against state aids.

I commend the motion and ask the House to give its general approval to the stance that the Government have taken.

10.43 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): As the Minister's triumphant and deeply moving peroration, which I thought he read beautifully, will have suggested, we are dealing tonight with a kind of Euro-dustbin of accumulated measures which, frankly, should have been dealt with months before. Indeed, my first question is: why are measures relating to decisions, many of which were taken in December, only just being debated now? Why were we not able to debate them at the crucial time?

I do not want to go on about the detail of the measures; I want to come straight to the nub of the matter—the production quotas on steel—because they suggest that the Community is stymied on this issue. It cannot achieve production cuts and cannot agree to remove the quotas. In that situation, it got the three wise men to travel and deliberate. They reported in November-December that there was nothing in the manger—no infant cuts did the wise men discover which might grow to capacity, eventually matching demand. Indeed, they were between £20 million and £30 million short of the cuts that they wanted.

In that situation, the Minister is right to say that the United Kingdom has taken its share of cuts. Indeed, we are not opposed to him. We support him in saying that. However, we want to be assured that in saying that, he will stick to it and that we shall not have another performance such as we had when the Prime Minister went to Europe, saying one thing loudly and bravely, but coming back, waving a piece of paper saying, "No food mountains for our time." We want to be assured that the Minister will not be rolled over, as has happened in the past.

The cuts in the output of steel in this country since 1975 have been massive and far bigger than those of any other member of the Community. Production is now three quarters of its 1975 level, whereas those of other countries are at 80 per cent. or 90 per cent. and, in the case of Italy, at over 100 per cent. of the 1975 production levels. Like Herbert Smith, of the miners in the 1920s, who, when asked what wage cuts the miners had to offer said, "Nowt; miners have nowt to give", the Minister must say "Nowt" to Europe and say it firmly and absolutely. He must say it without hints, with no lawyers' talk about the fulness of time, and no nods or winks about commercial considerations——

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I seem to recall that historically Herbert Smith of the National Union of Mineworkers used to take his false teeth out first before saying "Nowt". Is my hon. Friend suggesting that as another tactic for the right hon. and learned Gentleman?

Mr. Mitchell: Yorkshire men know that Herbert Smith also used to wipe the sweat of his brow with the slack of his belly, but we shall not go into that tonight.

I hope that the Minister can assure us that there will be no nods or winks about the fulness of time and commercial considerations regarding Ravenscraig. Ravenscraig is central to Scottish manufacturing, steel and industry and Scottish national feeling. In Europe the Minister must hold exactly the same line as he has taken here. There must be no European double-talk that allies the possibility of capacity closures with the closure of Ravenscraig.

The steel industry is at a turning point. We are now getting the necessary return on public ownership. The massive investment and restructuring that took place in the 1970s to form five integrated plants and the loss of jobs and the sacrifices of the 1980s are now reaping success. We now have a lean, productive, competitive industry up to and beyond the best in European standards. What do we do in this situation?

The Government's response has been irresponsible and trivial—to seize the moment with gibbering gratitude for

a quick return by means of the privatisation programme. The money will go into the Government's back pocket. That is despite the assurances of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) during the election campaign that the steel industry was not an early candidate for privatisation and despite the statements of the chairman, Sir Robert Scholey, that the industry wanted to show a record profit before privatisation. The Government have rushed in to grab the moment for privatisation.

The Government have overridden all the assurances that they had given and they have overridden Sir Robert. They have made their traditional approach of the huckster and demonstrated asinine irresponsibility. They will hand the BSC to the speculators because they need the money and there is a hitch in the privatisation programme.

Given the situation, the response of any Government with the national interest at heart would be to use the new power, competitiveness and industrial strength of the BSC to expand production, compete and win back the ground that was lost over the years and to clobber the European competition. A response dictated by national interest would have been to go for quantity even at the expense of profit—to go for output—to rebuild the strength that has been lost.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Given that the hon. Gentleman is now getting carried away with his arguments about privatisation, is he seriously arguing that our approach should be to go for quantity of steel production regardless of profit? The point of the debate is that we are facing the fact that a number of European companies and Governments have taken such an approach for too long. When the hon. Gentleman comes back to earth and stops being carried away with his own rhetoric, surely he will agree that we must get rid of surplus capacity. Our problem is the need for restructuring. We are trying to close down the kind of plants kept open by people in the Mezzogiorno, who go round spouting the rubbish which the hon. Gentleman is now giving to the House.

Mr. Mitchell: I did not intend to give the Minister the chance to amplify his brief, he has already had long enough to read it. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman is more acquainted with silk than steel he should know that we have taken a much bigger cut in production than any of our European competitors. That is why the ground lost must be made up. The Government's motives are suspect. If their motive is to privatise, they want the maximum return on profit rather than the increase in output that is required by the national interest. Those two things are different. Because of the Government's obsession with privatisation, they are rushing through the privatisation of steel, and that is suspect.

If the Government are to rush blindly into privatisation——

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mitchell: I shall give way, but not at this moment.

We must face the fact that the Government intend to privatise the BSC. However, when the European quotas go —we want them to go—it will be a much tougher, competitive business. It is estimated that there are 200 million tonnes of over-capacity in the world, and 30 million tonnes in Europe. The Minister has mentioned Spain. He must be aware that, given that other European countries are building up their steel industries, the BSC is faced with two major disadvantages.

Governments in other European countries have shown that the steel industry is more important to them and their national interest than our Government believe it to be. They have shown that by taking smaller cuts, because they realise the impact of those cuts on the industrial economy, and by declining to take more. That is why the three wise men got such a short response. No volunteers were forthcoming. That shows that they will make every effort to support their steelmaking capacity.

The Minister has assured us that aid will be invigilated. How closely and intensively will he invigilate the invigilators? How can we be sure that no indirect state aid will be given behind the door? I have a copy of the 1985 report by the National Economic Development Office on indirect state aid in the EEC and its impact on the EEC steel industry. It is an impressive piece of research. I shall read some extracts from the document, as it is the fashion of the Government to turn to the executive summary rather than to the full deployment of the arguments. The report states that the term "indirect aid"

> "includes improvements in general infrastructure where industry does not subsequently meet the full costs (eg new ports), the region of social services which industry would otherwise be required to pay (eg certain severance payments), reductions in the costs of local services etc.".

The report distinguishes two areas where European Governments have been strong in support of their steel industries. In respect of transport, the report states:

> "All of the four countries subsidise their railways. The level of subsidy varies, being highest in Italy. France and Germany subsidise inland waterways to certain extent and some aid is available in the UK; all subsidise ports (with the exception of the UK). Road transport aid is harder to define".

The report also deals with labour cost reductions. It states that there are schemes for employees threatened with redundancy available in Germany and France. The report gives the figures for the total estimated indirect aid to the steel industry in Europe. In France, labour-related schemes receive £36·7 million and £94 million of transport aid is provided. At the other end of the scale, in the United Kingdom, labour-related schemes receive £12·4 million and a measly £2 million of transport aid is provided. In other words, a massive total of indirect aid is going to the industry in France, Germany and Italy, which is not going to British industry.

France provides a total of £2·25 to £7·22 of indirect aid per tonne of steel produced. The United Kingdom provides £0·78 to £1·66 of indirect aid per tonne of steel produced. Italy provides £2·88 to £6·18 of indirect aid per tonne of steel produced. Other countries provide a considerably higher proportion of indirect aid per tonne of steel produced than Britain does. The British industry is therefore asked to run in a competitive race with a ball and chain around its leg. The Government, who believe in the free market, also believe in slanting that free market in favour of finance and against manufacturing industry. They put up the value of the pound. In real terms, the pound has gone up by 13 per cent. since the last quarter of 1986, which removes the competitive advantage that British Steel has gained in the fall since 1986.

The Government have increased interest rates, which are a burden on the industry, and they are about to increase electricity charges, which are an even more

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considerable burden on the industry. The Government expect the industry to run with a ball and chain around both legs.

Mr. Quentin Davies: The hon. Gentleman talks as if it were a virtue to maintain unproductive steel capacity. How can the hon. Gentleman expect the Government to go on pouring money down the drain or proceeding with this massive distortion of resource allocation which he now appears to be advocating?

Mr. Mitchell: I should never give way to the hon. Gentleman. He looks more intelligent than he is. We are competing against those who support the industry indirectly in a way that we are not. That is not equal and fair competition. The Government say that they believe in the free market, yet they are slanting that market against the domestic manufacturing industry to which that industry is central.

As for the increase in electricity charges, I quote from a letter sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) by the chief executive of United Engineering Steels:

"the proposed increase of 15 per cent. will put up our company's cost by at least £7 million . . . the 15 per cent. increase is equivalent to reducing our sales margin by 25 per cent."

If that is the cost for one steel producer, what will it be for the entire British steel industry? That is yet another burden that the industry is being asked to carry because of the Government's doctrinaire obsession with fattening electricity for privatisation for more money than they will get from the privatisation of British Steel. If the CBI has managed to get up from its knees and say that this is monstrous, it really must be.

The papers before us tonight are not the real issue. That is, what will happen to the industry in the 1990s, amid intensified competition? It is all very well for the Minister to smile blandly, because he is irresponsibly going for a quick profit while the window is open for privatising the industry—he will grab the cash while it is there. If that is the Government's record while steel has still been a public corporation, when they have been able to draw off money from steel through the external financing limits and to skimp on necessary investment—there has been no major authorisation for two years—how much worse will steel fare when it is flogged off and the Government have washed their hands of it, having given their limp, wet handshake to British Steel and told it to get out into the world?

If the Government weight the odds against British Steel in this way, we shall be launching it into an extremely difficult position, in a highly competitive European market, against competitors that are more effectively supported by their Governments than our Government have ever shown themselves willing to do. Unless the Government commit themselves to doing better by manufacturing industry, by supporting it and running the economy for growth, jobs, expansion, investment and steel, they will launch British Steel on a sea of troubles and wash their hands of the consequences of their own irresponsibility.

11.3 pm

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): When I read the motion on the Order Paper, I was worried by its tone, but having heard the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister, I was reassured that at last we had a Government who would go to Brussels and tell the people of the Common Market that time has run out and they must get themselves organised. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said that the Government—I quote his excellent rhetoric as accurately as I can—had extended to British Steel a limp, wet handshake. That is to ignore the billions of pounds that this Government, and the last Labour Government, have given British Steel to put it in the competitive position in which it finds itself today.

The standards of performance in the integrated strip mills in Ravenscraig, Llanwern and Port Talbot are as good as anything to be found in West Germany or Japan, in price, quality and delivery. We should be proud of those plants for what they have done. It is fascinating that, should any hon. Member want to go to any of those steelworks, he will amost certainly be taken around, as Opposition Members know, not by the management but by the trade union leaders. That is a measure of the confidence and integration of managers and workers in those companies, and of their belief in the future of the enterprises.

It is welcome news that, as my right hon. and learned Friend said, 1 July will mark the end of quotas. The ending of quotas is long overdue. British Steel and the Government have prepared our steel industry for the competitive nature that it will have to exhibit to stand up to its competitors in the Common Market and the rest of the world. We must stand for no more nonsense from the other members of the Common Market, which have had years in which to put their businesses in order. They have had plenty of time to get their work done, and we have set an example which they are long overdue to follow. When we look at the chances of success of British Steel, the sooner the quotas are lifted and the British companies can exhibit their qualities in the world market, the greater will be the profitability and employment in the steel industry.

I agree with the hon. Member for Grimsby also on indirect aid, which is totally unfair. It had been concealed effectively until recent investigations brought out that foreign Governments are prepared to go to Brussels, put their hands on their hearts and say that they will restructure industries, while shovelling money into the support of those industries, against what they plead are the grave and real intentions of the Common Market.

I agree with the hon. Member for Grimsby on one final item—electricity prices. It is gravely worrying that there should be an increase in the cost of the prime commodity which defines the nature of the production of steel—energy. We must not, if we can possibly avoid it, load that great organisation which has been built up with a burden which is not of its own making, which other Common Market countries are not burdening their companies with, and which will hinder the competitive capability of British Steel.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Warren: If I may conclude, I will be delighted to hear my hon. Friend's contribution later.

It would be wrong not to give credit to a former Member, who is now in another place, Lord Joseph. At a very difficult time in the steel industry he stepped out of

the line of policy which one might have expected from him. He went straight into the heart of the Treasury and produced the resolute determination from the Government to get the British Steel Corporation on to a footing which it could get on to only by putting yet more taxpayers' money into it to make it the success it now is. British Steel, when it is privatised, will aptly repay the taxpayers for what has happened.

I view with some scepticism the Americans' attitude to access to their market. In another context I have dealings with American exporters around the world. They seem often to slip past Cocom, just ahead of us, but it is not always easy to get into their markets with traditional products. I hope they will realise that GATT is there for the protection of the whole world. They have perhaps been caught napping on that and may learn from it.

A statement was made in London today by the Japanese ambassador who, recognising the fortitude and capability of the management and workers of British Steel, said of British business that if an Olympic games were held today, our managers and men would be winning the gold medals; and that goes for British Steel.

11.9 pm

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): I am speaking on behalf of my party as the Welsh affairs spokesman and as a member of a family who for three generations have worked in the steel industry in south Wales. For the past seven years we have lived with the European quota system; now we see a real sign of it ending. We welcome that, but we wonder whether Europe has the will power to bring that about. We are pleased to hear that the Minister hopes to phase out quotas by 1 July, but we wonder whether that will become a reality. Removal of the quotas would allow United Kingdom production to expand competitively; there is no doubt about that.

Our hot strip mills are running well below capacity, at around 70 per cent., which means that the fixed costs of the industry are not favourable in relation to output. As the Minister said, our production is the lowest of any EEC country. As hon. Members have said, our current competitiveness has been obtained only at great loss—the loss of 100,000 jobs in the British steel industry. Many of those jobs were in Wales. Before the cuts in the British steel industry, our work force represented 24 per cent. of the steel industry work force in the Community. Now it represents only 14 per cent. That has caused real hardship and has wiped out completely such plants as East Moors, at Ebbw Vale, and Shotton and Corby. There is a massive list of plants that have suffered in England, Scotland and Wales. That is because we have played the game.

There must be no further cuts whatever in the British steel industry. Our capacity is now about 13 million tonnes, which is low in comparison with the possible output of the industry. We are opposed to any further cuts in British Steel, particularly at Ravenscraig, where it is vital that the plant should be kept going. The production in Llanwern and Port Talbot has been outstanding. The investment in those plants has paid off because of the dedication of the work force, and has produced profitable steel at a high output. They are the profit powerhouse of British Steel, and the work force has responded magnificently to that investment.

If we agree to quotas in future, the future of Ravenscraig will be in severe doubt. If quotas remain, 3,000 jobs will be on the line, and 2,000 more jobs in support industries. However, if we are allowed more of a free market, Ravenscraig may eventually get increased investment, but that depends entirely upon what happens with the privatisation of the steel industry. If the Government privatise the industry, there is a need for more market opportunities. Clearly, the market must be freed.

Quotas are not the only factor. An analysis in the *Financial Times* of 13 November put the crux of the problem rather well:

> "The British Government has promised not to reconsider the future of Ravenscraig"

for the time being. It continues:

> "West Germany is refusing to give up any of six hot strip mills on the ground that they are among the EC's most efficient, a position further complicated by the age-old rivalry between Germany's two biggest producers, Thyssen and Kloeckner. On top of that, the Italian and French Governments could suffer political crises if there were major plant closures at Italsider and Usinor-Sacilor."

Therefore, immense political problems are bound up in the business of quotas.

It is no accident that many of the steel plants in Europe are sited in areas of high unemployment. In the past, investment has been deliberately made to overcome some of those problems. It will take great political will on the part of those European Governments to grasp the nettle. I am not convinced that the Minister can push them hard enough and that he can provide cast-iron guarantees that the quotas will be phased out. Therein lies the rub.

The fluctuations in the pound also need to be considered, as they can affect the level of competitiveness. Indeed, I request the Minister to urge the Government to join the European monetary system as soon as possible. That would provide greater stabilisation of prices in Europe, and those prices would not be distorted.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and others spoke about state aid. There is no doubt that it is almost impossible to police state aid. It is one of the most difficult subjects that the Minister has to tackle. It is difficult to identify hidden state aid. Some of the plants that are under threat in Italy are in the south of the country. That area is very poor, and very difficult political decisions will have to be made.

There must be cast-iron assurances about the policing of state aid and the phasing out of quotas so that the British steel industry will be able to benefit from its new-found competitiveness.

11.14 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): My worries about this proposal are reinforced by the speech of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey). There is a great similarity between what we are doing tonight and what the Prime Minister announced last week. She announced that we are to give an enormous amount of additional money to the Common Market because we have received assurances that things are going to get better and that agricultural spending will be curbed. When we pointed out that we had received exactly the same assurances in 1984, we were told that we were spoiling everything and that instead we should talk about all the exciting new developments that will arise because of stabilisers, restraints and goodness knows what.

Every hon. Member knows that the agreement to pour more money into the Common Market will lead to exactly

[Mr. Teddy Taylor]

what happened last time. Even if the so-called curbs were to work, the Commission could get round them quite easily by means of accountancy devices. Everybody I speak to in private conversations knows that it is a sick joke and that all we have done it to pour more money into the Common Market to finance what is already being done.

In 1985 we were given solemn, binding pledges, recorded in *Hansard*, that there would be an extension of quotas for a maximum of three years. We were told that three years might not be needed, but that three years would provide more than enough time to sort out the European steel industry. Tonight we are being asked to extend the quotas in the hope of obtaining assurances. But the cuts are not agreed. We are told only that the Government hope that they will soon be agreed and that quotas will come to an end.

The Minister referred to an extension of six months, but he did not have time to explain that it will not be just for six months. For plate and heavy sections there will be an extension to the end of 1990. According to my calculations, subject to metric measurement, that is not exactly six months.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My hon. Friend is referring to the proposal. We have agreed to a six-month extension, after which the quotas will come to an end, unless there is a commitment to restructure the industry.

Mr. Taylor: I am referring to the paper that was presented to us today by the Under-Secretary of State for Industry. If the restructuring pledges are not made and if the Commission then proposes another six months or a year, is there anything that the Government can do about it if a majority of the member states say that there should be yet another extension? Despite the solemn pledges of 1985, I fear that we have agreed to another extension, in the hope that something will turn up.

The British steel industry is at least as competitive as those of other European states, but what about the rest of the world? In its relations with the rest of the world, Europe is becoming more and more protectionist with every day that passes. We talk about competitiveness and free trade, but we impose the most horrendous restrictions on trade with the Third world and other areas where the costs of production are very low. I fear that we are making the Common Market into an organisation that will try to live by taking in other people's washing.

As to costs, Europe is becoming a high-cost economy, covered with protection in almost every area. Europe is awash with unemployment. The Minister from his previous position may be able to confirm whether I am right in saying that the current level of unemployment in the European Community is higher than in any other country or group of countries in the world with the exception of Tibet and El Salvador, where there are special considerations.

I fear that on agriculture and steel we are just getting pledge after pledge. We are congratulating ourselves in the hope that something will happen in the future, but all we do is pour in more money, become more uncompetitive with the rest of the world and thereby dig our graves on competitiveness.

I have two brief questions which I think deserve answers. We have been told that this is just for another six months and that if we do not get pledges of some kind in six months, quotas will stop. What happens if we get pledges? What happens if they say, as the farmers have said, "We will try to cut back." I am sure the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor will appreciate that it is difficult for farmers to give such assurances. The assurances they have given are like those one would get from a 12-year-old child if one said, "I promise to increase your pocket money if you guarantee that you will not grow by more than an inch a year." Most children would sign such a pledge quickly and mean to keep it, but it is very difficult for children to promise not to grow.

That is what has happened on the CAP. The farmers mean well, and the countries mean to do it, but they cannot, because of the pressures. What happens if we get assurances? What happens if the countries agree to cut their steel industries? Does that mean that quotas continue, or does it mean that they stop?

Secondly, if the countries do not agree, and give no commitment, what happens then? The Minister has been studying this for a long time and I am in no sense an expert. But my understanding is that, because this is under article 85, the Commission simply puts forward a proposal for an extension: the majority of member states agree, and quotas go ahead as before.

Finally, does the Minister not think that there is merit in the suggestion that, while we may be becoming more competitive within the EEC, we are becoming, in the rest of the world, more and more protectionist and high-cost, and therefore more and more awash with unemployment? Britain stands out like a beacon because of the Government's policies. Our unemployment is down, while Europe's unemployment, sadly, is the worst it has ever been. Therefore, we must ask ourselves if it is a good thing to have a reunion.

After the solemn pledges that it would be an absolute three-year maximum, with no question of it being continued, is there not a danger that the Minister will come back in another six months with the assurance that the countries are going to try to cut back, like the child and the pocket money pledge, or with a statement that he is afraid that we shall have to have another six months of quotas because the majority voted against doing anything?

11.23 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): The Chancellor of the Duchy has been handling the negotiations with considerable skill and determination in the short time that he has been Minister. I am sure he is aware that the problems which he has been dealing with in the steel industry go back many decades. He should not get too frightened about the talk of a necessity to work at 90 per cent. capacity. Other industries which are less capital-intensive have managed to survive with 70 to 90 per cent. capacity without the trauma that there is in the steel industry.

The problem comes from the incontinent behaviour on pricing. Selling steel is fairly complicated. Late delivery and such things make it difficult to identify a clear market price. Thought should be given to less incontinent behaviour that would ease the transition to a fully competitive regime. It should be possible to see beyond the preoccupation with excess capacity to the next stage, that of inadequate capacity. It takes about 50 years for the steel industry to work through that well-established cycle.

If one is reasonably optimistic about the course of development in world trade, with reference to the latest report by MEPS Europe that was used in the Arthur Young study, that points to the coming danger of inadequate capacity.

The problems that will arise if we reach a better balance in production concern the cyclical behaviour in the steel market, with stockists screwing the thing up totally and there being mystery about what is happening. Demand for steel will decline because orders are banged in quickly to get delivery in time. That trend tends not to affect final levels of demand, but it produces many headaches for producers who get into difficulties concerning allocation and plant scheduling.

Without wishing to add to the Minister's problems, I expect that this transition will be easier if the European Community begins to look outside at what is happening in the rest of the world. In industrial terms, the biggest tragedy of the modern world is its failure to use the immense industrial capacity of Japan. The loss of human capacity, in the rundown of Japanese industry, including steel, is a great loss to mankind.

The imbalance that that represents is the inability of the developing world to buy steel, to invest adequately and to build up infrastructures to meet its huge needs. There needs to be a shift of balance between the great funds that Japan has to invest overseas, the inadequate servicing of debt to American banks and the wish of the developing world to invest in infrastructure. That position could begin to change if the steel community was less obsessive about its capacity problems and more understanding about the directions of development of world trade.

I am not offering an easy or short-term solution. If the Minister is dealing with problems of inadequate supplies of steel a year from now — and that is possible in Europe — he will need to look much more widely for opportunities and sources, and study the nature of world trade then, and the problems at that time.

Dealing with the specific question of hot rolled coil, the problem is not in relation to capacity of hot mills, but the long pipeline of supply. Llanwern does not have sufficient continuous casting capacity and is not able fully to load up its hot mills. There are blockages in supply, and although there are manned capacity problems, they cannot be corrected overnight in the steel industry. There are very difficult problems to face in a planned market; there are considerable advantages in a much freer market, for which we are heading. But moderation of behaviour is needed from the steel industry in its commercial practices, which will be quite a test for it in the next few months.

11.30 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I have just one question to put to the Minister. Did I hear him say that, on one aspect of the European Coal and Steel Community's job creation provision for helping to staunch job losses in steel closure areas, he hopes to be able to get most of the money for the United Kingdom for the enterprise initiative that he announced a month ago?

If that is correct, is he not saying that this is a reference to article 15 of the new regional development fund programme that was announced some two years ago? Will he confirm that since then his Department and the Treasury have been having a running battle with the fund as to whether the article 15 money is to be spent by local enterprise agencies, which is the view of the European Community, or, as is the view of the Treasury — naturally enough, given its interest in clawing back all the EEC money for central Government plans — is to be used as a way of saving the Government the money it wants to spend on regional development in this country?

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not agree that it was rather naughty of him to claim one month ago that the enterprise initiative was a great new initiative that was going to create jobs in the regions? What he meant, if I understood him correctly tonight, was that the EEC would be paying for it, and, if he was not able to persuade the Community that that was a proper use of article 15, local enterprise agencies that could do the job very much better would be able to get their money from the EEC in the way the European Coal and Steel Community intends.

11.32 pm

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The last point was rather ingenious, bringing in the whole argument about additionality and wider issues on the European regional fund, rapidly switching to article 15 and the fund generally.

Some of the difficulties that we have encountered in making local propositions for funding to the European Commission have recently been resolved. To answer his point, I will let the hon. Gentleman have a note of where we are in trying to sort out the relationship between local government applications and the Government's view of European funding.

What I have described is the early days of the RESIDER programme. I do not think that we have yet addressed the issues that he is describing. It is certainly true that one of the principal beneficiaries of the funds from the RESIDER programme will be the enterprise initiative, but there will be more to it than that.

I will deal briefly with the points that have been raised in a debate which at one point was arousing rather more passion than I had expected.

The hon. Gentleman the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said that there had been some delay in arranging this debate, and that is certainly true. That is a matter that has to be discussed through the usual channels to try to ensure that we get on to these European debates in reasonable time in future.

From what I have heard, I do not think that the Government have taken any decisions in this field with which any hon. Members who have spoken disagree, so Parliament's interest has not been prejudiced in any way. It is also the case that large numbers of documents are referred for debate. I took up some time earlier giving the necessary detailed explanations of the documents on the agreements between the United Kingdom and the United States and the arrangements with Portugal and Spain. It was not surprising that these did not command wide interest in the debate that followed.

Not surprisingly, the debate concentrated on the key point of the future of production quotas and the effect this will have on the privatised British Steel Corporation when we get back to a free market. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) was very scathing about our prospect of ending quotas as we are going at the moment. We have now ended quotas altogether on long products. They came to an end at the end of last year. We are dealing now with flat products and heavy sections, and

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quotas on those two products will not continue beyond the end of June of this year unless credible assurances are forthcoming on getting the excess capacity out.

My hon. Friend asked again about the constitutional position. I am simplifying it, but I hope accurately. If the Commission puts forward a proposition, majority voting determines the outcome on the proposition by a system of weighted voting that is applicable to the Council. But if the Council of Minsters wants to put forward a proposition despite the Commission's opinion, unanimity is required for the Council to impose its own solution. No unanimity will be possible on anything that extends quotas, despite a lack of assurances, because the British and Dutch—I can speak confidently about the British—will not agree to any such Council proposal going forward.

It is possible that people will put pressure on the Commission to put forward a proposal, but the Commission so far has been resolute on this matter. Commissioner Narjes has been clear in his opinion, and I would regard it as an extraordinary reversal of every previous assurance on its part if it went back on them. It is not altogether true that it has gone back on matters in the past.

Mr. Teddy Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I shall not tonight be drawn into the wider issue of the EC.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East waxed lyrical about what he described as solemn pledges given in 1985 and made it sound as though they had been given at least on cub's honour, if not stronger. In fact, the then Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry—before being interrupted by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East—said in the debate in 1986:

"The Commission also proposed the progressive liberalisation of the system to reflect the improvements now being seen in the market and designed to pave the way towards the return to a free market in 1988 or 1989".—[*Official Report*, 12 March 1986; Vol. 93, c. 1032.]

That does not strike me as the most binding guarantee of the kind that my hon. Friend now says has been violated, and we have not yet reached 1989. Perhaps quotas will have come to an end by then.

I think I interpret correctly the remarks of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby when I say that, in the end, we have all been talking about the ending of quotas—that it is an agreed objective that we should, at a sensible pace, end quotas. As the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) said in one of the more understated points of the debate, it is essentially a political problem and a matter of political will in other countries.

As for where the unprofitable capacity is and where we are looking for the closure of steel plants, we are looking at some of the older industrial parts of western Europe; we are looking to the Mezzogiorno, to parts of the Saarland, to places near the border with East Germany and to parts of Belgium and Luxembourg which are heavily dependent on older industries.

That explains the difficulties which other Ministers encounter. I made some less than complimentary remarks about the behaviour of some of them at meetings. One is asking colleagues from other European ministries to do the equivalent in their parliaments of announcing the end of Ravenscraig. I suspect that I would find myself in some difficulty if I were to do that here.

Economic arguments and logic point to their doing that because we have surmounted some extremely similar hurdles in our time, leading to the closure of much of our unprofitable and surplus capacity. They must do the same if anybody is to have a secure future. We have that behind us and we are now into a more profitable stage. We are therefore able to say that we will not offer anything towards the restructurings proposed. We do not mind if the quotas go, anyway, so we have no motive to offer any further restructuring. We made our position clear on Ravenscraig in the last debate. We are in that position because we have a profitable British steel industry ready now to take advantage of the more open market.

Where I got nearest to misunderstanding the hon. Member for Great Grimsby was when he gave a long description of our level of output and the level of state aids that other countries give. I agreed with the analysis in the report to which he referred. I suspect it is true that indirect state aids are much higher in some other western European countries than they are in this country. That underlines how well the British Steel Corporation is performing; it is profitable compared with them.

The hon. Gentleman made it sound as though he was expounding a case for raising our output regardless of profit. Indeed, he said so at one point. He spoke as though he envied those great state aids and thought we should pour more of them into British industry. He will appreciate on reflection that that is exactly the conduct that all three parties in the House have been deprecating on the part of other member states and companies. It is the behaviour we propose to bring to an end, and it would be a disaster if Labour Members got drawn back into advocating it. They used to follow it, but I trust it is no longer their line.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: That has been the case ever since the present Secretary of State for Wales was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. My point concerned raising output, if necessary at the expense of profit, but not going for profit as the Government are.

Mr. Clarke: I repeat that at the moment we are suffering from no particular lack of capacity. It was quite the reverse over Europe and the world as a whole. Some Members took a somewhat wider view. In the earlier debate, the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) acknowledged the wisdom of some of the strategies being considered by British Steel, which is going more for the finishing and added value end of the process rather than simply increasing the quantity of steel being produced in this country.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) dealt with our surplus capacity in hot strip—yet again. I made it clear that at the moment the mills are working to full manned capacity, but that that is only about 70 per cent. of the potential capacity. That remains one of the lowest uses of capacity in western Europe and reflects a particularly high level of demand throughout western Europe at the moment but one that the Commission does not think is likely to be sustained. We should all be delighted if the market recovered to the extent that we could sustain 90 per cent. capacity. That is not impossible. There are other industries that do.

The hon. Gentleman said that the mills were threatened by incontinent pricing. The cut-throat commercial practices that occur in the steel business and attempts to

go in for very aggressive pricing when the opportunity arises reflect the excess capacity in western Europe, which we need to tackle and which lies at the root of the debate.

As we return to a more liberalised regime in the EEC and between Britain and the United States, and as the world's industry is sorted out, those in the steel industry will be able to address themselves to potential markets in Japan and so on. I particularly look forward to the management of the privatised British Steel Corporation addressing itself to the issues. As we emerge from the closed, cartelised and protected world imposed as a necessity on a steel industry in chaos, the British steel industry is emerging as the industry that has gone through the most effective restructuring and undergone the most dramatic changes in its production and marketing. It is now profitable and has low production costs and can look forward with great confidence to the future. The general view of the House is that we should ensure in our European negotiations that we get rid of the remaining impediments to BSC's competitive position in the European market and enable it to take full advantage of all that it has won so far, thanks to the achievements of its management and work force.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8560/87, the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 1st December 1987 and 4127-88 on steel policy, 8803/86 and the proposals described in unnumbered Explanatory Memoranda submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 7th July 1986 and 15th July 1986 on trade with the United States of America in certain steel products 8993/86 and COR 1 on aids to the steel industry (1984-85), and the proposals described in the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 19th October 1987 on delivery levels of certain steel products of Spanish and Portuguese origin onto the rest of the Community market; supports the Government's commitment to a Community steel regime which provides a framework for a steady return to free market conditions; and endorses the Government's agreement of measures which place a temporary limit on steel exports to the United States of America, thus safeguarding access to the American market.

Maternity Allowance

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

11.42 pm

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Imagine the excitement in a household when a woman discovers that there is to be an addition to her family—a first child. She looks forward eagerly to the day when the baby will be born and to the benefits that will go with it. Then she finds that her application for maternity benefit is denied because of two things in juxtaposition: she has changed her job, and her present job is paid monthly rather than weekly. As a consequence, she is disbarred from receiving maternity allowance. Doubtless she will say, "That's a bit rough. I've been working for 10 years and paying my contributions. I deserve it." But she is not thinking like the bureaucrat with the bureaucratic mind, who, like Shylock, reads only about the pound of flesh and not about the blood.

My constituent, whose baby is now 14 months old, wrote to me to say that she has been disbarred from receiving maternity allowance because she does not satisfy the requirements. It appears that the requirements are twofold. First, the person must satisfy the strategic conditions appropriate to the nature of the benefit—retirement, incapacity, unemployment and so on. Disputes on that are determined by an independent adjudicating authority. It is a bit difficult to dispute the fact that someone is pregnant. It is reasonably easy to agree on whether a person is pregnant.

The second criterion is laid down in section 93(1) of the Social Security Act 1975. I cannot for the life of me believe that, whichever party was in power—it happened to be the Labour party—it was the intention of the legislators that a person could be disbarred from an allowance simply because he or she was paid monthly, not weekly.

To be eligible for the maternity allowances, a woman must have paid 50 benefit credits in the year preceding the delivery of the child. But if it so happens that one works for 49 weeks before 1 April, and the fiscal year begins on 6 April, that crucial week between 1 and 6 April becomes the 50th week of one's qualifying period. If, because one becomes a monthly paid employee, one's employer determines that one's credits are not paid over to the state until 30 April, because that is the nature of paying people on a monthly basis, one is deemed not to have paid one's credits for the first week of April or the last week of the preceding fiscal year, or, more crucially, the 50th qualifying week in order to obtain benefit. Therefore, one is disbarred.

That is lost in the mish-mash of bureaucratic language. I am told that the Secretary of State's determination is binding. Once the Secretary of State has made a determination, that is the end of it. I have a copy here of the Secretary of State's determination in the case of my constituent, Mrs. Watson. It says that she does not satisfy the second criterion for maternity allowances. That is cut and dried. At the same time, my constituent is told that she can appeal. How does one appeal when one has been told beforehand that the matter is cut and dried and that the law does not allow for any appeal?

In the past few years, I have had another case involving the Department of Health and Social Security. It started in 1985. A constituent of mine and his wife came to see me because he believed that his retirement benefit had been

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wrongly calculated, and he asked me to investigate. I did, and I found that the ministerial decision was that the DHSS was right and my constituent was wrong.

Last week, quite out of the blue, nearly three years later, my constituent received a letter and inside was a handsome cheque. On the back of the letter it said that on a point of law my constituent should not have been disqualified from his benefit.

I wonder whether, on a point of law, Mrs. Watson should not have been disqualified from her benefit. I wonder whether anyone has ever tested this in a court of law. I wonder whether that is what Parliament wanted. The logic of section 4(2) of the Social Security Act 1975 is that liability for the payment of national insurance contributions arises at the time earnings are paid, regardless of the period to which they relate.

Let us take the case of the lady who is a retained sales agent in the furniture industry—I know one such person — and is paid on commission only, at quarterly intervals. God help her if she becomes pregnant, because the chances of her getting the 50 weeks in before the three months are pretty negligible. Mathematically, I believe that they are almost impossible. So, by definition and by law, anyone who is over one month in a payment period and who is female and becomes pregnant must lose her benefits and allowances.

I may have approached the issue in a slightly lighthearted manner, but it is quite serious. I cannot believe that this is what was intended when the law was framed, or that the Government really want to leave such a stupid loophole, so that they now find themselves on the hook. I am sure that they wish to heaven that they could find a way out for Mrs. Watson, as they did for Mr. Gaines-Burrill, on a point of law, and send a handsome cheque for four hundred quid to my constituent, who has so far been denied it.

I shall leave the matter to my hon. Friend, to whom I have been writing and talking for several months, both semi-formally and privately over a cup of tea. I know that he is sympathetic; however, I also know that he is only the Minister, and as such has not the powers to rise above the bureaucrats and tell them that they have got it wrong. They will want to wave at him the piece of paper that says, "This is the law, dated 1975."

There are two things that my hon. Friend can do, if he is to do anything. He can bring in legislation to change the law, or he can resign. Either way, I want him to tell me how I can face anyone else who comes along to me and says, "I am in a terrible state. I am paid monthly, and I am pregnant."

11.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Michael Portillo): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) on obtaining tonight's Adjournment debate, and on pursuing the cause of his constituent so assiduously. As he says, he has taken up the matter with me on numerous occasions, both in correspondence and in conversations face to face, and I do not think that any constituent could have had a better advocate than Mrs. Watson has had tonight.

Mrs. Watson has certainly been most unfortunate in not qualifying for maternity allowance, and she has failed to do so by a hair's breadth. She claimed the allowance from her local social security office at Eston on 13 October 1986. To qualify under the rules that then applied, a women needed to satisfy two contribution conditions. The first was that in any one tax year she must actually have paid contributions equivalent to 25 times the lower earnings level at which national insurance contributions become payable, and Mrs. Watson satisfied that condition. The second was that she must in the relevant tax year have paid or been credited with contributions the equivalent of 50 times the lower earnings level. The relevant tax year is governed by the benefit year in which the claim occurs.

In Mrs. Watson's case, the relevant income tax year was 1984-85. Mrs. Watson was unemployed for most of that year. She was signing at the local unemployment office until 30 March 1985: that covers a total of 51 weeks. However, as Mrs. Watson went abroad for two weeks and was not available for work, she received unemployment credits for only 49 weeks. That still leaves one week unaccounted for—the very last week in the tax year.

Mrs. Watson started to work with South Tees health authority on 1 April 1985. Her employer paid wages monthly on the last working day of each month; Mrs. Watson's first pay day was, accordingly, 30 April 1985. As such, liability for contributions would fall in the new tax year, 1985-86. Her employment did not therefore assist her contribution record for 1984-85.

My hon. Friend has argued strongly that, because Mrs. Watson worked for the last week of the 1984-85 tax year, part of the contribution paid on 30 April 1985 should be reallocated to that year. I perfectly understand his reasoning, but unfortunately the legislation does not work in that way. Legislation cannot just be set aside in quite the way that my hon. Friend might like.

Liability for the payment of national insurance contributions arises at the time earnings are paid, regardless of the period to which they relate, as my hon. Friend accurately repeated. The extent of the liability is then determined by the interval at which the earnings are paid, known as the "earnings period". Thus, if, like Mrs. Watson, a person is paid regularly at monthly intervals, contributions are calculated by reference to a monthly earnings period and liability arises only on the date on which the earnings are actually paid.

There are a number of reasons for adopting that procedure. It evens out the liability for contributions, ensuring that, for a monthly-paid employee, there will be 12 payments of contributions in a year. More importantly, to ask employers to calculate contributions over split periods would impose a real burden on them which could not be justified for the handful of employees who might benefit from it.

In passing, I advise my hon. Friend that, whereas Mrs. Watson has been unlucky in this case and has fallen just short of a contribution record for a year, of course the way in which the contributions fall might in another case have helped her to make up the contributions in the following year if she had been deficient. One can fall either side of that line.

All this means, of course, that Mrs. Watson's contribution record for 1984-85 was 49 credits and she was one short of satisfying the contribution tests and qualifying for maternity allowance. I fully accept my hon. Friend's comment that, had she delayed starting work by one week, she would almost certainly have been entitled

to a further unemployment credit and hence satisfied the test. It is, of course, an inevitable consequence that wherever one draws the line, someone may fall the wrong side of it.

My hon. Friend may feel that Mrs. Watson should have been better advised about this situation, but of course, that would have meant predicting that 18 months later she was likely to become pregnant and would seek to draw maternity allowance. To recognise the significance of the missing credit 18 months before is not a realistic proposition.

As my hon. Friend knows, Mrs. Watson appealed against the adjudication officer's decision disallowing her maternity allowance. By law, questions relating to contribution conditions are reserved for determination by the Secretary of State, although in practice those decisions are given through specially authorised officers of the Department. Mrs. Watson subsequently applied for a formal decision from the Secretary of State regarding satisfaction of the condition for 1984-85. All aspects relevant to the second contribution test were considered afresh.

In coming to a decision, the officer for the Secretary of State is strictly bound by the provisions of the Social Security Act and regulations. He has no power to waive or relax those provisions in any circumstances or in any particular case. The decision was that Mrs. Watson did not satisfy the second contribution condition.

However, it was open to Mrs. Watson to appeal to the appeal tribunal, which she did. As a matter of fact, it was just this morning that the appeal tribunal heard the case and gave the decision that there was no title to maternity allowance.

The combination of circumstances faced by Mrs. Watson was unusual. I reassure my hon. Friend that in 1986 there were 350,000 successful maternity allowance claims, so he can put the case into context.

I now want to make the important point that, from April 1987, the old rules that applied to Mrs. Watson have been scrapped. My hon. Friend called on me a moment ago to do something about this and I think that at one point he invited me to resign, so I assure him that the rules have already been scrapped. Instead, we have today statutory maternity pay, paid by the employer. We have also changed the rules for maternity allowance, which may still be payable where there is no entitlement to statutory maternity pay.

Under the new provisions, an employer is required to pay statutory maternity pay to an employee who has worked for him for at least six months up to and including the 15th week before her baby is due and whose average weekly earnings in the last eight weeks of that period are above the lower earnings limit — currently £39. If a woman does not qualify for statutory maternity pay, perhaps because she has recently changed jobs, she will be entitled to maternity allowance providing she has worked and paid full-rate contributions in at least 26 of the 52 weeks ending with the 15th week before the baby is due: in other words, a recent record of being in employment, quite different from the more distant record of contributions credited — the position that Mrs. Watson was trying to satisfy.

The distant reference period for qualification, which applied to Mrs. Watson's case, is no longer relevant today. Therefore, she is doubly unfortunate in that she failed narrowly to satisfy the former test and, if her baby had been due a few months later, she would have been eligible under the new rules. I hope that my hon. Friend does not consider that I am rubbing salt into the wound by telling him that if she were in a similar position today she would undoubtedly qualify either for statutory maternity pay or for maternity allowance. I am sorry that I am only able to give that disappointing answer to my hon. Friend, although I believe that he will be happy to know that the rules have been changed.

Let me say a word about the case of Mr. Gaines-Burrill. My hon. Friend has written to me about this matter and I owe him a response in due course. Mr. Gaines-Burrill claimed a dependency increase for his wife in January 1985 following his retirement. At that time, the adjudication officer disallowed the dependency claim on the grounds that Mrs. Gaines-Burrill was in receipt of an occupational pension of £85 per week that could be treated as earnings and that she was not to be regarded as dependent upon her husband. The adjudicating authorities at that time were satisfied that this decision was correct in law.

A social security commissioner's decision of June 1987 disturbed that view. The commissioner held that for certain benefits, including retirement pension, an occupational pension can be treated as earnings only if the dependant receiving it was at the same time engaged in employment. We were then faced with the problem that an estimated 1,700 past claims, similar to that of Mr. Gaines-Burrill, had been wrongly decided in the period between November 1984 and June 1987.

All practical steps were taken to identify the wrongly decided cases from departmental records. Mr. Gaines-Burrill was one of those identified and the earlier wrong decision of January 1985 was referred back to the adjudication officer for a revised decision. The adjudication officer's revised decision, following the social security commissioner's decision, was notified to Mr. Gaines-Burrill and at the same time arrears for the maximum period of 12 months allowed by the law were paid into his bank. Unfortunately, the notification of the decision was not sent to Mr. Gaines-Burrill until a week after he had received his arrears.

Mr. Holt: I am an innocent who believes that the law is the law. If the Department made a mistake in law according to the commissioner, and therefore had to pay the back pay, how can that total amount of back pay be negated to a maximum of 12 months by a subsequent element of law? Which law predominates — a law that says that a mistake was made and therefore that the total amount of money should have been paid or the overrider that says a year is a maximum?

In that case, if the adjudicating officer had not pulled his finger out and had not woken up for six years, Mr. and Mrs. Gaines-Burrill would still only have the benefit for one year and would have lost the benefit of five years. As it is, they have lost the benefit of 22 months and I do not see that there is anything fair in that. I should like that explained.

Mr. Portillo: I was coming to precisely that.

The Government believe that the commissioner's decision introduces an inconsistency into the law by treating a substantial occupational pension as though it were not earnings for the purpose of determining whether a person is dependent. In the Social Security Bill that is

[Mr. Portillo]

currently being considered in another place, we seek powers to reintroduce the consistency until the commissioner's decision is generally understood and applied.

What I am about to say is a matter of speculation, but the Government's view of the law as we now understand it, following the social security commissioner's decision, is that the law is so inconsistent that that must be changed. It does not make sense to us that one should regard some earnings as earnings but disregard an occupational pension. A person with an occupational pension of £85 cannot be regarded as being dependent on her husband. Although this is speculation, if the Government had become aware, before the social security commissioner's decision, that the law was as it has now turned out to be, we would probably have sought to put the law right earlier.

That is why it was right that, last year, we took powers to limit to 12 months the arrears payable in cases where an adjudication officer had decided a case in line with what was thought to be the law, but where that view was subsequently overturned by a commissioner's decision on a point of law. Otherwise, claimants would receive several years of benefit in respect of a matter which neither the Government nor Parliament had intended to be the norm and which had not been dealt with because the social security commissioner had not yet reached a decision. It has always been understood to be something quite different.

I shall write to my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh about the case of Mr. Gaines-Burrill, but I hope that the debate has given him an opportunity to understand the matter.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 24 February 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Nurses

1. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many nurses in Scotland have left the National Health Service in each of the last 10 years; and if he will express that number as a percentage of the total number employed in each of those years.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The number of nursing staff in the NHS in Scotland increased from 53,000 to 63,250 whole-time equivalent over the last 10 years. Information about nurses leaving the service could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Reid: It is amazing that the Secretary of State does not know how many nurses leave the profession every year. It is estimated that, every year, 30,000 trained nurses leave the profession. Does the Secretary of State think that that is because morale is at rock bottom? Why are thousands of devoted health workers in Scotland taking further action today? Is it because, as his colleague the Minister with responsibility for health in Scotland pretends, they are all Militant clones, or because they care a damned sight more about the Health Service than do the Minister and his colleagues?

Mr. Rifkind: First, with regard to morale in the Health Service, it is perhaps significant that when the Royal College of Nursing met my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health it did not raise the matter of morale among nurses. As the hon. Gentleman knows, many of those who leave the nursing profession leave temporarily or for personal or family reasons. It is surely significant that, under this Government, there has been a major increase in the number of nurses and that the real income of nurses in Scotland has increased by 30 per cent., whereas it fell by 21 per cent. in real terms under the Labour Government.

Mr. Fairbairn: Will my right hon. and learned Friend note that today's day of action has nothing to do with soul baring by the nurses? It is a strike by NUPE, which is anxious to keep up its numbers and is unwilling to have competitive tendering. The whole purpose and thrust of the day of action is not to keep viable patients alive but to keep moribund unions alive.

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. and learned Friend is quite right. It will be interesting to know the Opposition's view on the damage that is being done to patients in Scotland by the industrial disruption that has been taking place over the past few weeks. For example, we understand that between 11 February and 23 February, in the Glasgow Royal infirmary and in Stobhill hospital, more than 330 operations were either postponed or cancelled as a result of industrial action; in Lanarkshire, more than 100 operations at Law and Strathclyde hospitals were postponed because of a 24-hour walk-out by non-nursing staff; and there were reports that more than 250 operations in Lothian were cancelled because of industrial action. It will be interesting to know whether Her Majesty's Opposition approve of the damage that is being done to patient care by industrial action of the kind that we are seeing.

Mr. Ernie Ross: The Secretary of State will know that nurses, ancillary workers and manufacturing workers are on the cobbles today because of serious concern about the National Health Service in Scotland. What comment would he make to a staff nurse who earns £65 a week less than a policeman earns?

Mr. Rifkind: The point that I would make to her is that her income has increased considerably under this Government, whereas it declined under the Labour Government. Those in the National Health Service who say that they are interested in the welfare of patients have a strange way of showing such interest if their actions result in operations being postponed or cancelled and the greatest discomfort to patients. If Opposition Members have the interests of patients at heart they should follow the lead of the Royal College of Nursing, which has never allowed grievances, real or imaginary, to result in harm to patients in Scotland or anywhere else. That is what real interest in the NHS is all about.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that what has come through clearly in the dispute is that the real professionals—members of the Royal College of Nursing, who care about patients—attend to their duties, as they are doing today? It is important to recognise that patient care is what matters, and not the care of trade unions, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn) said.

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There has been a great deal of interest in waiting lists in Scotland over the past few weeks. It is significant that two things have happened with regard to waiting lists: first, that the Government have been able to make available an extra £3·6 million, which has reduced waiting lists; and, secondly, that industrial action by ancillary and other staff, which appears to be supported by Opposition Members, has led to the cancellation of hundreds of operations, which will undoubtedly add to waiting lists in the weeks and months to come.

Dr. Moonie: Does the Secretary of State realise that the industrial action in Scotland today is due directly to his folly and incompetence and that of his ministerial colleagues and their failure to recognise the depth of feeling against the damage caused by the Government? Does he not realise the contribution that low pay makes to ill-health in Scotland? Will he, even at this late stage, change his mind and act to the benefit of Scotland, instead of to its detriment?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman should understand the alleged purpose of today's industrial action. The trade unions have told us that it is not about low pay; it is about the Government's policy of competitive tendering. That is a means of ensuring that resources in the National Health Service will, so far as possible, be made available to help patients rather than anyone else.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Secretary of State accept that, for my part, I do not believe that industrial action is appropriate at this stage? If he wants to do something about the morale of nurses and support the work of the Royal College of Nursing, he should consider the problems of recruiting nurses in future because of demographic changes. He could do much to help and raise the morale of nurses if he would tell us the Government's reaction to the Project 2,000 proposals and put extra resources into the clinical regrading and restructuring that is necessary. That would keep nurses in the profession and prevent problems about recruitment in future.

Mr. Rifkind: I note the point that the hon. Gentleman made in the latter part of his question. Only a Liberal could analyse today's action on the basis that the Liberals were against industrial action at the present time.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that operations in Scotland are not being cancelled because of a shortage of nurses, but that they will be cancelled as a result of this politically motivated action by public sector unions with their snouts in the trough of taxpayers' money attempting to preserve their own privileges? Will he confirm that, because fewer than half the Scottish Labour Members are present today, the rest are on strike?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend must not draw too many conclusions from that. During the debate on Ravenscraig and the steel industry yesterday, only the hon. Members for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) and for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) chose to be present during the opening speeches and for most of the debate.

Mr. Harry Ewing: Is the Secretary of State proud of the fact that he is the only Secretary of State in the history of that great office to provoke the caring nursing profession into strike action? Is it only because he has now lost his own self-respect that he does not resign?

Mr. Rifkind: I remind the hon. Gentleman that, far from the nursing profession being on strike, the Royal College of Nursing has reported that since the beginning of the present industrial action there has been a large influx of nurses into the Royal College of Nursing from other unions. That has happened on a larger scale in Scotland than in any other part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dewar: Is there a Scottish Office Minister among the ministerial group set up by the Prime Minister to review the funding of the National Health Service? If not, why not? Will the Scottish Office be bound by any scheme dreamt up by the right hon. Lady in this important and sensitive area? The Opposition unanimously feel that the day of protest in Scotland today is fully justified—— *[Interruption.]* It has been caused by the obstinacy of the Secretary of State, who insists on a policy of irrelevant privatisation, and by the continuing crisis over the funding of the Health Service. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that the Select Committee on Social Services has calculated that a 2 per cent. increase in real terms in the Health Service budget is necessary for it to stand still? In the right hon. and learned Gentleman's commentary on public expenditure, published this month, he says that a 1 per cent. increase is necessary to stand still, yet the figure for the hospital and community service programme shows that that figure is not being reached. Is it true that, having set his own criteria, he has failed to meet them and that that is the reason for the justified discontent in the Health Service?

Mr. Rifkind: I am glad that we now have that on record. The hon. Gentleman, with all the authority of the position that he holds in the Labour party, says that he and his colleagues are fully behind the disruption of the NHS. Presumably, they are accepting — *[Interruption.]* — full responsibility for the operations that are being postponed or cancelled as a result of that disruption. In the light of the hon. Gentleman's comments, I hope that in the weeks and months to come we will hear no more sanctimonious claptrap and synthetic concern from him about the length of waiting lists in Scotland and the problems of those who require operations under the NHS.

Hospitals

2. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many new hospitals are to be built in Scotland within the next five years.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): The current building programme includes 34 major developments providing 4,484 new beds. Of those, two are being commissioned, 11 are under construction and 21 are being planned. By the end of 1992 our continuing programme of hospital building will have enabled a further 15 of those schemes in planning to have been completed. This represents the biggest ever capital investment programme in the history of the National Health Service in Scotland.

Mrs. Michie: Can the Minister tell me what has happened to Oban hospital? Is he aware that people in that area have been waiting for that hospital for well nigh 30 years? Back in the 1950s and 1960s money was promised for that hospital, but it was reallocated. A former Conservative Secretary of State, now Lord Campbell of Croy, promised that money in 1972. Indeed, one of the Minister's predecessors promised that money a year before the general election. We understand that the site for the hospital has not even been bought. I should be grateful if the Minister could tell me, so that I can tell the people of Oban, when the hospital is to be built.

Mr. Forsyth: Approval was given for the new hospital at Oban in May 1986. It is now up to the Argyll and Clyde health board to progress the scheme to the next stage of planning. I should have thought that the hon. Lady would welcome the fact that we have announced our decision to build a new hospital at Campbelltown in her constituency at a cost of £4·2 million. She is right to point out the years that have gone by under successive Governments when neither of those hospitals progressed, but this Government have brought them to fruition.

Mr. Douglas: Will the Minister with so-called responsibility for hospital building in Scotland reflect on his decision, announced today, about hospital building in Fife? The decision is tantamount to government by diktat.

Despite four years and more of appraisal by the Fife health board, which came down unanimously in favour of option C, the Minister has sought, by diktat, to reverse that decision. It appears that the Minister believes that he knows best. When the Minister assumed office, would it not have been better if he had sacked all the health boards of Scotland and said that his office had subsumed all responsibility for hospital building? At least that would have been honest.

Mr. Forsyth: I am extremely surprised by the hon. Gentleman's remarks. He came to see me a matter of weeks ago and asked me to make a quick decision. Now he criticises us for having taken a decision that will result in a substantial improvement in hospital facilities in his constituency and in the rest of Fife.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Does my hon. Friend accept that it does not necessarily make the best sense and use of resources for hospitals if, as in Grampian region, attempts are made to close viable and popular rural hospitals and to centralise? Will he ensure that that aspect is considered in relation to new hospital building?

Mr. Forsyth: As I have said to my right hon. Friend on previous occasions, the proposals which Grampian health board has to consider regarding the rationalisation of maternity services will be subject to consultation. My right hon. and learned Friend and I will consider all arguments that are put forward, including those advanced by my right hon. Friend.

Domestic Rates

3. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimates he has of the effect on the percentage increase in domestic rates in Scotland in 1988-89 of restricting the non-domestic rates increase to the annual inflation rate.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Ian Lang): Non-domestic rates will not be indexed until domestic rates are abolished in 1989-90. Therefore, no such estimates have been made.

Mr. Worthington: The Minister's answer does not surprise me. Roughly translated, it means that he cannot be bothered to work it out. Is the Minister aware that his attitude of studied indifference to the consequence of his policy resembles that of Marie Antoinette, because, in effect, he is saying, "Let them eat cake"—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman ask his question?

Mr. Worthington: Does the Minister agree that in 1987-88 the average rate increase for Scotland was 13 per cent., and that if a poll tax had been in force and a business rate had been indexed at 4 per cent., the average poll tax increase across Scotland would have been 25 per cent.?

Mr. Lang: I am anxious to help the hon. Gentleman, although it is a hypothetical and artificial calculation. If the new system were in place and if Strathclyde were to peg expenditure and increase the non-domestic rate by the rate of inflation, it would be able to reduce the community charge by about 5 per cent.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Opposition and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities have created a scurrilous campaign on the community charge and its effects on the non-domestic rate? Will he point out to the Opposition that the non-domestic rate, tied to a rate of increased inflation, will be of immense advantage to businesses in Scotland, because they can plan ahead knowing the maximum rate increase? That will be a tremendous advantage to the industrial future of Scotland.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In the current year non-domestic rates rose by 15 per cent. when inflation was at about 4 per cent. That illustrates the extra burden that the non-domestic sector has had to bear. It is important to keep down non-domestic rates, in order to preserve jobs.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: Will the Government impose the uniform business rate system throughout the United Kingdom in 1990, or will it be applied only to Scotland as most people suppose? Is the Minister aware that the present unfair disadvantage to Scottish businesses through the rating system in commercial and financial terms compared with England will be mild compared with the problems posed for Scottish businesses if the UBR is implemented only in Scotland and not throughout the United Kingdom?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman has got it the wrong way round. The uniform business rate is coming in south of the border in 1990. Until we are able to harmonise the practice and the law on valuation between England and Wales and Scotland, it will be impossible to contemplate any move towards a national United Kingdom rate. In the meantime, index-linking gives excellent protection to the non-domestic sector.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Does my hon. Friend agree that in a year when the Government are increasing aggregate Exchequer grant by more than 8 per cent. there is no justification for any local authority increasing the rate above the rate of inflation? My hon. Friend said that there were considerable advantages to business men from index-linking. Will he comment on the rumour that the discussions between the Scottish Assessors' Association and the Inland Revenue valuers—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot hear what the hon. Member is saying.

Mr. Stewart: Will my hon. Friend comment on the rumour that the talks between the Scottish Assessors' Association and the Inland Revenue valuers are not progressing without difficulties? Does he agree that it is essential that those talks should be completed before revaluation north and south of the border in 1990?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the 1988-89 RSG settlement. There was an increase of 8·2 per cent., which was well above the rate of inflation. It was based on local authorities' own budgets for 1987-88, inflation and allowances for other factors. The talks between the Scottish Assessors' Association and the Inland Revenue are making progress, but the issues on which they are engaged are complex and it would be a mistake to rush the talks.

Mr. Maxton: Following the question of the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh), what assessment have the Government made of the damage that will be done to Scottish industry by a uniform business rate operating in England and Wales for several years before

it operates in Scotland? When they finally introduce a scheme for Scotland, will it be linked into the United Kingdom scheme, so that there is one United Kingdom scheme and one uniform business rate across the whole United Kingdom, or will it be a separate Scottish UBR?

Mr. Lang: A separate Scottish UBR is not part of our programme. It is impossible to make firm estimates of the effect of what goes on south of the border until after the 1990 revaluation. It is important that local authorities should control their expenditure because high and growing local authority expenditure has greatly damaged the business sector in the past.

Cervical Cancer

4. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the figures for deaths in Scotland caused by cervical cancer for each year since 1975.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The figure for 1975 was 244 and for 1986 it was 199. I shall arrange for the details to appear in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Wray: Does the Minister agree that the Government have a deplorable record in dealing with this disease? They have allowed it to manifest itself, and their proposed scheme to provide a smear test for women between the ages of 20 and 65 over a five-year period is absolutely useless. It is time that they showed some compassion for the 2,000 needless deaths in the United Kingdom and the 200 deaths each year in Scotland since they have been in Government. They should support a scheme and spend the additional £20 million needed, bearing in mind the £5 billion that they spent on defeating the miners.

Mr. Forsyth: I am sure that Professor Strong and the other professionals who drew up the report on which we set up our screening for cervical cancer will be interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's views on the validity of their work. The Government have established a call and recall system for all women between the ages of 20 and 60 in Scotland, and it will be operational by the end of this year. I note the criticism that the hon. Gentleman makes of previous Governments for having taken no initiative in this direction.

Mrs. Fyfe: Does the Minister agree that a five-year span is inadequate? Is he aware that widespread opinion is that three years is a proper length of time between tests and that, if the Government were less insufferably complacent about spending on the NHS, that could easily be arranged?

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for pointing out that the Government opted for five rather than for three years. The reason is that 90 per cent. of deaths caused by cervical cancer are among women who have not been screened. We took the view that it was important to set up an effective call and recall system and to have the software in place, rather than to choose an over-ambitious recall period. We shall examine the length of time in the light of circumstances. I should have thought that the hon. Lady would have the grace to acknowledge that the Government have made considerable progress in this area.

The following is the information:

Deaths in Scotland caused by cervical cancer:

	Number
1975	244
1976	214
1977	225
1978	203
1979	224
1980	187
1981	201
1982	208
1983	213
1984	227
1985	214
1986	199

Farmers

5. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the executive of the Aberdeen and Kincardine branch of the Scottish National Farmers Union to discuss the problems facing farmers in north-east Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My noble Friend the Minister of State met representatives of the Aberdeen and Kincardine branch on 12 November 1987.

Mr. Bruce: Does the Minister recognise that the state of the agriculture industry in the north-east of Scotland is in particular difficulties and extraordinary circumstances? Does he acknowledge that particularly in the pig-rearing sector, which accounts for half of Scotland, the Government's failure so far to introduce a devaluation of the green pound or an adjustment in monetary compensatory amounts is causing genuine anxiety? What assurance can he give that the Government will press for an early and substantial devaluation?

Mr. Forsyth: The Government are well aware of the strong feeling among farmers about the green pound, and we shall certainly take that into account when we consider the extent of any green pound devaluation to be negotiated in the context of the annual Community price-fixing negotiations later this spring. I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware that the devaluation that the United Kingdom secured under the 1987 price fixing substantially improved our competitive position in relation to our main competitors.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Has the Minister had an opportunity to study the excellent document produced by Dr. Dalton in November 1987, which outlined the critical position of farmers, especially in the north-east of Scotland? How can we take any encouragement from his reply when Scottish Office Ministers do not attend our debates on agriculture, when Opposition Members argue strongly for support for that vital industry, which, in Grampian region, is responsible for 30 per cent. of the region's total output?

Mr. Forsyth: I am surprised at the tone of the hon. Lady's question. Surely she is aware of the initiative that was taken by my noble Friend in consultation with the National Farmers Union of Scotland? They have established a short-term joint counselling initiative to offer advice to farmers who are experiencing financial difficulties. The initiative involved not only the Department and the SNFU, but the Scottish agricultural colleges and the Scottish clearing banks. It is now well

under way. I am not certain what the hon. Lady meant by her criticism about Ministers attending debates, but perhaps we can settle that later.

Mr. Andy Stewart: On behalf of my relatives, who are all farmers in Scotland, may I ask my hon. Friend to tell the House by how much the Government have increased expenditure on agriculture in Scotland during the past five years?

Mr. Forsyth: I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Forestry

6. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he is taking to amend forestry policy in regard to the protection of areas of ecological importance, and in particular the flow country of Caithness and Sutherland.

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement that I made to the House on 25 January, by way of a written answer, covering the protection of areas of ecological importance in the peatland of Caithness and Sutherland.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Secretary of State accept that Britain's conservation bodies, whether public or private, remain deeply concerned about the damaging scale of blanket afforestation in those areas, which seems likely to continue? Does he accept that the local, national and international interest suggests that greater priority should be given to the ecological importance of those areas, rather than to maintaining tax regimes which may assist a few people of celebrated importance?

Mr. Rifkind: I advise the hon. Gentleman that the Government attach importance to the ecological significance of the flow country of Caithness, which is precisely why we made the announcement that we did. The policy that we announced was welcomed by the Nature Conservancy Council, but it is significant that it was welcomed also by Highland regional council and the Highlands and Islands Development Board. We seek to achieve two legitimate objectives: to meet the ecological criteria, which we have done on a scientific basis, and, at the same time, to take account of the livelihood of those who live in that part of Scotland and who have a legitimate interest with regard to their livelihood and the work opportunities that are available to them.

Mr. Macdonald: With regard to the relationship between ecological forms of land use and forestry, does the Secretary of State accept that crofting is one of the most environmentally sensitive forms of land use? How can he justify taxpayers' money being given hand over fist to speculators who, frequently, are not resident in the Highlands and Islands, to engage in commercial forestry, whereas crofters are excluded from such access to commercial forestry? When will he progress from expressions of high sympathy for the crofters to doing something about that situation?

Mr. Rifkind: The opportunities that are available to crofters are similar to those that are available to, for example, tenant farmers elsewhere in Scotland. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that his tax question is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Sir Russell Johnston: Is the Secretary of State aware that I very much welcome the answer that he gave to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), that we in the Highlands must consider not only ecological protection, but work and jobs. In return for that generosity, given that there are only five Conservative Members of Parliament present who represent Scottish constituencies, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman assure us that he might find some way of keeping quiet the raucous invasion from south of the border?

Mr. Rifkind: Whether in the Highland region or other rural areas, it is always essential to take into account the legitimate needs of the local community and the wider economic importance of forestry in Scotland. For example, we would not be able to have the major £250 million investment in a papermill at Irvine but for the availability of spruce in Scotland to service the requirements of that factory. We need to achieve a proper balance, and the announcement that we made in January, which has been welcomed by the Nature Conservancy Council, shows that we have achieved what many might have thought impossible — the reconciliation of those two interests in a constructive way.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that 100 per cent. of the Conservative party is here and there is present a miserable percentage of the Liberal party, mixed, and all at odds with each other, anyhow? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that his announcement last month was an acceptable compromise in the interests of all concerned, the Nature Conservancy Council, the sites of special scientific interest and the Highlands regional council, and aimed at creating employment? In addition to those important aspects, will my right hon. and learned Friend also bear in mind that, in the general context of the whole of Scotland, the most important issue is the beauty of the land, and we do not want too much blanket afforestation keeping away tourists and others who want to see Scotland as it really is?

Mr. Rifkind: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The Forestry Commission is to be commended on showing much greater sensitivity to those objectives in recent years. For example, it has insisted on broadleaved planting as part of a more general planting. There may still be improvements that can be made, but most objective commentators would accept that the Forestry Commission, and, indeed, those in the private sector involved in planting, have taken far greater account of environmental considerations in recent years than used to be the case.

Mr. Home Robertson: Is the Secretary of State aware that we, for our part, would strongly support the properly planned expansion of forestry in Scotland, but will he come clean about the position of the Scottish Office on the grotesque development of blanket tax incentives for blanket afforestation? Is he aware that, for once, his hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) was right when he told the House of Commons, in an Adjournment debate on 26 January 1987, that a new generation of absentee landlords was exploiting that tax shelter? Will he, just this once, listen to his hon. Friend and acknowledge that those tax incentives should be drastically overhauled before any more damage is done to the Scottish countryside or to the reputation of the forestry industry?

Mr. Rifkind: I acknowledge that the hon. Gentleman can speak better on behalf of absentee landlords than most

of us, but fiscal matters are for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. If we, like the Opposition, wish to see a proper planting programme and the benefits to the Scottish economy that forestry represents, we must ensure that whatever system exists there will be a proper planting programme and a proper availability to the wood pulp and other comparable industries of the raw materials that they require.

Public Expenditure

7. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of his commentary on Scottish public expenditure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: Copies of the Scottish Commentary were placed in the Library on Wednesday 17 February.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Secretary of State confirm that there are no assumptions in the commentary dealing with the pay increases or other allowances that are expected in the fiscal year 1988-89? Does he accept that that makes it difficult for health boards, for example, to plan next year's finances, particularly when there is no reference to any special allowance for nurses' pay review awards? Will the Secretary of State undertake to use his influence within the Government to ensure that, whatever the review body recommends, once the Government have taken a decision and made an award they will fully fund it, so that the local health boards in Scotland will not have to use their own resources to meet in part the pay review award?

Mr. Rifkind: The Government have an excellent record on implementing the recommendations of pay review bodies. Obviously, I cannot anticipate what the pay review body will say. We shall have to consider that at the time on the basis of the criteria normally applied.

Mr. Hayward: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that expenditure next year on health in Scotland is to increase by £225 million, or 8·6 per cent., and that that will contribute to the preparation for the replacement of the acute hospital at Ayr?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely correct. The Health Service is in fine fettle in Scotland. That might explain why the industrial action today is not about the resources of the Health Services, but is about this controversy over competitive tendering.

Mr. O'Neill: Will the Secretary of State take account of the amount of public expenditure which has been put into the Castlebridge mine, which is in my constituency and forms part of the Longannet complex, whose future is endangered by the foolhardy programme of tendering for importing foreign coal? Does he agree that the flexible attitude adopted by British Coal and by the local mineworkers union in that area suggests that that investment should have a long-term future and should not be endangered by short-term rushes towards privatisation of the South of Scotland Electricity Board?

Mr. Rifkind: Naturally, we hope that the difference of view between the SSEB and British Coal will be resolved amicably, but the hon. Gentleman should appreciate the difficulties for all parties involved. There are difficulties for British Coal, for reasons with which the hon. Gentleman will be familiar, and for the SSEB, which has an obligation to its consumers, particularly its industrial consumers. The House is anxious that Scottish industry should be as competitive as possible and that Ravenscraig should not be put at a disadvantage. The hon. Gentleman must know that Ravenscraig, which is the largest user of Scottish electricity, clearly has an enormous interest in tariffs in Scotland being as low as possible. The SSEB must also take that factor into account.

Mr. Harris: Just in case anyone outside the House might be tempted to take seriously the latest manifestation this afternoon of whining and whingeing by Opposition Members from Scotland, will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that public expenditure per head in Scotland is, on average, higher than in England? Will he also confirm that spending on the Health Service amounts to £454 per head in Scotland, compared with £365 per head in England?

Mr. Rifkind: The level of Health Service expenditure in Scotland is determined by the Secretary of State from within the overall block available to him. It has been the practice of successive Secretaries of State to take into account the particular health requirements of Scotland and to make generous provision for health expenditure. A further £225 million will be available for that purpose next year.

Mr. Dewar: Does the Secretary of State accept that there are few signs of an amicable resolution of the coal dispute and that there is genuinely widespread disappointment at the negative stance taken by the Scottish Office on that matter? As the Secretary of State has a statutory responsibility for electricity supply, is he satisfied that it is in the public interest to substitute foreign imported coal for that produced domestically? If that occurs, what impact will it have on jobs and on stability of supply? Does he recall that, in a widely published speech last Friday to the CBI in Scotland, he listed coal as one of the group of important industries providing vital jobs? Does he not think it important to stop the hands-off negative approach and to do something to protect those jobs?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman must address himself to the difficult problems that must be resolved. He has not expressed any view today about the implications for consumers, including industry in Scotland. Last night he spoke eloquently about his devotion to the interests of the steel industry in Scotland. He must know that the most crucial question affecting industry is the cost of the power that it uses. When the Electricity Board and British Coal have certain interests in common, and certain differences of view, it is much more sensible to allow those two boards to come to a conclusion as to what is required than for the Government to interfere in what is ultimately a matter to be determined by those involved in the industry.

Council House Sales

8. **Mr. Forth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the numbers of applications to buy public sector housing during 1987; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): Returns made to my Department show that about 39,000 applications to purchase public sector houses were made during 1987. This continuing high level of applications is making a major and welcome contribution to diversifying ownership of housing in Scotland.

Mr. Forth: I thank my hon. Friend and welcome those figures. Will he tell the House what is the rate of owner-occupation in Scotland? Is he satisfied with the rate of progress being made in that direction, and does he think that the excessively low level of council house rents in Scotland is perhaps a disincentive to people to consider buying their council houses?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Council house rents have risen considerably, although they are still much lower than those in England. Sales have been running at an extremely high level. Now, 10·3 per cent. of public sector house stock has been sold since 1979 and about 107,000 public sector tenants have purchased their homes. We have now reached the stage where fewer than half of all homes in Scotland are rented from the public sector. We can justly call that a Scottish success story.

Mr. Graham: Why do the Government have double standards? Is the Minister aware that a Ministry of Defence worker in my constituency who applied to purchase his house was denied the 49 per cent. discount that he would have received on a council house, and received a discount of only 30 per cent.?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are certain exclusions. This is a matter primarily for the Ministry of Defence. The same also applies to certain police houses. There are exemptions on certain grounds, but, overall, we are very much in favour of the right to buy and we wish to extend it wherever possible.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that the figures that he has given on the sale of council houses last year and before show clearly that the Opposition, who fought the 1980 Bill tooth and nail, do not care, in the same way as they do not care about patient care? Does my hon. Friend further agree that our policies will continue to produce the results?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It will always be remembered that the Bill that we introduced was called the Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Bill. That was to the credit of my right hon. and learned Friend the present Secretary of State.

Education (Strathclyde)

9. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to improve education facilities in Strathclyde; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The provision and improvement of education facilities in Strathclyde is primarily a matter for the regional council, taking account of available resources and, where, appropriate, the wishes of parents.

Mr. Martin: The Minister and the Prime Minister intervened in the proposed closure of Paisley grammar school. I do not begrudge that school remaining open, but the hon. Gentleman must know that in my constituency, Colston, Rosemount, St. Bede's and St. Rock's are all supported wholeheartedly by the parents, who want to keep them open. Why is the Minister making flesh of some schools and fowl of others? Why is he not prepared to intervene to help out those schools?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman mentioned schools in his constituency. He will know that St. Bede's is a denominational school, and the case may come to my right hon. and learned Friend for his consideration. I have already answered a question by the hon. Gentleman on that subject. As for non-denominational schools, where travelling distances are not excessive, and where the schools operate at less than 80 per cent. capacity, it is entirely a matter for Strathclyde regional council, with which I should have thought the hon. Gentleman had some influence.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Is my hon. Friend aware of the volume of correspondence that I am receiving from parents in Strathclyde, who want the Government to give them the chance to consider whether to opt out of the Strathclyde regional council system? Why is my hon. Friend so reluctant to move on the matter? Is he further aware that all parents, pupils and ratepayers in Strathclyde have a right to reasonable decision-making? Is it not a disgrace and an outrage that today Strathclyde regional council will be adjourned because Labour members are too indolent to attend, as they wish to wave NUPE banners rather than do the job for which they were elected?

Mr. Forsyth: The events of today and recent months, and the conduct of their elected representatives, will give the people of Strathclyde something to think about. With regard to opting out, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has said that we will consider any arguments that are put forward in Committee on the Bill, but my hon. Friend will recognise that we have no history of school boards or parental involvement in schools in Scotland——

Mr. Forth: It is time that my hon. Friend had some.

Mr. Forsyth: I say to my hon. Friend, who intervenes from a sedentory position, that the forthcoming Bill will give Scotland an opportunity to make progress on that matter.

Mr. Buchan: Has the Minister read the devastating document issued by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments condemning his squalid set of regulations? It said that the regulations were illegal in the sense that they did not comply with the Act, and that they were defective in the sense that they could not be corrected or understood. Should he not apologise for his part in the squalid conspiracy that led to the sequence of events, withdraw the regulations and have an early debate on the behaviour of himself in going over the head of the Secretary of State, in alliance with the Prime Minister, and his intervention in the proper, legal behaviour of Strathclyde regional council?

Mr. Forsyth: As the hon. Gentleman knows, there will be an opportunity to debate the regulations. His account of the criticism of the regulations is somewhat exaggerated. The House will have a proper opportunity to consider the matter. The validity of the regulations is not in doubt. I imagine that the people of Paisley must be astonished to be represented by a Member of Parliament who has campaigned so hard to prevent one of the most successful schools in his area having an opportunity, should Strathclyde decide to close it, to have the decision reviewed by the Secretary of State.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend comment on the schizophrenia of Opposition Members? The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) asked for Government intervention, and the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) objects to Government

intervention. Will my hon. Friend comment on the fact that Strathclyde regional council has the worst record in education of any of the Scottish regional councils? Is he happy that one pupil in four leaves Strathclyde schools without any qualification, a record basically equivalent to that of ILEA? Does he believe that the same treatment would be suitable for Strathclyde as is being accorded to ILEA?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend is right to point to the problems in Strathclyde. I understand that management consultants have been called in to help sort them out. As to the paradox that he identifies, it is a paradox that Labour Members are in favour of no Government intervention to save popular schools from closure, but call for Government intervention to keep open schools which are half empty and which parents do not support.

Mr. Norman Hogg: Is it not the case that the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments has revealed that the Government's instrument concerning school closures is ambiguous, badly drafted and in breach of the rules and protocols of the House? Does he not accept that the heavy-handed diktat which he has applied in this case has created a shambles? Is it not time to call a halt and to withdraw the regulations so that the confusion which surrounds the matter can be clarified?

Mr. Forsyth: The criticism of the regulations was that we had not observed the 21-day rule. We did not observe it for the reason which we explained, which was that the region should know the position. As to the regulations being unclear about who decides, it is clear from the context of the main regulations and the parent Act that it is up to the local authority to decide whether it must refer a case to the Secretary of State. I am sure that the people of Scotland will note that the hon. Gentleman, the official spokesman for the Labour party on education in Scotland, does not want the parents of Strathclyde to have the opportunity, should Strathclyde decide to proceed with closure, to have that decision reviewed.

Mr. Buchan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the grossly inadequate nature of that reply, I give notice that I shall raise the matter on the Adjournment. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is perfectly in order for the hon. Gentleman to do that.

Horse Sales

10. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to implement in Scotland the recommendations of the Farm Animal Welfare Council on conditions at horse markets and sales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government's response to the council's report on the welfare of livestock at markets, announced in October last year, accepted that legislation should be introduced to cover horse markets and other sales. Proposals for a new order and code of practice to apply throughout Great Britain are now being prepared.

Mr. Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware that the standards for cattle markets and sales are much higher than those for horses and ponies? As the Farm Animal Welfare Council has pointed out, those applying to horses and ponies are very unsatisfactory. Would my hon. Friend and Scotland like to set an example and make the proposed voluntary code statutory, so that horses and ponies receive better treatment?

Mr. Forsyth: I know of my hon. Friend's interest in the matter: indeed, he has a constituency interest. Our preference in general is to legislate only where there is a clear need for statutory safeguards. Guidance to those using and operating markets is, we feel, more a matter for codes of practice. However, the detailed proposals will be issued for consultation in the summer, and I am sure that my hon. Friend's arguments will be taken into consideration.

Mr. Ron Brown: Was there not a lot of horse trading going on when Guinness took over Distillers, which was an illegal and corrupt act——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is the wrong sort of horse.

Hospital Services

11. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what responses he has had from health boards to his draft circular on the privatisation of hospital services; and how many were in favour.

Mr. Rifkind: A letter of 11 December from the Scottish Home and Health Department set out the steps which boards are to take to test the cost-effectiveness of their support services by putting them out to tender. All boards have agreed to implement these instructions.

Mr. Ross: The Secretary of State will know that in Scotland today 50,000 people—not only Health Service workers, but workers from the manufacturing sector, miners and dockers — are demonstrating against the Government's cynical refusal either to fund the nurses' pay award properly or to fund technological changes in hospitals—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Ross: Those workers are on the streets because of the Government's cynical determination to ignore Select Committees of the House when they try to assist the Secretary of State, and the comments of his hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) last night implying that patient care was suffering due to the lack of emergency cover because of the current stoppages. The Government are determined not to fund the Health Service properly, either through salaries or through facilities required by technological change.

Mr. Rifkind: I noted the hon. Gentleman's comment that those taking part in industrial action included people with no direct connection with the National Health Service. He might like to know—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must allow the Secretary of State to answer the question.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman might like to know that I understand that there was also a demonstration outside the offices of the Scottish TUC, with a placard reading "Stop the strikes and not the operations". He may also have noted the rather quaint advertisement that appeared in *The Scotsman* yesterday from Edinburgh district council, which, under the slogan, "Improving services and creating jobs", informed the public that it would be a waste of time telephoning the council today because no one would be there to answer the telephones.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm again, in the hope that it may penetrate the deaf ears opposite, that any savings made through contracts going out — and indeed, any savings in efficiency — can be devoted by the health board to patient care in its area? Does not the Opposition's attitude show a callous disregard for the real concerns of patients? Will my right hon. and learned Friend make that clear to the public in Scotland and to others outside the House, even though, inside the House, the Opposition will not acknowledge it?

Mr. Rifkind: My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. NUPE and COHSE have shot themselves in the foot by the industrial action that they are promoting. It will be in the best interests of those in the in-house services in NHS hospitals if they believe that they are providing the best service at the least cost to the NHS. They will then have nothing to fear from competitive tendering. As long as Opposition Members help to forment industrial disputes in the NHS, they will have themselves to blame for the problems faced by the service.

Mr. Lambie: What statutory powers does the Minister have to instruct members of health boards to put out contracts to privatise hospital services?

Mr. Rifkind: Health boards, whether under this Government or any previous Government, are agents of Government, and it has always been the practice of health boards that they carry out the policy of the Government of the day.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that efficient workers have nothing to fear from competitive tendering? If the unions are as upset as they seem to be, must there not be an awful lot of inefficiency around?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is correct. As has been said on numerous occasions, every penny saved by competitive tendering goes directly towards reducing waiting lists and helping patients in the NHS. If the Labour party is opposed to competitive tendering, clearly it is opposed to concentrating help, wherever possible, on patient care.

Mr. Norman Hogg: Is it not the case that the Secretary of State has no one to blame for today's events other than himself and his Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth)? These events have been brought about by his endeavours to thrust upon the health boards in Scotland his alien doctrines. Is it not also the case that what he is proposing has no support among the people in Scotland, and that public opinion stands four square behind those who are taking action to protect the NHS which he and his hon. Friends seem hell-bent on destroying?

Mr. Rifkind: As competitive tendering in England has already resulted in the transfer of over £100 million to patient care in the NHS, why the hon. Gentleman should oppose comparable benefits for patients in Scotland he has yet to explain. The House and the people of Scotland will have heard the hon. Member say that the Labour party stands four square with those whose actions today are resulting in the postponement and cancellation of much-needed operations. They will pay attention to the comments of the Opposition in future.

Mr. Harry Ewing: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I will take it after the private notice question.

VAT (European Court Ruling)

3.31 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement concerning the decision of the European Court of Justice to require the Government of the United Kingdom to impose value added tax on certain categories of spectacles.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Peter Lilley): As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) yesterday, this ruling arises from the EC sixth directive on VAT, which was adopted in 1977. The Government will abide by the court's decision, but we need to study the judgment in detail—and consult interested trade bodies—before we can make any firm decisions about how to proceed. The United Kingdom has a treaty obligation to implement rulings from the European Court. Any amendment to United Kingdom law imposing taxation would have to be proposed to, and approved by, the House of Commons.

I want to make it clear that the court's decision has nothing whatever to do with the European Commission's proposals for the approximation of VAT rates. These are no more than proposals, and would require new legislation which could be adopted only with the unanimous consent of all member states. The Government have made it abundantly clear that we could not consent to proposals which deprived us of our right to apply zero rates.

Nor does this case have any bearing on the current infraction proceedings taken by the European Commission against the United Kingdom's zero rating of construction services, fuel and power and certain other goods. This concerns a different article of the sixth directive. The legal arguments are entirely different.

Mr. Spearing: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is the first occasion in over 300 years that any person or body has imposed a view on this House or the British Government concerning the taxation of our people? Therefore, are not this judgment and any resulting proposals of the Government of more constitutional importance than of health or financial importance, important though they be?

Secondly, in his answer yesterday in columns *140* and *141*, the Minister said, as he has now, that the Government will ask the House to pass such legislation, even though it is against the will of both the Government and maybe of the House. If Parliament decides not to pass such legislation, it will be in breach of the treaty. What primary legislation will the House need to amend in order to avoid such an imposition?

Finally, the Minister may be correct in saying that the case that is pending on fuel and industrial building has no connection with the legal arguments, but does he agree that stemming from the sixth directive, the primary legislation and powers for such imposition also exist for those matters?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman is correct to say that this raises constitutional issues, but he is not correct to say that it is unprecedented. He will recall that on an earlier occasion the British Government was obliged under the treaty of Rome, and as a result of a court ruling, to alter the balance of taxation between beer, wine and spirits. We are restricted in the laws that we can pass by the rulings that we have agreed with our partners in Europe.

The hon. Gentleman asked what primary legislation would have to be changed to free us from our obligations to enforce the rulings of the European Court. That would, of course, infringe the treaty of accession. Article 171 of the treaty of Rome requires us to adopt the rulings of the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): Clearly, Britain must stand by its treaty obligations. However, if a court in this country makes a ruling on the scope of VAT which the House wishes to change, we have the power to do that. What mechanism exists for making such a change in the circumstances that my hon. Friend has outlined?

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend is right to point out that the British Parliament can overrule decisions of British courts. If we wished to change decisions of European courts made under European directives, we should have to obtain the consent of our partners.

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): My concern is for the poorer people who claim benefit in our community. May we have an assurance that the extra charges that they will now have to foot will be met by extra allowances? Can the voucher system be revised so that that is catered for too?

Mr. Lilley: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that the poorer members of society are already eligible to receive vouchers for spectacles. Of course, they receive hearing aids free if there is medical need for them. Consequently, they will not be affected by the decision in any way.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Now that the Commission has found and taken advantage of this back-door method of obliging the British Parliament to impose taxes that it does not want to impose, will my hon. Friend say whether we shall be obliged to levy VAT on gas, electricity, water, sewerage, protective clothing and footwear for industry and all new industrial and commercial buildings, at an estimated cost of £350 million a year, if the European Court makes a similar judgment in a few weeks' time?

Will my hon. Friend urge his legal colleagues to look into the Government's constant assertion that we have a long-time right of veto? Is it not true that under the Single European Act that right of veto lasts until 1992? If by that time we have not agreed to a uniform, harmonised method of VAT, the Commission will be perfectly entitled to go to the court and require us to impose VAT across the board because we have not fulfilled the conditions of the Single European Act.

Mr. Lilley: On the last point, I can reassure my hon. Friend, who has fought an honourable and long battle against the legal basis on which this decision has been taken, that there is no question of our freedom to impose zero rates being time-limited by 1992, or any other date.

I cannot agree with my hon. Friend that this ruling is a back-door method. It was carried out in open court, and the European Court considered the matter over a long period in a perfectly formal and normal way. Just as in this country our courts have to interpret the detailed application of our laws, in Europe the European Court of Justice has the responsibility for interpreting the detailed application of EC directives.

There is no question of this ruling having a direct bearing on the entirely separate infraction case which is currently before the court and which has to do with zero rates on the goods and services that my hon. Friend listed. We still await that judgment. We have argued the United Kingdom's case vigorously and it will be some months before we know the court's ruling. The case will be separate and distinct, based on separate legal arguments and coming under a different part of the directive. Whatever ruling the court reaches, we have an obligation to enforce it in Britain. My hon. Friend is correct in that respect.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): This is a test case which clearly establishes the supremacy of the European Court and European institutions over this sovereign Parliament, or what was a sovereign Parliament. Is not the Minister's reaction wholly inappropriate? He is trying to pretend that this is not a major judgment and a major change in our expectations. Ought he not now to be looking at the treaty of accession and the European Communities Act 1972 under which we consented to join the European Community so that he can identify amendments which would give us a remedy for external tax impositions?

Mr. Lilley: I am sure that the powers exercised by the European Court came as no surprise to the right hon. Member, who during the referendum warned, as he saw it, the country against accepting these powers. He is right to say that fundamental changes amounting to an ending of our membership of the European Community would be required to exempt us from the powers of the European Court when interpreting the laws of the European Community.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Will my hon. Friend dismiss with contempt the hysteria of the last of the anti-EEC Mohicans who remain the the Chamber? Has he seen the remarkable leader in today's *Evening Standard,* which is not known for its passionate European views, which states:

"Britain has much to gain and nothing to lose from bringing her indirect taxes into line with Europe."?

Mr. Lilley: I read most of the newspapers, but I have not read the *Evening Standard* today, so I will not comment on that article.

I shall not dismiss with contempt the views of my right hon. and hon. Friends or of Opposition Members who have honourably opposed our membership of the European Community. They are free to do so. They have rightly drawn attention to the fact that some of the consequences of our membership are displayed in this ruling.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Will the Minister place in the Library a copy of the arguments that were deployed before the European Court of Justice, so that we can see whether there is any truth in the reports in some papers that the problem lies with the way in which the Government have reduced support for the National Health Service in the provision of spectacles so that spectacles were no longer regarded as being provided in the NHS but as medical supplies which the public were able to buy?

Mr. Lilley: I am happy to place in the Library the ruling of the European Court, and the hon. Gentleman will see that his allegations are entirely without foundation. The matter is not even mentioned in the ruling by the court.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): I congratulate my hon. Friend on quoting the precedent of the cider and beer tax ruling as against wine, and remind him that the whole point of the Government's response was that, instead of increasing the tax on beer and cider, they agreed to a loss of revenue by decreasing the tax on wine. On that precedent, which he voluntarily quoted, will he now do away with any National Health Service charges for spectacles and testing which would be subject to VAT under this direction, on the exact precedent which he has quoted?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend will be pleased to be reminded that people who are in receipt of vouchers, who constitute about one quarter of those for whom spectacles are prescribed and dispensed, will not be affected by the ruling in any way, so there is no reason to do as he suggests.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): As the Minister seemed to approve the suggestion that the Government's attitude is supported by one newspaper, can he give us an absolute assurance that we shall not have, by any similar method, the imposition of VAT on books or newspapers?

Mr. Lilley: I can give the right hon. Gentleman the assurance that I did not place any weight on the newspaper article, which I had not read. In so far as the right hon. Gentleman's question concerns matters which are properly for the judgment of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I shall leave it to him.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Although it may be implied from his answer, will my hon. Friend reinforce the Prime Minister's assurance that VAT will not be placed on food?

Mr. Lilley: I can certainly assure my hon. Friend to that effect. It is in no way connected to our right to retain zero rating on all such goods and services, including food, as we promised at the election.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Minister confirm that our obligations under the treaty of Rome restrict the rights of the United Kingdom Parliament? Therefore, is not the Government's only option to introduce legislation into the House of Commons to repeal section 2 of the European Communities Act 1972? That Act places on the United Kingdom the obligation of imposing additional value added tax and other charges. Is it not important that the Government introduce appropriate legislation? As the Minister said, the charge is not unprecedented. It is irrelevant whether legal arguments are different. Other charges in the pipeline are to be imposed by the Common Market on our country. The majority of people are determined that we should leave the Common Market in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman is probably right to point to the legislative route that will be necessary to undo the ruling. I remind him that the directive that is now being implemented and determined by the European Court of Justice was unanimously adopted by member states of the EEC in 1977, and therefore was wholeheartedly supported by the Labour Government of the day.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Does my hon. Friend agree that the rhetoric of Opposition Members is empty and vacuous? They have failed to take account of the point that my hon. Friend has just made. In 1977, they failed to exercise the veto that led to the requirement being imposed upon Parliament. Will he reiterate the point that the Government have not the slightest intention of adopting a provision of the kind that was put up by Lord Cockfield in the Commission, which is unaccountable and unelected?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is quite right. We have no intention of accepting proposals that would deprive us of the right to retain zero rates. He was right also to point out to the House the contradiction in Opposition Members' views. They originally supported the directive, the consequences of which they now oppose.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Does the Economic Secretary agree with the view that was recently expressed by Lord Cockfield to the Select Committee, to the effect that no member state of the EEC has the right to veto the introduction of VAT within that member state, but has a right only in respect of the rate of VAT charged?

Mr. Lilley: Lord Cockfield pointed out to the Committee that the treaty states that member states shall unanimously agree such measures as they consider necessary to bring about an internal market. Whether it is necessary in order to achieve that desirable end to approximate taxes is open to dispute. We dispute that it is necessary, and we shall certainly not give our support to proposals which we cannot accept.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will my hon. Friend confirm that nothing in the judgment affects the Chancellor's right to decide at what level VAT shall be levied on any item? Therefore, there is absolutely no need for anybody to panic and think that spectacles will cost 15 per cent. more.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is correct. Spectacles and the other goods concerned already bear VAT up to but not including the retail distribution point. Therefore, the effect of the judgment is to require Britain to extend VAT to the retail margin. The National Association of Optometrists calculates that, at most, it will involve increasing the sale price of spectacles by 3 to 4 per cent. Of course, it is open to retailers to absorb the costs.

I remind the House that since we abolished the opticians' monopoly, the cost of spectacles to the final consumer has gone down by considerably more than that amount — *[Interruption.]* It is rich of Opposition Members to criticise our abolition of that monopoly when our action has reduced prices by more than the potential increase that we are discussing.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): Does not the Minister appreciate that the Government's way out of this practical difficulty is to supply corrective spectacles free of charge, as VAT would then not be leviable, whatever decision the European Court reached? Does not this incident underline the great importance of being careful about entering into obligations? Will he give an absolute guarantee to the House that the Government will veto all the proposals for VAT harmonisation?

Mr. Lilley: The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows full well that vouchers are available to those on supplementary benefit, family income supplement, children under 16, and students under 19 in full-time study. There is no problem with respect to those people.

However, I was interested—and I think that all hon. Members were interested—to hear the right hon. and learned Gentleman's implied slur on the previous Labour Government when he stressed the need to take great care when accepting obligations of this kind. I believe that the right hon. and learned Gentleman was a member of the Cabinet which entered into the obligations, the consequences of which we are now seeing. Is he saying that that Cabinet did not take due care?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have noted the hon. Members who have not been called. I am sure that we will return to this matter on other occasions and I will bear those hon. Members in mind. We have an important debate today during which many of these matters may be canvassed.

Points of Order

3.51 pm

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that yesterday I raised a point of order about the Prime Minister's reply to my question. The Prime Minister stated that the contract between the South of Scotland electricity board and British Coal would come to an end on 31 March this year.

I understand that you, Mr. Speaker, have the discretion, in a matter of major public interest, to waive or moderate the sub judice rule. However, as I understood it, it was not on those grounds that you ruled that the Prime Minister was in order. I wonder whether you have had the chance to look more closely at this matter. I believe that papers were lodged with the Court of Session earlier this week. Can you advise the House on whether you can expand, amend or clarify the ruling?

Mr. Speaker: I have kept in close touch with these matters. I am informed that there has been no change since yesterday and that the matter is not yet fully before the court.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that I raised this issue with you yesterday and my comments are reported in column 163 of the *Official Report*. You said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) that you believed that the matter was not sub judice.

I believe that I gave you a copy of a press release from British Coal which states that legal action was taking place after papers were lodged with the Court of Session in Edinburgh on Monday. I am rather puzzled by your ruling that the matter was not sub judice when the Prime Minister spoke on this matter yesterday.

As I said in my point of order yesterday, a dangerous precedent has been established because the Prime Minister advanced a case from the Dispatch Box which the South of Scotland electricity board's lawyer will be making in the courts. It is very damaging for a counsel to be able to present in evidence to the court a statement made by the Prime Minister.

Of course, I took the issue further than that in my point of order. I suggested that, although you had been adopting the practice of not taking points of order until after questions, there was a classic example yesterday of a situation where the Prime Minister should not have been allowed to get away with it as the issue was already before the courts.

I know that you, Mr. Speaker, are giving this matter fair consideration according to the procedures and past practices. However, in the light of what I have submitted to you in writing, the Prime Minister was clearly in the wrong to quote the brief from the SSEB when we know that the papers were already lodged with the court. I ask you, Sir, to give the matter due consideration.

Mr. Speaker: On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's comments, may I say that what he said yesterday and again today is not a matter of order, but concerns whether the Prime Minister gave the right answer. That cannot be a point of order; it is a matter of argument. I believe—I hope that the House will agree—that it is not right that points of order should be used as a vehicle to carry on Question Time. I am, of course, giving careful consideration to the matter.

I can only rule that a matter is sub judice when a date has been set by a court. No date has yet been set and I am informed that the situation has not changed since yesterday.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Further to that important point of order, Mr. Speaker. Mine may be considered a niggling point and I accept that. When I sought to raise a point of order with you at 3.30 pm, you told me that you would take points of order after the private notice question. My point of order has now changed. The purpose of taking points of order after other matters has succeeded today because the Member to whom I wanted to refer in my point of order has left the Chamber. Because I respect and agree with the procedures of the House, I will not now raise that point of order. However, that makes it much more important that you now consider the time at which points of order are taken.

Mr. Speaker: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the point of order that he was going to raise about a Minister's answer had anything to do with order?

Mr. Ewing: Yes, it had.

Mr. Speaker: It had not. The hon. Gentleman has said that his point of order concerned a Minister who has left the Chamber. Clearly, by definition, the hon. Gentleman was raising not a point of order, but a point of argument that he had with the Minister.

Mr. Ewing: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In a sense you are provoking me and I am surprised at you. To clear any doubts from your mind, may I say that I was not going to refer to a Minister or a ministerial answer, but wished to raise, as a matter for explanation, your selection of questioners. One hon. Member was called three times during Scottish Question Time, and I was about to inquire whether you kept calling him in the hope that eventually he would have something sensible to say.

Mr. Speaker: That is a perfectly legitimate point of order and one which I would gladly have fielded.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I raised with you the refusal, last Thursday, of a Home Office Minister to answer questions from eight hon. Members on the ground that the matter was sub judice. Yesterday you were kind enough to make a ruling that, as far as the rules of the House were concerned, the matter is not sub judice. As we have the pleasure of the company of the Minister today, I wonder whether you would be kind enough to repeat that ruling, as I understand that his Department is still declining to answer questions on the sub judice ground. Perhaps you would make it clear to him, Mr. Speaker, that the sub judice rule is not something behind which Ministers who are unwilling to face questions from hon. Members, should shelter.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that that point has been heard. I draw attention to my comments in yesterday's *Hansard*.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 11 MARCH

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Patrick Thompson
Mr. George J. Buckley
Mr. Edward Leigh

Security Services (Parliamentary Scrutiny)

3.59 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to ensure effective Parliamentary scrutiny of the security services.

It is not part of my argument that there is no necessity for the security services. Even without large-scale terrorism and attempted spying by foreign powers, there would remain the need to provide protection for the state and its citizens. However, it is necessary to have complete confidence that the security services carry out their duties in a completely politically impartial manner. Indeed, they are required to do so by the Maxwell-Fyfe directive published in 1952. Paragraph 4 of that directive states:

"It is essential that the security service should be kept absolutely free from any political bias or influence and nothing should be done that might lend colour to any suggestion that it is concerned with the interests of any particular section of the community or with any other matter than the Defence of the Realm as a whole."

As it has been questioned that such political impartiality has always operated, the security agencies have become the subject of controversy. Those doubts existed before Wright's book. In my view, and in the opinion of my right hon. and hon. Friends, there should be a full judicial inquiry into Wright's statement that MI5 officers, including himself, were involved in the attempted destabilisation of the Labour Government in the mid-1970s. The sooner such an inquiry takes place, the better.

At the moment, there is no meaningful parliamentary accountability for the security services. Ministers are not willing to answer questions that relate to security services, therefore such questions cannot be tabled in the first place. Unlike what occurs in some other democracies, no one could argue that Parliament has any real say in these matters.

In many respects the security services are a law unto themselves. Certainly their intrusion into civil liberties must concern all those who value our democratic rights. For instance, there were the disclosures of a former employee of MI5, Miss Cathy Massiter, who resigned in protest at the work she was asked to undertake. I shall give an illustration of the sort of work which led to her decision to leave MI5. She told us publicly that anyone who was on the national executive of the National Council for Civil Liberties, who worked for that organisation, or who was an active member to the degree of being a branch secretary, would be placed on permanent record, and routine inquiries were instituted to identify such people and police help was sought.

It is no use putting a question to the Home Secretary about that. He simply would say that he was not in a position to comment either way. Are such routine inquiries still being made into the National Council for Civil Liberties? Is that a wise and correct way of spending public money?

My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), prior to coming to the House, was the legal officer for the National Council for Civil Liberties. There is, we are told by Miss Massiter, an MI5 file on her. Presumably there is a file on her because she was a full-time employee of the National Council for Civil Liberties. As I asked on a previous occasion, was my hon. Friend considered to be a subversive? Was she out to overthrow

parliamentary democracy? Is that the proper way in which public money and time should be spent? Did the Prime Minister or the Home Secretary know that files were being kept on such people? Labour Members would be happy if all Conservative Members were as committed to parliamentary democracy and civil and democratic liberties as my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham.

What happened with the NCCL also occurred with CND, yet successive Tory Ministers have told us that campaigning for nuclear disarmament is perfectly legitimate. If that is the case, when a former editor of the CND journal resigned after some disagreement in the organisation, why was he asked questions by the special branch about the private lives of leading officials of CND? Why was he asked about the leadership style of the general secretary of CND? Why was he asked about who lived with whom and who was active in the organisation? That smacks more of a police dictatorship than a parliamentary democracy.

All that criticism does not come only from one side of the House. May I remind the House that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath)—he should know about such matters because as former Prime Minister he was head of the security services—in the debate on the Official Secrets Act only last month gave us an illustration of some people employed in the security services. If they saw someone on the tube reading the *Daily Mirror* their reaction would be to say, "Get after him, that is dangerous. We must find out where he bought it." I should like to know how many other such people are employed in the security services? How many Wrights are there who cannot make a decision between legitimate dissent and genuine subversion?

Miss Massiter deserves public credit for the manner in which, as an employee of MI5, she came to the conclusion that she could not carry out the work asked of her, and in my view she did the honourable thing and resigned and made her views known publicly.

We know from her disclosures about MI5 that there is a branch F which is subdivided. F2 investigates trade unions, F7 looks into teachers, lawyers and journalists, and F4 apparently puts agents into organisations. There does not seem to be any F grouping that looks into the City, the stock exchange or multinational companies.

We need to be sure that those who hold responsibility in the security services can and do make a distinction between mainstream legitimate dissent and a few extremist groups such as the National Front, and other Fascist or racist organisations or ultra-revolutionary groups. Can anyone believe that when Wright was holding a senior position in the security services he was capable of making such a distinction? How many other such officials remain employed in the security services?

The time has come for parliamentary accountability, in my view by way of a Select Committee. In that way the security services would no longer be a law unto themselves. I see no reason why a Select Committee should not be set up. I also see no reason why those Conservative Members who state that they are in favour of parliamentary democracy should be opposed to any such committee being established. Those who are given the task of combating subversion and defending our democracy must be accountable for their actions.

As long as the security services are the subject of the controversies that I mentioned today, that is not useful for their own good or for their image. I imagine that there must be a number of people employed in the security services who believe that we should have such parliamentary accountability as exists in a number of other western democracies.

The only change that has come about in the past few months has been the appointment of Sir Philip Woodfield as staff counsellor to the security services. I and a number of my hon. Friends wrote to Sir Philip Woodfield and asked him if he would have a meeting with us. We were asking only that the newly appointed adviser to the security services should have a meeting with Members of Parliament. I received a courteous reply, but the answer was no.

For all those reasons, I believe that I should be given permission to bring in my Bill, and that the reforms and changes for which I have argued should be carried out.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Who will prepare and bring in the Bill?

Mr. Winnick: It is unanimous. I believe that the Select Committee should be established in the very near future——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has made his speech. Who will prepare and bring in the Bill?

Mr. Winnick: I was going to say that the whole House——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Who will prepare and bring in the Bill?

Mr. Winnick: A distinguished list, Mr. Speaker.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Winnick, Mr. Peter Archer, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. George J. Buckley, Mr. Tam Dalyell, Mr. Michael Foot, Dr. John Gilbert, Ms. Harriet Harman, Mr. Eric S. Heffer, Mr. Max Madden, Mr. Chris Mullin and Ms. Marjorie Mowlam.

Mr. Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Winnick: Unless there is a Select Committee then, 29 April.

Mr. David Winnick accordingly presented a Bill to ensure effective Parliamentary scrutiny of the security services: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 29 April and to be printed. [Bill 100.]

Public Expenditure

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.10 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Major): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the White Paper on the Government's Expenditure Plans for 1988-89 to 1990-91 (Cm. 288—I and II).

The broad lines of policy on public expenditure were announced last November in the Autumn Statement and were debated in the House last month. That debate enabled the House to consider the trends in public expenditure and the way in which priorities had changed between programmes. The public expenditure White Paper before us today builds on that and provides a more comprehensive account of what the Government are spending, the service that they are delivering, and their efforts to secure even greater value for money. What the White Paper does not provide is a new statement of policy. I suspect that that was not fully appreciated last month when many people affected to be disappointed that it did not contain fresh expenditure plans. Frankly, it would have been extraordinary if it had, only weeks after our plans were announced in the Autumn Statement.

The public finance cycle is clear. It begins with the Budget and the medium-term financial strategy in the spring. That sets out our taxation and borrowing policies. It continues with the public expenditure survey to determine future spending plans. These are set out in broad terms in the Autumn Statement. It concludes with the public expenditure White Paper, followed by this debate, which provides an opportunity to consider the Government's management of taxpayers' money. We are helped in this by the report from the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, which makes a number of interesting observations and recommendations. The Government will respond to these as soon as possible, and I shall refer to a number of them shortly.

It is crystal clear that the strength of public finances has created the conditions for a sound economy, and that the soundness of that economy has fed back to the public finances. The crisis so lovingly and frequently predicted by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has failed to arrive yet again. Like Bunter's postal order, that crisis is forever in the post. In reality, rising real incomes and corporate profits are boosting the revenue side of the account.

But a growing economy also brings benefits for expenditure, and that is perhaps less well understood. Nationalised industries are producing better results—for example, the rising profits of British Steel and the increasing passenger revenues of British Rail. Falling unemployment is reducing the growth of social security spending and a buoyant economy is enabling central Government, local authorities and new towns to step up their disposals of surplus assets. These are a combination of changes that few people would have predicted accurately a few years ago.

The lower borrowing that has resulted from these changes is reducing the costs of servicing the national debt. Debt interest has now fallen from its peak of 5¼ per cent. of GDP in 1981-82 to about 4¼ per cent. this year. We expect it to fall still further, and this will enable us to speed more on priority programmes. It is worth putting that in context. If the PSBR had remained at its 1978-79 share of GDP, cumulative borrowing would by now be about £80 billion higher, with increased debt servicing costs of about £8 billion a year. That would be the equivalent of an extra 7p on the standard rate of income tax, just to finance the debt. None of that extra revenue would have gone on education, social security or health; it would all have gone to our creditors. That would have been the result of the policies that the Opposition still cling to with such hidebound affection.

We are in the fortunate position that we have dumped those policies. That is one of the principal reasons why our economic performance is so strong, but it will stay that way only if we continue with the policies that brought us to this point in the first place. I offer the House the assurance that that is precisely what we propose to do.

In the survey of public spending conducted last year, we added £4·5 billion to the planned programme expenditure in 1988-89 and £6 billion in 1989-90, while, at the same time, thanks to a growing economy, still reducing public spending as a proportion of national income. That proportion has already fallen from 43 per cent. when we took office to 42 per cent. now, which is a decrease of more than 4 per cent. from the peak to which it rose in 1982-83.

But that has not meant cuts, because national income has risen over the past eight years by 19 per cent. The proportion of spending to GDP is set to fall further, to 41 per cent. by 1990-91. But with a growing economy that further fall does not mean cuts either. This is in stark contrast to the rising share of national income absorbed each year by public spending in the 1960s and 1970s and it is a welcome contrast, indeed, for taxpayers.

The plans contained in this White Paper show that, within the constraint that we have set ourselves, we have been able to strengthen priority services, such as health, law and order, education, defence and the inner cities.

In its report, the Select Committee has raised some important issues which need to be addressed on the Health Service, and I shall respond to these, but let me first put the position in proper context. Measured in all sorts of ways, the National Health Service is not in crisis but is expanding, improving and becoming more efficient, as the programme of cost improvements has clearly demonstrated. Indicators of health show significant improvements in life expectancy in recent years — I should have thought that this was a good output measure —and large reductions in deaths from a wide range of conditions, and indicators of the number of treatments show large increases in patients treated, whether as in-patients, out-patients, or day-patients. Since 1978 the output of the hospitals service has increased by over 20 per cent. or about 2·5 per cent. a year, and treatments are now being widely offered that barely existed a decade ago. I suspect that little of this would have occurred if the Government had not provided increasing resources. But we have.

Total spending on the Health Service has risen by 32 per cent. more than inflation. It has risen, too, as a proportion of public spending, and will continue to do so. It has risen as a proportion of national income. Gross capital spending, which was cut very savagely indeed by the Opposition when in government, has increased by 42 per cent. in real terms, helped partly by rising capital receipts.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The Chief Secretary has described an optimistic picture of the Health Service, yet in counties such as mine five hospitals are about to close largely because of the non-funding of the nurses' wage award. Given the change in circumstances since the White Paper was originally drawn up, and as it appears that more money is available now than the Government believed was available then, will the Chief Secretary confirm that the Government could absorb the entirety of the wage awards without throwing their strategy off course?

Mr. Major: My remarks were not optimistic so much as realistic. They were a factual assertion, and nothing in what I said is not clearly and demonstrably fact. I shall turn to the hon. Gentleman's second point in a few moments, if he will be patient.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): If it were true that the Labour party was the party that cared about the Health Service, and if ours did not care, how is it that we are spending a higher proportion of total public expenditure and a higher proportion of GDP on the NHS than did the Labour party, which claims to care so much about the NHS?

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend has made a telling point. Indeed, I would not adequately be able to explain that point if I were a Member of the Opposition. Perhaps part of the explanation—nobody doubts that the Opposition care—lies in competence and in the fact that, with the reducing level of national debt, we have a far smaller deadweight cost in interest on that national debt. That absolutely reinforces the policies that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has followed in recent years.

In one of the most crucial areas of the National Health Service, the hospital and community health services, which are of great concern at the moment to many hon. Members, and to many beyond the House, current expenditure will have increased in 1987-88 by around 10 per cent.—well over twice the rate of inflation in the economy generally, and, what is more, faster than any measure of rising prices in the health sector specifically.

If one allows for that and also for the benefit of the cost-improvement programme,

"the margin available for service development"

will have increased by nearly 3 per cent., comfortably ahead of even the most pessimistic estimate of demographic pressures. Therefore, it rapidly becomes evident that current difficulties faced in the Health Service are not simply questions of funding; and funding alone will not solve those difficulties.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside) *rose*—

Mr. Major: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall give way in a few moments.

The Government have recognised that there are important issues to be examined. We must consider whether there are other ways of delivering health care which meet people's expectations. In doing so, I offer the assurance that we propose to preserve the principle that a high standard of health care must be available for all regardless of means. That principle is not at risk in the fundamental review of the management and funding of health care in this country that we have set in hand.

As well as those fundamental issues, the Select Committee was particularly concerned in its report at the uncertainty faced by health authorities, which have to plan their budgets before the review body recommendations are finalised and before consequent decisions on funding are known.

I understand and sympathise with that concern and with the dilemma facing health authorities. The Government have examined the problem to see whether there is a way of resolving it without abdicating responsibility for the control of public expenditure. We are not prepared to commit ourselves in advance to accepting review body recommendations unreservedly or to funding resulting awards in full — nor should or would any responsible Government. Those decisions can be made only when the recommendations have been received and studied.

However, what we can and will do is remove this uncertainty for health authorities in the future. Therefore, we have decided in future years to bring forward the timetable for the review body reports, so that decisions can be made on them well before the beginning of the financial year. We hope that review bodies will be able to submit their reports in time for decisions on them by the end of January or, at the latest, by mid-February.

Mr. Barry Jones *rose*—

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): I welcome enthusiastically my right hon. Friend's statement, which will make great improvements in the future. However, for this year, can he give any information of the date by which a decision is likely to be made, so that health authorities need not make premature decisions on the issues that he has mentioned?

Mr. Major: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his welcome, especially in his capacity as Chairman of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. I shall turn to the specific point that he mentioned in just a second.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my right hon. Friend accept that this statesmanlike decision will be widely welcomed, because one problem facing all health authorities is that of making their spending decisions before pay awards? Because of the special problems that face them this year, can the Government find their way clear to say that they will fund, for this one year until the new scheme comes in, the pay award that they agree—I repeat that they agree?

Mr. Major: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome. I shall deal with the position this year in a few moments.

Mr. Barry Jones *rose*—

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Before my right hon. Friend leaves that point, may I ask whether he is aware that some of us find the implication of what I think he said a little disappointing? It appears that we are to continue indefinitely to face a system of national monolithic pay bargaining and rate setting. Will my right hon. Friend concede that at least as part of the review that is taking place we should look at decentralising decision-making within the Health Service, and at greater flexibility in pay-setting in order to recognise the great variety of regional requirements, and skill and specialist requirements?

Mr. Major: I understand what my hon. Friend has in mind, part of which is being considered by the review body this year.

Mr. Barry Jones *rose*——

Mr. Major: I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Barry Jones: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way at last. In his intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) made an important point about Wales. None of us know of any health authority in Wales which, in our judgment, is anything other than underfunded. I advise the right hon. Gentleman that Opposition Members met his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales last month to tell him of our deep concern because we are certain that soon, if not now, the Secretary of State for Wales is to make a case to the right hon. Gentleman and to the Treasury for more funds for the Welsh Health Service. When the right hon. Gentleman receives that demand, will he please give it a fair wind?

Mr. Major: I certainly cannot prejudge any comments that may or may not come to me from my right hon. Friend. However, I advise the hon. Gentleman that I would consider with great care anything coming from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

I should make it clear that the new timetable will affect the reports of all the review bodies — the Nurses and Midwives Pay Review Body, the Doctors and Dentists Pay Review Body, the Armed Forces Pay Review Body and the Top Salaries Review Body. It will mean, in particular— I hope that the House will welcome this — that the outcome of salary awards will be known to Health Service treasurers before they finalise their budgets for the coming year. I hope and believe that that will remove a great deal of uncertainty for them in each future year.

We cannot, at this late stage, bring this year's reports on to this timetable, but we propose to try to minimise the period of uncertainty. In particular, it would be difficult to press the review body for nurses to hasten its report, because this year, as the House knows, it is considering a number of important and complex issues, including a new clinical grading structure. This seeks to reward skill and responsibility and to give better pay and career prospects to those nurses who choose to stay in areas of direct patient care, rather than move into administration. This meets precisely the point that so many Health Service professionals have drawn attention to in recent weeks. The review body will also be looking at special pay differentials needed to cope with localised recruitment difficulties— many hon. Members may also welcome that.

As I have said, we wish to minimise the period of uncertainty this year. Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reminded the House that last year the Government received all the reports of the review bodies between 1 and 14 April and announced all decisions on implementation and on funding by 23 April. She stressed that if, as we expect, the reports come in at a similar time this year, the Government will, for their part, be equally swift in announcing their decisions. We hope, therefore, to be in a position to announce firm decisions no later than the end of April.

In short, the position is as follows: first, we are carrying out a fundamental review of the management and financing of health care; secondly, the timetable for future review body reports will be brought forward so that the Government can announce their decisions well before health authorities finalise their budgets; and, thirdly, we hope that this year we will be able to announce our decisions on the review body recommendations and the financing of them no later than the end of April.

Decisions on review body pay in the Health Service are therefore only a matter of weeks away. As I have said, we hope to be in a position to announce our decisions by the end of the first month of the forthcoming financial year. In my judgment, it would be premature and unacceptable, therefore, to put into effect service reductions on the grounds of uncertainty. Moreover, the concerns of nurses, over the level of their pay, the structure of their pay and their career prospects, are all being comprehensively and speedily addressed, and the results will soon be known.

In the light of those assurances, there is one further point that I wish to add. In recent weeks only a small minority of nurses have decided to take part in industrial action. I hope that that minority will now realise that the strikes in the Health Service are unnecessary and damaging to the very service that they care about. If they continue, public and patients will draw the conclusion that the motives for such action cannot wholly lie in genuine concern for the Health Service or the pay and conditions of those who work within it. The action in Scotland today in unnecessary, pointless and damaging to patients, and it will not affect the Government's judgment on how to deal with that issue.

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that the Opposition have claimed to support the so-called action in Scotland today, that it is a strike organised by the National Union of Public Employees to try to keep up its role of resisting competitive tendering, and that it has nothing to do with patient care or funding for the Health Service, but is increasing waiting lists, cancelling operations and making a sham of any claim that the Opposition may have to care for patients in Scotland?

Mr. Major: My hon. and learned Friend makes a pertinent point extremely well. Patient care is being damaged in Scotland today and operations are being postponed. It is extraordinary that that action should have the support of Opposition Members, who in recent weeks have accused the Government of not caring about the Health Service.

The requirement to test the efficiency of domestic and catering services by competitive tendering has released over £100 million for patient care in England in recent years. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Government are determined to ensure that that happens in Scotland as well.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Does the Chief Secretary agree that his much-trumpeted announcement has committed not a penny of extra money to the NHS? Does he accept that it is a wholly inadequate response to the immediate problems that are faced by health authorities, and that, without the commitment of extra money, he will do nothing to allay the uncertainties of health authorities, which are now having to discuss whether to close wards and cancel operations? Will he end the uncertainty today by giving an assurance that he will accept in full the nurses' and ancillary workers' pay award, and that he will fund that award in full? Will he give us those assurances to end the uncertainty?

Mr. Major: I detect the tang of sour grapes in that intervention. The hon. Gentleman clearly does not realise

that the central part of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee's report asked the Government to deal with that uncertainty, and that is precisely what we have done. I have already answered the second part of what the hon. Gentleman said. As to the much-trumpeting of the statement, the fact is that it was trumpeted to no one at any stage at any time, and the hon. Gentleman looked as surprised as anybody else.

Mr. Brown: Will the Chief Secretary answer the central part of my question? Will he end the uncertainty facing health authorities by agreeing that he will accept in full the nurses' pay award, and that he will fund it in full?

Mr. Major: If the hon. Gentleman reads *Hansard*, he will discover that I dealt quite specifically and in detail with that point when, clearly, he dozed off a few moments ago. I trust that the hon. Gentleman will be more accurate when he makes his speech later than he has been about what I have said in the past few moments.

Mr. Brown: Will the right hon. Gentleman answer the question? Will he accept in full the recommendation of the nurses pay review body, and will he fund it in full?

Mr. Major: I have no intention of repeating what I said before simply to pander to the inadequacies of the hon. Gentleman's attention a few moments ago.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Do not those interventions demonstrate clearly that the Opposition are incapable of understanding the facts about the NHS even when they are told them repeatedly, and seem incapable of understanding that the NHS will receive more money next year—£1·1 billion more; the largest cash increase ever? That increase alone is larger than the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry. Can we send all Opposition Members a large postcard with those facts on it so that they can read it at their leisure?

Mr. Major: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Judged by the inaccuracies of documents that the Opposition have recently published about making Budget day NHS day, I doubt whether, even if they were given the facts, they would understand or use them accurately.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North) *rose*—

Mr. Major: I shall give way for the last time.

Dr. Reid: Is it not the case that in 1985 a suggested pay award of 8 per cent. for nurses was dealt with in two stages to reduce the effect to 5 per cent.? Is it not the case that in 1986, when the nurses were awarded almost 8 per cent., the Minister delayed it for three months to reduce it to 5·7 per cent.? Is it not the case that the only time that the Minister and the Government have made a full award to the nurses was last year, when there was a general election? Will the Minister pay the nurses in full this year—yes or no?

Mr. Major: Before the hon. Gentleman makes such ill-judged interventions, he would do well to acknowledge the fact that nurses today are infinitely better paid under this Government than they ever were under any previous Government.

Let me return to the industrial action. If such action continues, either generally or in Scotland specifically, it will not influence the Government's decision. We propose to proceed as I have described in the past few minutes. I reiterate the message that I first gave when the White Paper was published—there need be no expectation of a public expenditure package in the Budget.

In its report, the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee drew attention to a number of other points to which I wish briefly to refer. It recognised that the Autumn Statement is now the primary vehicle for announcing the main results of the survey and that, as a result, the White Paper has, to a considerable extent, been upstaged. The Committee's resulting suggestion that much of the material from volume 1 should be incorporated into the Autumn Statement is attractive and has a great deal to commend it. We shall therefore consider that carefully and sympatheticaly, despite the obvious technical problems that would need to be overcome. We shall certainly bear in mind the Committee's strong support for that proposal.

The Committee also suggested that volume 2—now over 400 pages of information—should be published as separate departmental booklets, as the Estimates are now. We shall consider that proposal sympathetically, along with the corresponding proposals that were made by the Public Accounts Committee last year.

I sense that parliamentary opinion is running in favour of such change. The Treasury is already investigating a number of possibilities, and as soon as that work is complete we shall put the proposals before Parliament.

If we change the way in which information is reported, there will be consequences for the way in which it is debated. One possibility would be for the broad lines of expenditure policy to be debated as part of the Autumn Statement, for Select Committees to consider the departmental booklets and for one or more of their reports to be chosen for debate in May or June. All that will need further consideration, which we shall give as speedily as possible.

The Select Committee also invited me, in its report, to set out the public expenditure effect of the agreement that has been reached on the future financing of the EC.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South) *rose*—

Mr. Major: With great respect, I did say that I had given way for the last time, and I must stick to that.

The agreement concludes a far-reaching review of the Community's finances and policies. It provides effective and legally binding controls on spending, effective measures to reduce agricultural surpluses, and the preservation of the United Kingdom abatement as agreed at Fontainebleau, and there is to be no oils and fats tax.

In so far as domestic public expenditure is concerned, the agreement is likely to increase our net payments to Community institutions by some £200 million to £300 million a year. This is compared with what would have happened with a continuation of the 1·4 per cent. VAT ceiling — the assumption that underlies the public expenditure White Paper. Compared with the effective level of spending in 1987, which was already in excess of the 1·4 per cent. VAT ceiling, the increase will be smaller, at around £100 million to £200 million a year. In response to the specific question of the Select Committee, I confirm that the extra expenditure will be met entirely from the reserve and will not involve reductions in agreed domestic programmes.

The timing of the future financing agreement means that the 1988 Community budget will not be adopted before the end of the current financial year, so the

[Mr. Major]

Community's emergency financing arrangments, known as provisional twelfths, will continue into 1988-89 rather than end in 1987-88, as assumed in the White Paper. This will increase our net payments to the Community in 1987-88 by about £240 million, mainly because our abatement in the first three months of 1988 is being made at the rate of the 1987, not the 1988, budget.

When the 1988 budget has been adopted, however, perhaps in May, we shall benefit from a much higher abatement, and the increased abatement will be backdated to the beginning of January. This will reduce our net payments in 1988-89, compared to the figure in the White Paper, by the same amount as the increase in 1987-88—around £240 million. Thus, in 1988-89 itself, the effect of the future financing package on our net payments will be very broadly offset by the effect of the delay in the adoption of the 1988 budget.

I am acutely aware that the breadth of public expenditure is such that, in the interests of allowing as many hon. Members as possible to speak in the debate, I have not been able to mention many important matters. I have not had time to mention the extra £240 million a year that we have added to the plans for spending on science and technology. Nor have I mentioned the £1·5 billion addition to our plans for capital expenditure in each of the next two years. I have not mentioned the extra £630 million that we are providing for education. That is £270 million more, even after taking account of the amounts allowed for teachers' pay and academic restructuring.

I have not referred to the extra resources that we are devoting to the inner cities and to the increased resources that we are attracting into the inner cities through creating a partnership with the private sector. I suspect very strongly that those increases will not find a place in the speech that we are about to hear from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), either.

Those public expenditure increases have been made possible only by the sound state of the public finances and the healthy condition of the economy. I confidently predict that the complete and abject failure of the Opposition to understand those simple truths will again be in evidence today. They seem to view the hard-won progress of recent years as a kind of windfall, just as I suppose they imagine that the economic failure that toppled them was sheer bad luck. If they do not understand why the economy is doing so well, the public do, as they have shown very clearly on three memorable occasions, in 1979, in 1983 and in 1987, and as I suspect they will do again at an unspecified future date.

The Opposition will again talk of cuts where there have been increases. They will air their obsession with pounds spent rather than output achieved, and this, surprisingly, despite the awful illustration of ILEA, which spends more and achieves less than any other education authority in the country. All those points that they will make are as familiar as they are flawed. The public are not fooled, and I trust that the House will not be fooled either.

4.44 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"deplores the under-investment in areas vital to the future of Britain which results from the public expenditure plans; urges Her Majesty's Government to take additional action to reduce unemployment and to strengthen Britain's productive and competitive performance; condemns the Government's antipathy towards public expenditure on vital community services; and in particular calls on Her Majesty's Government to recognise the strength of the evidence to two Select Committees and from the health care professions that the National Health Service is inadequately resourced, and to make extra provision in the Budget to end the funding crisis faced by the National Health Service and hospitals in particular."

The Chief Secretary's speech was characteristically full of statistics and typically overflowing with input and output measures. It was complete with the statutory Tory Central Office references to the last Labour Government. It was completely oblivious to the £60,000 million windfall benefits of North sea oil that the Government have been lucky enough to enjoy. Not a penny in extra cash is being offered for any part of the National Health Service. No health authorities will be better off as a result of any announcement that the Chief Secretary has made.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall give way in a moment.

The Chief Secretary's speech leaves completely unanswered the main public expenditure question of concern to the whole nation—the underfunding of our National Health Service.

Mr. John Townend: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall give way in a moment.

If the economy is doing as well as the Chief Secretary says, if public finances are as sound as he tells us, if the Chancellor of the Exchequer is facing his Budget with unique opportunities available to him, why cannot the Goverment afford to respond to the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing, the National Association of Health Authorities and the recommendations of two Select Committees, and offer proper and adequate funding to the Health Service?

This week, uniquely, 100 doctors and consultants in Ilford have placed an advertisement in their local newspaper, saying that they cannot guarantee that patients will be able to get the hospital treatment they deserve.

Mr. Fairbairn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall give way later.

In addition, new information has become available this week about the £5 million that is needed to employ the cardiologists that we need in our hospitals, the £25 million that is needed to keep open all the children's cancer wards, the £30 million that is needed to make available nationwide the cervical cancer screening service. This week, behind closed doors, many health authorities are wondering how they can budget for the future settlements next year. They are no wiser today about how far the Government are prepared to fund the nurses' pay settlement, the doctors' and dentists' pay settlement or the ancillary workers' pay settlement.

Mr. John Townend: If this matter is so vital to the nation, will the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) explain why only about 16 Labour Back Benchers are present? What will he say to my constituents in Bridlington who have waited 40 years for a new hospital

to replace two old hospitals? They did not get that hospital under the last Labour Government because they cut the capital building programme, but they will get that hospital this year. It is opening in two weeks' time, after expansion of the budget provided by the Government.

Mr. Brown: I am glad that the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) has expressed the concern that is felt throughout the nation about hospitals, nurses and facilities that are needed. Perhaps the Chief Secretary will explain why, when faced with the underfunding problems of the Health Service, the Cabinet, last Thursday, should have issued an unprecedented pre-Budget statement. According to that statement, as a result of the cash crisis, the Government will not consider forgoing tax cuts in the Budget for the top people in the country, nor will they forgo changes in capital gains tax or inheritance tax. That statement told us specifically that we could not expect extra funding for the National Health Service in the Budget.

Mr. Fairbairn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall give way in a moment.

Is it not typical of the Government's distorted sense of priorities that they should take the one Budget priority which unites all decent opinion throughout the country —the funding of our National Health Service—and, by an unprecedented act of malice, eliminate it from consideration in the Budget.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Brown: They then claim that the reasons for not mentioning the Health Service in the Budget are purely technical, as if taxes and spending are not inextricably linked and as if, in 1985 and 1986, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had not announced in his Budget extra money for employment measures.

The reality is that, until 15 March, the Chief Secretary and the Chancellor will tell us that they cannot invest any more money in the National Health Service because of what the Budget is there to do. After 15 March, after the tax cuts, the Chief Secretary and the Chancellor will tell us that they cannot invest in the NHS because of what the Budget has done.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Member is obviously not giving way at this moment. Hon. Members should desist from trying to intervene for a while.

Mr. Brown: The truth is that—*[Interruption.]* I wish that Conservative Members would listen. They might have addressed some of their questions about the funding of pay awards to the Chief Secretary when he spoke.

The truth is that no Chancellor has faced his Budget with so much money but with views that are so out of touch with the decent instincts of the British people. This is the Government who keep telling us that it is the people's money, not the Government's money. It is the people who must choose, not the Government. Is there any doubt about what the people would choose? They would choose to invest in the NHS.

Mr. Forth: As the hon. Gentleman develops his remarks, will he give the House and the country a commitment that a future Labour Government wil reopen any ward that has been closed, eliminate all NHS waiting lists and meet any pay demands in full? If he gives that commitment, will he tell the House what it will cost the economy and the taxpayer? If not, will he tell the House what he would do with the NHS?

Mr. Brown: That is exactly the question that the hon. Gentleman should be asking the Chief Secretary.

We are committed to funding the NHS properly. That is why, last Wednesday, in the light of the evidence that we have taken from the British Medical Association, the National Association of Health Authorities and the Royal College of Nursing, and in the light of the evidence available to the Select Committee on Social Services and the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, we announced that the proper sum required is about £2,000 million. That is money that the Chancellor should make available in the Budget.

It is not as if the Government are investing inadequate sums in the NHS so that they can invest more in other public services. Perhaps the Minister who is to reply to the debate will tell us why, in a year that is claimed to be one of unparalleled prosperity for Britain and at the same time as the Government are discussing the scope for tax cuts in the Budget, in the public expenditure White Paper the Government have cut the real value of the budgets of half a dozen Government Departments.

Perhaps the Minister will tell us why this year the Government have frozen the value of child benefit and will remove 1 million pensioners in April from all help with rent and rates, and why they have forced 4 million of our poorest households to pay rates for the first time, no matter how poor they are. Will the Minister explain why the Government have imposed dental charges and are imposing charges for eye tests, despite the Prime Minister's assurance in previous years that charges would never be introduced, and why, last week——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I am not giving way. I shall give way to the Minister. I am happy to give way to him.

Mr. Major: Before the hon. Gentleman continues his misleading litany, perhaps he will explain to the House, if the Government are as he describes, why the increase in programme spending next year is £4·5 billion, with a further £6 billion in the second year of the survey?

Mr. Brown: Will the Chief Secretary tell me what was misleading in what I said about the withdrawal of rent and rate support and about the introduction of charges for eye and dental treatment? Will he tell us why, if the Government are so flush with money, last week, in new regulations on the social fund, the Government imposed a state charity fund, which will force thousands of our citizens to beg and borrow for vital necessities? The state is withdrawing from responsibility for the relief of poverty and passing it to the soup kitchens of the Salvation Army.

Mr. Fairbairn: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the fact that some doctors were in doubt as to what operations they might or might not be able to perform. Will he reflect on the fact that he and Scottish Back-Bench Labour Members are today supporting a strike which will guarantee that hundreds of operations cannot be performed? It is a political strike to frustrate more funds going to health care. It does not seem to me to support the principles that the hon. Gentleman is putting forward, when unions vote against the use of the £3·6 million of

[Mr. Fairbairn]

extra funds for operations, transplants and ophthalmic units. That has been given to Scotland in the past few weeks, thanks to the Government's success.

Mr. Brown: The hon. and learned Gentleman shows the difficulties that I have as a Member of Parliament in representing all my constituents. Will not the hon. and learned Gentleman put the pressure that he wants to bring to bear on the Minister? In Scotland, as a result of the Government's policies, waiting lists are 8,000 higher than in 1979. The number — *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members should listen. Waiting lists are 8,000 higher in Scotland than they were in 1979 and the number of acute beds in Scottish hospitals has been reduced by 2,000. That is the state to which the Government have brought the NHS.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I should like to refer to the detailed evidence and recommendations of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. In a non-party political way, I want to congratulate the Chairman of the Committee on the excellent work that his Committee has done. As the Chief Secretary did, we welcome the proposal that many of the public expenditure White Paper details should be included in the Autumn Statement. It is entirely right that decisions should be announced as quickly as possible and not delayed until the publication of a public expenditure White Paper in January.

I wish that the Chief Secretary had dealt with this matter in more detail, but we also welcome the Committee's view that greater use of price indices to give a proper value of the volume of expenditure should be part of the public expenditure White Paper exercise. That factor is of distinct relevance to the NHS. The cash figures show a rise, but inflation is 3·5 per cent. and the GDP deflator is 4·25 per cent., and the relative price effect to take account of NHS pay and prices is about 6 per cent. It is small wonder that the cash figures do not reflect the real position in the NHS.

We welcome the Select Committee's recommendations about the timing of the nurses' and other pay reviews, and the fact that the Government have taken them up. It makes absolutely no sense for health authorities to begin their budgeting year in the first week of April, for the pay review board to report in the second week of April and for the Prime Minister to make an announcement in the third or fourth week of April. That would make it impossible for health authorities to plan ahead. The problem is that nothing that the Chief Secretary has said today makes life easier for health authorities faced with cash problems at the moment.

The facts in the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee were of great interest. They showed that the Chancellor had before him about £5,000 million more in revenue than he originally expected. Not only that, but the figures showed that, after higher than expected asset sales were taken into account, the net underspending was about £1,300 million—£100 million less on the Foreign Office budget, £200 million less on trade and industry, £400 million less on transport, and £700 million less on housing.

Next year, the Chancellor is likely to receive about £7 billion more in revenue than was anticipated, yet the clear message of the Chief Secretary's speech is that, even when this year he has spent less than originally expected and has received more than originally anticipated, and even when next year he will receive more than was projected, he still refuses to make a commitment to invest in the National Health Service or in any of our other great public services. It is not financial constraints that prevent the Chief Secretary and the Chancellor from acting, but the ideological constraints that they have placed upon themselves.

I ask the Chancellor and the Government to consider two areas where I believe that there is a developing consensus throughout the whole country, which extends beyond the Labour party to the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing and the National Association of Health Authorities, and includes many Conservative Members.

Indeed, I was interested to read the Budget submission of the Tory Reform Group. The Chancellor may not like to listen to what the Tory Reform Group says. It is interesting that its patrons include the Secretary of State for Education, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Home Secretary; of course, its president is the Secretary of State for Wales. The Tory Reform Group says:

"The Budget . . . will be judged not by the size of the nest egg, nor by the Government's ability to accumulate it—but by the way in which they choose to use it . . . If this is the situation, it all becomes a question of priorities and high on that list will be education, employment, social services, the inner cities and, above all, health. . . . It would be deeply offensive to many people, in all parties, if the major 'bonus share' in this year's Budget were to go to those on higher incomes until or unless the most pressing needs of the NHS are also met."

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I cannot speak on behalf of the Tory Reform Group, but is my hon. Friend aware that when I visited the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Birmingham at the beginning of January, I went into the section dealing with cancer patients where I was shown two wards with 14 beds for cancer paitents which had been closed in the last year? When I wrote to the chairman of the regional health authority, he replied that, with the financial crisis facing the west midlands, there was no alternative. Does that not give the lie to those who argue that there is no crisis in the National Health Service?

Mr. Brown: I agree with my hon. Friend. The letter which had to go out from the Minister of Health to the chairmen of health authorities in December said that it would not be possible to transfer resources to the priorities which had been identified by the Government because of the cash restraints. It is not just the Tory Reform Group, which is patronised by a number of Cabinet members, which believes that the Budget should be used to help the National Health Service.

There may be some doubt about what lay behind the speech of the Secretary of State for Social Services at the Young Conservatives' conference. What is clear is that the Secretary of State believed that the Treasury had stopped him getting the best settlement for his budget. He said:

"It seemed to me clear, as many have said, we needed more resources, and I secured from the Chancellor increases on top of what we had in the last eight years . . . 11 per cent. in real terms, but I did not think that was enough in terms of the changes I would like to see . . . I wanted to see additional resources above and beyond what I secured."

If the Secretary of State for Social Services is right—he speaks with all the honesty of a Minister who was

defeated on the issue—what weight can we put on the words of the Chief Secretary when, addressing the Select Committee on the Treasury and the Civil Service, he said:

"We reached a bilateral agreement on the programme and that tends to suggest an agreement means consensus . . . Every colleague had the opportunity of making whatever points he or she wished to make."

Who is telling the truth—the Secretary of State for Social Services, who said that he was defeated, or the Chief Secretary, who said that there was no battle? Perhaps there is no contradiction. Is it that the Secretary of State for Social Services fought so valiantly for his budget that no one noticed? Is it that the Treasury had simply stopped listening to the Secretary of State for Social Services a few weeks ahead of the rest of the country? Or is it that the Treasury is determined to stand up to the Department of Health and Social Security and has a different agenda, seeing in the current problems of the National Health Service an opportunity to narrow the scope of a public service?

Is it not the case that, when the Secretary of State for Social Services agreed with the presidents of the royal colleges of medicine that more cash was needed for health care, the Chief Secretary replied that that could come from the private sector? Is it not the case also that the main item being considered as part of the internal Health Service review is the expansion of the private sector in medicine? The electorate was not told about the review. Consultation will clearly be a charade. The review will be dominated not by the professionals in health care, who are not even included in its membership, but by people who use the National Health Service only as a last resort.

The Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), in the speech in which she urged people to give up second holidays, when millions cannot afford the first, said:

"There are many of us around now that feel that the time is right to look at radical new solutions to take us into the next century, solutions which revolve around the private sector playing a far bigger part in health provision in the future . . . We could be asking it to grow to £2 billion or more in a comparatively short space of time . . . We are talking about a thumping big growth of that sector the like of which we have never seen in this country before . . . We will have to consider whether they can do it by themselves or whether they will need help. And I don't just mean tax relief or whatever."

Is it not clear that for the Government the crisis in the National Health Service—for that is what it is—is not a challenge to statesmanship, not a call for compassion and care, not a call to avoid needless suffering in hospitals, but a new opportunity for the private sector, with an agenda to push more and more patients into the private sector and bring private profit right to the heart of the NHS, the one great public service that has so far resisted the Government's obsession with privatisation?

The NHS is to be considered for privatisation not because it is inefficient — there is no evidence that, compared with the private sector, the NHS does not secure far better value for money, is administratively far less expensive and is far more cost-effective than any private sector hospital—not because the private sector can offer a better deal, but simply because the NHS is there, next in line after electricity, water, coal, steel and the privatisation of local authority services. It is for Conservative Members the last great public service still to be captured by the speculative forces of the City. The response to eight years of neglect in health care is to withdraw the public sector systematically from a solution to the problems that the Government have created.

Mr. Forth *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman again.

There is another area where there is a developing consensus in the country which excludes the Government. People are increasingly realising that the Government must invest more in training, in education, in research and development, in science and in innovation to ensure long-term economic efficiency and industrial success. As a nation we are already investing less in ourselves in the oil-rich 1980s than we did in the 1960s and 1970s. We are investing a smaller share of the national income than any other European country, with the exception of Belgium. The CBI has just reported that the shortfall in investment has serious implications for business competitiveness.

What sense does it make for the Government, who should be bridging the investment gap in those vital areas, to compound the problem by announcing, in the small print of the White Paper on public expenditure, cuts in the real value of capital investment in just about every Department?

There are cuts of £14 million in the capital programme for education and science; of £30 million in transport; of £90 million in trade and industry; of £120 million in housing; of £48 million in Scotland; and of £38 million in Wales. In real terms, capital investment has been significantly increased only in the Home Office prison building programme, because we need to build more prisons to cope with the increased crime levels. As the evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee states, capital investment is to fall in real terms by 5 per cent. in central Government over the next three years, and by 14 per cent. in local authorities.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West) *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I am not giving way again.

We know that more people leave school early without qualifications, and that our work force contains fewer people with technical qualifications than those of most of our major industrialised competitors. But the Government will not act, even when they recognise that there is a shortfall in the investment going into those vital areas, even when in other countries the public sector fills the gap and spends more, and even when it is admitted that market forces of themselves cannot do the job properly.

Was it not Sir Francis Tombs, the personal scientific adviser to the Prime Minister, whose Engineering Council said yesterday:

"Normal market forces will not work to make up the severe shortfall and provide the skills base needed by modern industry and commerce"?

Even when the Government know that there is a shortage of investment and the market will not fill the gap, they refuse to back public sector investment to the extent that they should. We need a Government who open doors to young people; to provide opportunities, break down barriers and help young people up the ladder of opportunity. Instead, we have a Government who, by failing to invest to the same degree as our competitors, are slamming doors shut in the face of many young people who need the best possible technical training and skill qualifications if we are to succeed in the modern world of the future.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher) *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has already said that he is not prepared to give way at this stage.

Mr. Brown: The same is true of the problems that we face in research and development, problems that are not answered in detail in the public expenditure White Paper or in anything that the Chief Secretary has said. Let us take the science budget. After the pay awards and the new spending announced for AIDS research, it receives no extra money. Professor Sir David Phillips, chairman of the advisory board for the research councils, has said that decisions by the Government are

"leading progressively to an unstable situation".

The board says that the budget

"does not provide the means to move our nation's scientific capability towards the twenty first century".

The Medical Research Council faces for tomorrow the same problems faced by the National Health Service today. Referring to the shortfall of £40 million in medical research funds, Professor Colin Blakemore, head of physiology at Oxford university, has said:

"In my gloomiest moments I think we have lost the future".

Professor Leslie Iversen, head of the United Kingdom neuroscience laboratories, has said:

"We are committing national suicide".

The Government admit that the private sector is not doing the job. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has said that our private sector research and development is a smaller proportion of gross domestic product, and is growing more slowly, than that of our major competitors. In other countries, as the CBI has pointed out in its agenda for 1988, far more money is spent on research and development. But even when it is recognised that market forces will not do the job by themselves, the Government are not increasing the research and development budget in the way that is necessary to guarantee economic efficiency and industrial success for the future.

When will the Government set aside their antipathy to everything public and their obsession with everything private? When will they realise that the public sector exists not because of decisions by previous Labour Governments, but because there are national responsibilities, which the private sector cannot or will not undertake and market forces alone cannot perform in the national interest? Only because of the success of 100 years of collective provision in education, training, health and transport have people forgotten the chaos, the uneven patchwork of provision, the undercapitalised industries, the obsolete equipment and the gaps and shortages in a whole range of public services, which led people to demand public intervention as a necessary way of improving our economy in the first place.

What is perhaps most worrying about the Government's stance in these few weeks in the run-up to the Budget is that we are being asked to sacrifice the certain, unmistakable, concrete benefits of overdue and necessary public investment in our National Health Service, and in other public services vital to the economy, for the unproven and unprovable, the untested and untestable, benefits of top-rate tax cuts for the very few.

The Government are not yet satisfied, having already reduced the top rates of taxation, given away £13,000 million in tax cuts to the very rich and created a whole series of tax concessions that are available only for them. The Government are not satisfied that those in the top range of the income scale can set £40,000 against tax for the business expansion scheme, and that limitless tax reliefs are available in forestry—usually for planting the wrong trees in the wrong place for the wrong reason.

They are not satisfied even when, in the heart of the most deprived inner-city areas, enterprise zones have become tax shelters for the very rich to make a great deal of money without even setting foot in those areas. They are not satisfied that, when the basic rate for a nurse, a car worker or a teacher is 27p in the pound and utterly unavoidable, the effective tax rate for many wealthy people can be as low as 10p in the pound.

How, in those circumstances, can the Government defend putting money aside for further tax cuts for the very rich? Would it not be the triumph of dogma over common sense for the Government even to contemplate abolishing capital gains or inheritance tax, at the cost of more than £1,000 million to the nation—money that, if properly invested, could ease the problems in our hospitals and health centres, and go a long way to restoring the vitality of many public services? Would it not be the triumph of greed over the national interest if the Government were to proceed with their plans to reduce the top rate of taxation from 60p to 40p or 50p in the pound, when the money that would be lost to the nation——

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton) *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East made it clear earlier that he was not giving way. The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) has only just come into the Chamber, yet again.

Mr. Brown: Would it not be the triumph of greed over common sense if the Government were to use the £1,600 million that would be lost in top rate tax cuts—money that could make good the shortfall in the NHS finances identified by the all-party Social Services Committee only in the last few weeks? What justification can the Government have for giving more to people who are already wealthy, when the NHS and other public services are waiting for vital funds?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I am just finishing my speech.

When I see the ever-lengthening queues of the elderly and the sick waiting for hospital treatment which they cannot now rely on obtaining; when I see pensioners so poor on £39·50 a week that they have to choose between heating and eating; when I see families in such distress that many children, in the 1980s, are going to school ill clad and hungry; when I see households so destitute that they will now have to beg and borrow from a state charity fund which will not even offer to help them in the first instance; and, on the other hand, when I see unused and under-used resources—money that is being sent overseas when it should be invested here, money squandered in speculative activities in the City when it could be used more productively in industry and money going to a rich few on the basis that as their incentive they must get richer while the poor need the spur of their poverty to escape; when I see needs that can be met only by public intervention to redress the economic imbalance and social injustices and at the same time Government resources being misdirected, I see the challenge facing a Government in a democratic

society. It is a challenge to meet those unmet needs by using those under-used resources that, because of their antipathy to public investment and services, this Government refuse to meet. It is a challenge that, in the interests of social cohesion, should be taken up. It is a challenge that clearly will be met only by a Labour Government.

5.20 pm

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): Iain Macleod, under whom I served my apprenticeship on the Opposition Front Bench, when faced with a concession from the Government, had a favourite expression—I never shoot Santa Claus. It is a dictum that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) might take to heart. The speech of my hon. Friend the Chief Secretary contained a considerable number, not only of concessions, but of important improvements in the way in which economic forces might be handled.

With great warmth and enthusiasm, I express my appreciation for the way in which my right hon. Friend has responded, and responded so quickly, to the views expressed by the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee.

Some of these issues are of great political importance to our constituents. If one gets one's report accepted in such a way, one should tear up one's notes and make a different speech, but I shall retain a certain amount of what I was going to say.

I welcome my hon. Friend's response on documentation and the procedures of the House for debating these matters. We have seen substantial improvements in our procedures since the beginning of the decade, and particularly in the balance between the Executive and Parliament, not least by the establishment of the departmental Select Committee system, combined with the important arrangements that we now have for debating items of public expenditure under the Estimates day procedure.

In the report that the Select Committee has just produced, we are seeking to build on those two major reforms in an important respect. We suggest that the documentation should be improved. The Select Committee advocated, and my right hon. Friend has accepted, a change in our arrangements whereby more detail is provided in the Autumn Statement, and then the main bulk of the enormous public expenditure, volume II, is divided into departmental reports. If that can be achieved, the extent of parliamentary scrutiny and accountability of the Government will be greatly improved, and that will be an important change.

If we go along that route, it will have important implications for the way in which we debate these matters. This may even be the last of the public expenditure White Paper debates in the present form. It has never been a particularly popular debate. When it was a two-day debate, it was disastrous. The Whips used to spend their time finding Members to speak. If we can have closer scrutiny on a departmental basis, while at the same time continuing the improvements in Estimates days, this will be a great change and an improvement in the way in which we debate our procedures.

The documentary side has essentially been accepted by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary. The procedural side has important implications for everyone in the House, not least the Opposition, and we have put forward our proposals as a Green Paper rather than as a White Paper. None the less, I hope that they will be carefully considered and that changes can be made.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary has responded to certain important aspects of the Committee's report. Much of it is concerned with the problems that arise in the assessment of priorities within the financial year. We draw particular attention to these problems in paragraph 36. We say:

> "One objective of the White Paper and related documents must be to enable departments and those implementing their policies to plan ahead, but this is manifestly being frustrated in some cases by the way in which pay settlements are treated each year."

We took the NHS as a good example, pointing out that district health authorities do not have a firm basis from which to plan for the future. As I understand it, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is essentially proposing to accept what we suggest in paragraph 37—that is, to alter the timing of the pay review bodies and to bring forward the timing when the Government announce their decision on whether they accept the recommendations of the review bodies, and on funding, so that those who have to plan for the year ahead will know what the situation is before the year begins.

That is a very significant change and one of great importance for the health authorities and all other responsible bodies. The rapidity of the Government's response is to be welcomed. It may be that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary was going to say all this anyway, without the Select Committee's report, but, on the other hand, it is possible that that might not have been the case. He is also suggesting for this year that the results, particularly of the nurses' review body, about which we are all greatly concerned, will be announced before the end of April, and my right hon. Friend showed clearly that he thought it would be premature of health authorities to go ahead and announce savings elsewhere in the Health Service until that was done. I certainly agree with him in that respect.

I can refer to a constituency case. Worthing health authority is carrying out widespread public consultations on a long list of savings that may need to be made if the nurses' review body and other pay settlements are not funded in full, and that is causing considerable concern. My right hon. Friend is right to say that decisions should not be taken on that basis until we know what the position is on funding, and he has made it clear that he hopes that that will happen by the end of April.

It is sometimes suggested that we need not fund the pay settlement in the Health Service in full, because that will somehow encourage efficiency in the Health Service. Because of demography and other factors, the pressure that the Health Service faces is great enough to encourage it to seek every possible improvement in efficiency. On the other side of the coin, if even greater pressure is imposed upon it so that it has to make savings elsewhere, typically, it closes wards. Nothing is more inefficient than closing wards where all the overhead costs continue and the savings are small. I understand the point that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary made, and I am putting forward a powerful argument that, when the settlement is finally decided in April, the full amount of the funding should come from the reserve and not from savings elsewhere in the Health Service.

[Mr. Terence L. Higgins]

The Select Committee also referred to a related and broader point about priorities within the Health Service. There is a danger that, when a particular Department finds that it has to make a substantial increase in resources, and that is accepted by the Treasury and the Government, if that increase cannot be met from the reserve, it is right that the matter should be looked at across the board to see whether savings should come from some other Department than from the Department which, it has been agreed, should have more resources. If not, we cannot be sure that we have the right allocation of resources.

The letter that the Treasury sent to the Committee in answer to the point that we raised about these issues made it clear that in previous years—on the Health Service, for example—the Cabinet had not looked across the board for where the savings should come from. It is understandable that, if someone comes to the Cabinet once the expenditure round is finished and tells its members to look for savings elsewhere, the Cabinet will make a rapid decision not to do that and to find the savings in the Department that needs the extra money. But that is not the best way of ensuring that our resources are properly allocated.

Much of the problem in the Health Service has been that resources have been badly allocated between different districts within regions. During the long period when the Labour Government were supported by the Liberal party, and when there were cuts in the hospital building programme, it was difficult to move resources from the districts that were said to be overfunded on the RAWP formula to those that were underfunded. One of the beneficial effects of the big increase in Health Service resources that has been made is that it is now much easier to make such a redistribution from one district to another, because it does not then involve a proportionate cut in the parts of the region that were previously overfunded on the RAWP formula. That is one of the Government's successes in the Health Service.

The Select Committee's report also addressed the issue of how to appraise the allocation of resources in the past. The relative price effect, rather than the cash figures deflated by the GDP deflator, is a better way to measure what has happened. It may not be the right measure on pay from the nurses' point of view, but it is the right way of asking whether we have allocated more real resources to this or that use. That provides the basis for the future. There has been some misunderstanding about this on the part of the Treasury, which is worried about the cash limit system being undermined. Neither I nor the Committee believe that that will happen, and there is an argument for using the relative price effect in the future.

We shall have to read carefully what the Chief Secretary said this afternoon about the EEC. It was a complex statement, but he again responded immediately to the Committee's suggestion that the position on the EEC should be clarified.

Overall, I believe that my right hon. Friend made an excellent response to a series of constructive suggestions; I congratulate him on the way in which he made his speech and on its content.

5.32 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), because he is an excellent Chairman of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, and it is due to his wise chairmanship that we have produced an excellent and constructive report that will help the House to come to a view on public spending, and on what has happened and what should happen.

The background to this debate and to the run-up to the Budget is that, despite a year in which output growth has been at its highest since the early 1970s, and in which revenues are likely to be much greater than forecast last year, the Government refuse to sanction the necessary increases in Health Service spending. Such increases would, as most objective observers agree, help to solve the current crisis in the National Health Service.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Before the hon. Gentleman proceeds to all the strictures which I do not doubt he is about to deliver to the Government, will he, in passing, be generous enough to pay tribute to them for the two achievements to which he referred—the growth rate that we have enjoyed, which is unprecedented for a generation, and the buoyancy of revenue? Will he for once give a little credit where it is due?

Mr. Radice: I note that the hon. Gentleman did not mention North sea oil. As for the growth rate, the Chancellor told the Select Committee that it was not sustainable beyond one year, as the hon. Gentleman will remember.

Buoyant revenues are excellent, but how should they be used? That constitutes part of the argument between the Opposition and the Government. Some Conservative Members would like the revenues to be used to increase National Health Service spending. Most observers find it difficult to understand how, given the increase in revenue and the good year that the economy has had, the Government have got themselves into such a pickle over Health Service spending. The Select Committee report helps to shed some light on what has happened.

First, it is clear that the Treasury bounced the Cabinet into its decision on public spending, with a highly conservative estimate of what revenue was likely to be. It is obvious that the Treasury had a good idea last autumn that revenue was running well ahead of forecast, yet no account of the buoyant revenues was taken when the public spending total was determined. If revenue determined expenditure, as successive Chief Secretaries have told the Select Committee it does, and as the Government claim, total spending could be up to £10 billion more than the Government have decided. Even without the revenue increase, spending could be at least £1 billion or £2 billion higher and still remain within the Government's target of reducing public spending as a proportion of GDP.

The Committee's second point was that Government procedures for determining public spending did not allow the Government to develop a coherent view of competing priorities. As we said:

"A series of bilateral negotiations with individual Ministers does not add up to collective decision making."

I also suspect—I refer to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) in his excellent speech—that the process of bilateral negotiations was fatally undermined last year by the failure of the Secretary of State for Social Services to press for sufficient funds for the Health Service. As we saw from

the example of Sir Keith Joseph, as he then was, it makes it easier for the Chief Secretary and lets the Cabinet off the hook if a Secretary of State fails to bat for his own budget.

So, partly because the Treasury bounced the Cabinet on revenue, and partly because the responsible Minister failed in his duty, the Government have got themselves into an appalling mess over the National Health Service. Yet, as everyone knows, money is running out of the Chancellor's ears. He will have at least £10 billion more revenue than he told the House—and his own colleagues—he had last year. The Government have the extra money—and more—to begin to help solve the National Health Service crisis, but they refuse to do so.

Finally, I want to consider whether decreasing public spending as a proportion of GDP is any longer—if it ever was—a suitable policy objective. This is in part a political argument. The Opposition believe that a civilised, prosperous nation such as Britain needs a substantial level of public spending and public investment in basic infrastructure such as roads, transport, lighting and sewerage, in basic services such as health, education and housing and to provide a basic income for people in sickness, unemployment and old age.

Conservative Members tend to be far more sceptical about public spending. They argue that many of the public services can be provided by private enterprise and that extra revenue should be given back in tax cuts so that people can spend the extra as they want. I believe that that is the Treasury argument. They argue, too, from a historical point—that in the 1970s public spending was out of control and that public spending increases at that time led to inflation.

I do not want to get into that old debate, except to say that the main reason for the public spending increases as a proportion of GDP in the 1970s was the impact of the recession on revenue. If hon. Members doubt that, they should remember how Government spending rose as a proportion of GDP at the height of the recession, between 1980 and 1982. It is interesting that, when the Government quote figures about the proportion of public spending compared to GDP, they do not take figures from the time of a Labour Government—they have to take figures from 1982, when public spending rose to 46 per cent. of GDP. It was a case not of profligacy on the part of the Government, but of the impact of the recession on revenue spending.

There is little evidence to suggest that increases in public spending in 1974-75 led to the inflationary surge of that period. I have studied this carefully. The main engine of inflation was the burst in commodity prices, the oil shock and the accompanying pay explosion.

In any case, the situation today is very different from that in the mid-1970s.—*[Interruption.]* I do not think that we were responsible for the Barber boom. Public spending has declined sharply as a proportion of GDP. It is now about 42 per cent., compared with nearly 47 per cent. in 1982-83. Output growth this year is the best since the 1970s, as the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) said. Although it is expected to decline in the coming year, it should still be in the region of 3 per cent.—the figure the Chancellor told the Select Committee the British economy ought to be able to sustain for several years. In these new circumstances, the question becomes: why on earth should public spending not grow in line with growth in GDP? The House should consider that proposition seriously.

Now that public spending is down to 42 per cent. of GDP, why are the Government planning a further decrease, as is suggested in the White Paper? The only rational argument for continuing the decline of public spending as a proportion of GDP is that it will allow taxpayers to have more money to spend as they like. That is the only argument that we hear from the Conservative party, but there is no economic justification for it. Yet we know from public opinion polls and the pattern of expenditure in other similar countries that, as people grow more affluent, they prefer to spend more on health and education.

There is therefore a strong case for allowing public spending to rise in line with growth. That is not inflationary or fiscally irresponsible. Increases in public spending would not be financed by increased borrowing or by increased taxation, but would come from increased output.

The great advantage of such a shift in policy would be that it would enable the education budget, for example, to be increased substantially. We know how important education is for the country's future. Such a shift would also allow Health Service spending to rise more in line with increases in costs and changing needs in the NHS. It would also allow badly needed investment in infrastructure projects to go ahead.

The tragedy about the Government's stance is not only that it has no economic justification, but that it is rapidly creating a country in which private affluence and public squalor exist side by side. Any hon. Member who doubts that has only to travel around the country and then go to France, West Germany or Scandinavia to see the contrast.

However, I live in hope. I have noted that, since 1983, to a far greater extent than they admit to their followers, the Government and the Chancellor have shifted their economic policies in a more pragmatic direction. It is essential for the future of the country that, on this vital issue of public spending, which is basic to our civilisation, the Government change direction.

5.45 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): The speech of the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) followed closely that of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). They are both in a predicament which they must get out of themselves. We cannot do that for them. They want more public expenditure, but they are unable to say quite how it will be found.

Mr. Radice: I said growth.

Sir Peter Hordern: The hon. Gentleman said that public expenditure could increase at the same pace as the national economy grew, but experience shows that only if public expenditure is a smaller proportion of gross domestic product can the economy grow. As the economy grows, more is available for public expenditure as long as the proportion taken by public expenditure is always reducing. Both hon. Members are in difficulty, as they have to criticise the level of public expenditure and output.

I listened with interest to the remarks of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East about the Health Service. Anybody who has followed these matters for some time recognises that expenditure on the Health Service has increased in both money and volume terms. I have heard the hon. Member speak in previous debates. I remember

[Sir Peter Hordern]

a winding-up speech in which he said that nurses were leaving the service. That is true; but many more are entering it. It is natural that nurses should leave to get married, for example.

It is the partial description of what happens with public expenditure which does the Opposition great harm. The volume of public expenditure is increasing all the time and its nature is always improving. I believe that the Opposition will appeal only to an ever-declining proportion of the population if that is the line that they pursue.

I should like to draw attention to the report of the European Court of Auditors, which is relevant to the public expenditure White Paper by virtue only of the amount we pay into the European Community. I do not know whether my right hon. and hon. Friends have read the report, but it is an indictment of the process of financing the EC. In my time in business, I have seen some very doubtful reports, but I have seldom seen such a display of deferred expenditure — the "cheque in the post" attitude — which the Court of Auditors has been obliged to reveal.

It is difficult for somebody who is not on the Treasury Select Committee to know exactly what the process is. As I understand it, the European Court of Auditors writes its report, the European Parliament debates it, and then it goes to the Council of Ministers. It makes proposals to the European Commission, which is not entitled to take any action. The result is that all we see is a report from the European Select Committee on the European Court of Auditors' report. That is not a satisfactory way of going about our affairs.

Mr. Higgins: It is debated.

Sir Peter Hordern: As my right hon. Friend says, it is debated.

I should like to see a Treasury minute, similar to those in respect of public accounts, relating what the Government propose to do and what they propose to recommend in the Council of Ministers. It is an important point. Whatever happens about the decision that was arrived at yesterday by the European Court, the European Community will bulk ever larger in our debates. Such a poor form of restraint on the finances of the European Community is intolerable.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I entirely endorse what my hon. Friend has said about the problems of Community budgets and negative reserves. Did he welcome the Prime Minister's statement last week, when she categorically said that, under the revised form of the budget agreed at the recent Brussels summit, such practices will no longer be allowed?

Sir Peter Hordern: I hope that my hon. Friend is correct and that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be able to see that all goes well. I have known it to happen that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister does not always get her own way within the European Community. The matter to which my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) referred must be examined. I would rather see it addressed in the usual way by Treasury minute, so that we may see what the Government propose to do about it.

Everyone agrees that health is the most important aspect of public expenditure. It is certainly the most rapidly growing part of any programme within the public expenditure White Paper. Everybody believes that that is a good thing. Looking back over the history of public expenditure White Papers, it is evident how programmes change. A few years ago, when the Labour party was in power, trade and industry formed a substantial part of public expenditure, but that programme is declining, largely because of changes in phflosophy and in the regional grant system. Another change is the decline in the amount of pubic sector building. Anyone who looks at that figure will recognise the great advance that has taken place in private sector repairs, maintenance and building, and the level of construction generally.

If one is to obtain a fair picture of the economy at the moment, one must take into account not only the decline in public sector building, but the great advance that has taken place in construction, repairs and maintenance in the private sector. Nevertheless, in trade and industry, and especially in building and construction, the public sector has declined. And it will continue to decline because of the increase in the number of owner-occupiers. That appears to be a natural trend, which is reflected in the huge increase in the number of people who own shares.

It is inescapable also that more and more people will wish to provide for their own health, however good the National Health Service is. Ultimately, they will not accept that what they spend on health should be controlled by what the Government think is appropriate. Health is becoming more of an individual responsibility. People of all political persuasions are increasingly questioning the capacity of any Government to confine their desire to pay for their health and provide for it within a nationalised monopoly system. It is increasingly the role of employers to provide for the health of their employees. Employers will wish to take out separate health schemes for their employees.

Already about 5·25 million people are covered by private medical schemes. Another aspect, which will be an increasing problem, is the number of elderly and retired people. There was a time when a substantial proportion of such people were cared for in local authority homes. That number has substantially declined. Hon. Members should look at the increase in the number of those who are looked after in voluntary private homes. In 1976, there were 46,000 such people. In 1986, there were 112,000.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): They are provided through local authorities.

Sir Peter Hordern: The hon. Gentleman is perfectly correct. Many are provided and paid for by local authorities, but that is not my point. Because of the Government's generosity, that will continue to happen. Such services are provided by the private sector, whether or not they are paid for by local authorities.

Of course, the population is living much longer. As far as I know, nobody proposes that there should be a vast extension of the number of publicly owned nursing homes. There is greater private provision of homes and health services for the elderly. The present trend is certain to increase.

We must take account also of rapid advances in medicine. The other day I asked what were the 10 most common operations. The tenth most common operation is a hip joint replacement. In 1984, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 53,000 hip joint

replacements, costing £3,300 each—that is £150 million. Ten years ago, such a cost would not have arisen. There were no such things as hip replacement operations. As medicine progresses, there will be more and more necessary, complicated and expensive operations.

That leads me to doubt whether the National Health Service can any longer be confined within the public expenditure programme as such. After all, when the Government weigh up one public expenditure programme against another, it is comparatively easy to limit, say, agricultural spending, trade and industry spending, or other parts of the public programme. But in the National Health Service, some of which is demand-led—I refer to family practitioner services — there is no control. As advances in medicine continue, there is no sensible control. Perhaps we shall go on for a few more years, but certainly what we spend on national health as a public expenditure programme will no longer be tolerated by people if it is to be compared with what is spent in other public expenditure programmes.

It is not as though the Government actually run the National Health Service. They run the Department of Health and Social Security. That is a different matter. The National Health Service is at arm's length. It has always been my complaint that the DHSS does not know what goes on in the NHS. The information available to it is poor.

I noticed that, for that part of the NHS for which the DHSS is responsible, there is to be an increase in manpower this year from 94,700 to 102,900. How did that get past my right hon. Friend the Minister? The Government are directly responsible for that figure. It has nothing to do with the Health Service recruiting administrators, or anything like that. It cannot be a misprint in the papers. On the whole, the number of people directly employed by the DHSS in the National Health Service has been declining for some time. What is the reason? It is a substantial advance. It is most unlike my right hon. Friend to let that slip through. I expect a satisfactory answer.

I wonder whether a state monopoly is the best way of providing for health services. No other country tries to do it, and none would dream of doing so. A monopoly of health service provision is no longer to be tolerated.

The weakness in the argument about higher charges —which some people would like to see—is that they would fall most severely on the poor who need to use the services. Another alternative that has been mentioned involves tax concessions to those who want to opt out of the National Health Service. That would only result in a greater charge on the Treasury and therefore less money would be available for the health services, however they are provided. I am not in favour of those alternatives. Any new scheme must allow the poorest access to the best in health care. There should be a national scheme to provide that care, while allowing greater choice.

A very interesting article appeared in *Economic Trends* in October 1987. It showed the proportion of public expenditure to GDP over many years. It showed that in 1890 public expenditure was 9 per cent. of GDP; in 1913 it was 12·1 per cent.; in 1923 it was 25·7 per cent.; and in 1975 it was 48·8 per cent.—the highest point that it has reached.

It is evident that the blocks of public expenditure have risen. Just before the first world war, public expenditure was low. Between the wars it rose and it has risen again, although it is now declining thanks to the efforts of my right hon. and hon. Friends. If there is a rapidly growing demand for a public service like the Health Service, it will inevitably mean a further large increase in public expenditure as time passes if it is to be kept within the programme. The demands cannot be resisted. At the moment, health demand is rationed. That is unsatisfactory and does not happen in other countries.

I believe that an alternative system should be tried. I believe that health services should be provided through a national health insurance scheme. The advantage of such a scheme would be that if it were provided the poorest would have access, as they have at present, to the best treatment. However, because there is a limit—a flat rate amount which is paid at the top level by high earners—the high earners should not have the same right of access to the same health facilities. High earners should be allowed only half the cost of health facilities that they receive. If that happened, the better-off would be inclined to insure themselves for their health needs through private health insurance schemes. That is what happens at the moment in Canada. Inevitably that would lead to the introduction of private health insurance schemes as direct competitors with the National Health Service.

There should be a system, like that operating in Medicare, of testing and costing each operation in the National Health Service. If that was applied, hospitals carrying out operations would be remunerated on the basis of operations carried out and not on the basis of a budget which causes ward closures as hospitals are penalised for carrying out too many operations. I hope that that fundamental change will be considered. Indeed, I understand that that idea is being considered in the present fundamental review of the Health Service.

The advantage of that scheme is that the provision for health would fall on the patient and the doctor. The doctor would be able to say where the patient should be treated. There would be no restrictions on treatment within the national health insurance scheme or in a private hospital. The costs would be regulated in the way in which I have described. If such a scheme was in operation, there would be no need for district or regional health authorities. That whole great apparatus of control would disappear and the new system would contain elements of the systems operating in France, West Germany and the United States. There are clear and obvious advantages in such a scheme.

Inevitably people would pay more for their health services. I see no reason why they should not do that. I object to people being constrained in what they wish to pay for their health by being part of the public expenditure programme. In future that will be a growing and intolerable restraint. I therefore hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends who are carrying out the review will consider this alternative carefully.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and all those responsible on drawing up the public expenditure White Paper, on the clarity with which these matters are being pursued and on the enormous volume of information given in the report. Better still, I want the constraint of public expenditure within GDP to continue and also a growing volume and value of services within a growing GDP.

6.5 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I listened with great interest to the hon. Member for

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Horsham (Sir P. Hordern). I have no objections in principle to the private sector participating and playing a part in health care concurrently with a National Health Service based on a properly resourced tax-funded system. I have no objection to the proposed Government review looking at all these matters carefully and scrutinising the proportion of expenditure that we devote to public expenditure in general and to the National Health Service in particular.

I cannot agree, however, with the hon. Gentlemen's conclusion that we should move away from a tax-based National Health Service at this stage because I believe that that would lead inevitably to a two-tier system. Once a system is designed specifically for the poor, it will inevitably become, almost by definition, a poor system.

If we were debating these matters against a background of straitened financial circumstances, there might be more force to the hon Gentleman's argument, but we have heard in the debate that the Government are relatively well off in terms of public finance at the moment. I accept that that is not an excuse for profligacy, but we have an opportunity to make modest and prudent increases and improvements to the level and way in which we disburse public expenditure. That should be the focus of this evening's debate.

I want to consider in detail some of the points made by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. He began by saying that, of course, the economic situation has improved. However, it would have improved automatically under any Government who were able to derive the benefits from North sea oil over the period of tenure of the past two Administrations. The revenue from North sea oil alters the situation. Comparisons between previous Governments and their stewardship and custodianship of the NHS have to be undertaken bearing in mind they start from two different bases. We are not comparing like with like when we take account of the current impact of North sea oil.

Nor should we ignore the fact that benefits in the form of revenue and capital accrue from the Government's current privatisation programme. I agree that parts of that programme are legitimate disposals, but I fear that the majority of the programme of sales of assets is a political mistake. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the Government have received the benefit of those proceeds.

The complaint has been made before—and I make it again now — that even if we do agree with the privatisation programme, trying to use the benefits, as the Government have, by treating them as negative capital expenditure, does nothing to improve the explanation of exactly what is happening in terms of the detail in the public expenditure White Paper and the Government's published expenditure programme. Treating those privatisation proceeds as negative public expenditure is tantamount to fraud and a great mistake.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury said that benefits were derived from having lower debt costs and more efficient nationalised industries. He should tell that to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy, who has just announced a 15 per cent. increase in electricity prices over the next two years. Clearly that increase is a prelude to moving the electricity industry out of the public sector and into private ownership at the expense of many old-age pensioners who rely on electricity as their single and exclusive form of heating. That particular part of the Chief Secretary's speech will be cold comfort to many of my constituents and other pensioners up and down the country in cold winters to come.

I wish to underscore and support what was said by the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) when he spoke of the proportion of GDP that should be devoted to public expenditure. I believe that the Government are duty bound to say at what stage the reduction will stop. I believe that there is indeed a case for prudently constraining public expenditure and that there is no case whatsoever for being profligate.

The hon. Member for Horsham gave us a history lesson about public expenditure levels in 1890 and identified that the proportion of GDP spent on public expenditure had inexorably increased — 48·8 per cent. of GDP was the highest percentage rate achieved. According to the Chief Secretary, that proportion will be reduced to 41 per cent. in the fiscal year 1990-91. Will that be the end? Is it the Government's intention to try to constrain the percentage of GDP spent on public expenditure still further?

I would certainly deplore any such reduction, and I believe that we should work on the formula suggested by the hon. Member for Durham, North to maintain that proportion as the economy expands and grows. Indeed, we should be able to increase expenditure now because of the current healthy state of the economy. The Treasury has received windfall income from the continuation of increased company profits, from higher oil prices and as a result of the further growth of the economy. All that is welcome.

Against that background, I can see no case for the Government continuing to adopt the stand that inexorably, year on year, the proportion of GDP spent on public expenditure should be reduced. Such a policy would inevitably have unacceptable costs. I accept that there will be adjustments. The hon. Member for Horsham mentioned that the DTI programme had receded, as has the housing programme. We could have a political argument on whether such adjustments are right or wrong, but the Government have a duty to let the country know their long-term plans for public expenditure.

The Chief Secretary mentioned the hospital and community health services. I do not believe that we do our case any good by using exaggerated and hysterical language. I do not believe that the entire NHS is in crisis, but I firmly believe that there are important sectors, especially the hospital services, that require urgent attention.

The right hon. Gentleman said that in the fiscal year 1987-88 the Government had provided for an increase of 10 per cent. in the hospital and community health sector. If we accept that the current rate of inflation is about 4·5 per cent. — that is the Government's assumption — we must also bear in mind that the nurses' pay award, which was made just before the election as a result of the pay review body's recommendations, was 9 per cent. However, for some specialty nursing grades, the pay award was nearer 12 per cent.

If we also assume that there is a need to allocate 2 per cent. of funds for service development factors, the total does not add up to the money that the Chief Secretary has boasted has been devoted to the hospital and community health sector. I am sure that Treasury Ministers will correct me if I am wrong. If the Chief Secretary checks his

figures, he will see that it is clear that the hospital and community health sector will suffer further expenditure constraints in its budget for the current fiscal year.

The budget deficit does not take account of the cumulative effect of the cuts to which reference has been made by the Select Committee. I am sure that the House looks forward to studying the report of the Select Committee on Social Services. This Committee has taken evidence from the National Association of Health Authorities and from the King's Fund. They all agree that the cumulative effect of the current underfunding of the hospital and community health service is a deficit of about £1·9 billion. This represents a substantial loss for any one sector within the Health Service to sustain, and there is cause for concern.

The Chief Secretary spoke about the new procedures for announcing the findings of the pay review body in January to allow the health authority budgets to be more properly and accurately drawn up before the start of the new financial year. I welcome that, and I welcome also the comments that he made about the points raised by the Select Committee. The Committee has raised important matters. I wish them a fair wind and look forward to early results.

The right hon. Gentleman said that he was aware of the industrial dispute in the Health Service occurring in Scotland this very day. It is true that there is a great deal of anxiety in the Scottish Health Service. This anxiety has less to do with the issue of funding of the Health Service, and more to do—as he well knows—with the directions issued by the Scottish Home and Health Department to the 15 area health boards of Scotland requiring them to adopt competitive tendering. I believe that that is a great mistake.

I am in favour of allowing boards to engage in competitive tendering if they believe that it is right. I am also aware of the political difficulties encountered where such boards have steadfastly set their faces against such a course. However, the Government's requirement for enforced competitive tendering is inimical to the long-term interest of the Scottish Health Service. I believe that the result will be that the dedication, commitment and previously high morale of the staff will be seriously eroded. The Government have effectively said that those members of staff are not doing their job properly and that private contractors can do it better.

One of the most valuable commodities of the NHS is the commitment of the staff. The Government's adoption of the tactic of competitive tendering, which obliges health boards to adopt such a system and ignores the savings that have been made—the most recent estimates suggest that some £50 million has been saved in the past three or four years—is a step which is retrograde, negative and ill-advised.

The right hon. Gentleman said that he believed that nurses are better paid now than they ever have been. However, if one considers the increases that have been devoted to nurses' pay awards it is clear that, if one takes the figures for 1979-80, the Clegg award—intended to make up for many years of underfunding and paid in one instalment—distorts all the statistics for nurses' pay. Indeed, that award makes the figures appear more generous than they are. Comparing nurses' pay with the equivalent pay for professions outside, in the private sector, a different picture emerges. They are suffering badly in comparison with the private sector.

In conclusion, I wish to put forward a number of positive suggestions which I believe must be considered urgently within the next few months. One of my chief concerns about the White Paper under discussion is that there is no obvious provision for any increases in pay review awards or the clinical restructuring of the nursing profession. Having read the evidence given to the Select Committee by the Chief Secretary I have no reason to believe that there is any more money available for this financial year.

That would be a great mistake. I appreciate that the Budget may not be the appropriate vehicle for making expenditure announcements, because the Budget is about deriving revenue, but the Government must find the opportunity to provide extra resources to fund the pay awards. The Government are now under a lot of pressure.

I do not say that the Government should willy-nilly accept and pay the amounts in the conclusions of the pay review body, but I do say that if the Government decide to reduce the pay review award they can still—as they have in the past—underfund the amount of money to be paid. They have said that £X should be paid, and have paid only X minus a significant amount, leaving the health authorities and the health boards to find the balance out of their own resources. That is not acceptable this year. If the Government adopt that tactic, it will be extremely difficult for them to justify it.

The right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) mentioned the relative price effect. As a statistical procedure, that would be a much better way of evaluating what has happened historically in terms of volume. I have read the evidence that the Chief Secretary gave to the Select Committee. Using that as a prognostication, the relative price effect could drive a coach and horses through his cash-limited plans to keep down expenditure. I understand that, but there is no excuse for refusing to adopt the relative price effects statistics historically to examine how the profession and the services are changing.

I make a plea that some money be found for the system of clinical grading and restructuring that is so long overdue within nursing. One of the main problems in the Health Service is that key nursing posts are not properly remunerated and do not take properly into account the skills of those nurses. It would not cost an awful lot of money. It might cost upwards of £200 million. Perhaps that sounds a lot of money, but that money would be very well spent, and it has to be spent soon. Even if the decision were taken today to introduce incentives to keep nurses in the profession, to encourage them to work and to maintain the morale within the profession, it would take a long time to implement such a scheme and to get nurses promoted to those positions, so that they could work in the intensive care children's wards that have been in such trouble recently.

More than anything else, if the Government were able to make a firm commitment to move in that direction, that would boost the morale of the whole nursing profession. Important things can and must be done. There are important aspects of the White Paper that relate to regional development and housing that cause me some concern, but the National Health Service rightly has been the focus of the debate.

The amendment in the names of my right hon. and hon. Friends rejects the reduction of public expenditure each year inexorably as a proportion of GDP. We believe that the revenues that are available would allow prudent

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additional expenditure in the Health Service, education, housing and regional policy. Such job-creating investment would be much wiser than substantial further cuts in personal taxation, which will serve only to exacerbate the problems of overheating in parts of the domestic economy.

6.22 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): I am surprised that the Liberal party spokesman on Treasury matters, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), does not seem to be aware how the figures have been arrived at. He mentioned that they contained nothing for pay awards. He should appreciate that, under all the headings, amounts for pay awards are based on an estimate of inflation. There is also a contingency reserve of £3·5 billion. In previous years, wage settlements in excess of the amount in the public expenditure White Paper have been paid out of the contingency reserve. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman did not appreciate that.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his colleagues on the excellent way in which they have managed the economy. It was a little unfair of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire to say that the improvement in our economy is due principally to North sea oil. We have had seven years of economic growth. I believe that the Government can take credit for the reform of industrial relations, which has reduced the number of days lost in strikes to 2 million compared with 29 million under the previous Labour Government. The Government can take credit for reducing taxation and encouraging enterprise. That is nothing to do with North sea oil.

Productivity in our manufacturing industry is rising faster than that of any of our industrial competitors. As a result, there has been a dramatic recovery in corporate profits. The tax from those profits is now pouring into the Treasury at an unprecedented rate which gives the Chancellor an opportunity in the Budget that no Chancellor has had for 50 years. He has the opportunity in the same Budget to fund the increases in public spending set out in the White Paper, which amounts, in cash terms, to another £9·7 billion—a real increase of 1·25 per cent. That will enable him to produce a balanced Budget, or even to have a negative PSBR, and pay back some of the national debt, which will reduce the burden of interest charges to the public in future. He will have the opportunity also to reduce taxes.

The very success of the Chancellor's policy is one reason why we are having such a politically orchestrated campaign demanding a massive increase in spending on the Health Service, with many people suggesting that there should be no reduction in taxation. The big spenders and special interest groups have got the smell of money in their nostrils. As a result, their demands for more spending grow more strident every week. I congratulate the Chief Secretary on standing firm. Like him, I am opposed to those demands. First, we have already allocated an extra £1 billion to the Health Service. That has not yet been spent. It would be foolish to increase that when we are about to embark upon a fundamental investigation of the Health Service. There is also a lot of waste in the Health Service budget of £20 billion.

Earlier today I mentioned in an intervention that a new hospital has been built in Bridlington, and is about to open. It has replaced two older hospitals. It is remarkable that all the furniture in that hospital is brand new, despite the fact that only two years ago the hospitals were re-bedded. Would any private sector operator or someone opening a new office block throw away all the desks? If someone were opening a new factory, would he throw away all the machinery? I am pleased to say that only this week the regional health authority told me that, because of the pressure on the Health Service, it has changed that policy.

My second reason for opposing those demands is that the Conservative party has fought three successive elections as the party that intended to reduce the tax burden on the British people. Despite the reductions in previous Budgets, the standard rate of taxation on the low-paid is now 27p in the pound, to which must be added a 9p national insurance levy. That makes a marginal rate of 36p for poorer people coming into tax. That is far too high and must be reduced. We have promised to reduce the standard rate by 2p in the pound. We must not miss that opportunity this year.

We should also use some of the available resources for a radical reform of the personal taxation structure. In particular, we should achieve equity between married women who have jobs and those who stay at home to look after their families. That would mean a move towards transferable allowances, which would be very expensive. In 1988, the tax system should stop treating women as if they were their husbands' chattels. Married women's investment income should no longer be aggregated. It is nonsense that if a married women with a reasonable investment income divorced her husband and lived in sin with him they would pay less tax. We should stop encouraging young people to live in sin. It is a scandal that young married couples get tax relief on a £30,000 mortgage, yet if they live in sin they can claim tax relief on a £60,000 mortgage.

A Conservative Government should never allow marriage and morality to be penalised by the tax system. I am not prepared to sacrifice in the forthcoming Budget those important objectives so that another £2 billion or £3 billion can be poured into the bottomless pit of the Health Service with no guarantee that patient care will improve. Indeed, it is extremely likely that most of it will be gobbled up by wage increases.

Despite the remarks of Opposition Members, 42 per cent. is too high a proportion of GDP to go on public spending. Several points particularly worry me. The social security budget is for £48·5 billion and we still do not have adequate control of some of that massive budget. In some cases, we do not even know the cost of benefits to certain people. Recently I tabled a written question, asking the Department what the cost to the Exchequer was of social security payments made to citizens of the Irish Republic. The answer was, "We do not know." I thought that that might be reasonable and that perhaps the Department did not differentiate between one country and another, so I asked what was the total cost to the Exchequer of social security payments paid to non-United Kingdom citizens. Again the answer was, "We do not know."

The next day I read in a newspaper that hundreds of Nigerians were registering as students at a bogus educational establishment and were using social security payments for their fees. That is appalling and action should be taken to ascertain the cost—I am amazed that we do not know the cost — and to stop subsidising feckless foreigners.

There is an unfair imbalance in public expenditure between the four countries of the United Kingdom, and the Select Committee referred to this matter in paragraph 11 of its report. We have now received a paper from the Treasury which provides some illuminating figures. Naturally, some expenditure cannot be allocated, but that which can shows that in England we spend £1,967 per person from public funds, in Scotland £2,518, in Wales £2,235 and in Northern Ireland no less than £2,939.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): What about Bridlington?

Mr. Townend: I shall deal with Bridlington in a minute.

Northern Ireland is clearly a special case, but the arguments that Scotland and Wales should have a higher level of expenditure than England because they are less prosperous must be challenged. Without doubt, Scotland is now more prosperous than many parts of England, particularly the north of England, such as Yorkshire and Humberside, where my constituency is situated.

We on the Select Committee asked the Treasury to provide a breakdown of public expenditure per capita for the English regions. It is not available, but the Treasury supplied some illuminating figures for certain services. They are a little out of date, because the last year for which they are available is 1984-85. What was most interesting were the figures for health expenditure. In Scotland, the figure amounted to £350 per person, whereas in Yorkshire it was only £260. That imbalance must be rectified on the ground of equity, and in the process the Government may make some savings in public expenditure.

Mr. Wigley: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that the high level of per capita expenditure on social security in Wales is a result of unemployment? In my constituency, we have 24 per cent. unemployment. The costs associated with that will come right when Government policies start working in Wales. Does he accept that the items that are not broken down by the Treasury include defence and procurement expenditure, 57 per cent. of which is spent in south-east England?

Mr. Townend: The hon. Gentleman is making my point. My figures related to health, not social security. The position in the north of England is no better than that in Wales, so it is not right or equitable that Scotland and Wales should get such a high level of per capita spending at the expense of the north of England.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that there is a reason other than equity for looking at the disparity in expenditure between England and Scotland? The point was made by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who said that the Health Service in Scotland was facing growing waiting lists, despite the significantly higher level of expenditure per capita on health that Scotland enjoys compared with England.

Mr. Townend: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The other reason why this happens is that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have a Minister in the Cabinet who gets a hand in the till on their behalf, whereas we in the north have not.

My one small criticism is the cost of the EEC to the United Kingdom. I am grateful that the Government have provided us with costs, but over the years this settlement will clearly be expensive to the United Kingdom. I would be less than honest if I did not say I was disappointed that the Prime Minister gave in and agreed to the new proposals. That will enable the Commission to increase spending by some 25 per cent. I wonder what my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench would say if an hon. Member suggested that we should increase our public spending by 21 per cent. I can imagine their horror.

Finally, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will convey to the Chief Secretary our view that his task is difficult and that we appreciate that he is under great pressure. Despite my feeling that expenditure should be reined in a little more, he is probably being as tough as he can be in the circumstances, and he certainly has our wholehearted support. I only hope that one day, when he becomes the Secretary of State in a big spending Department, as I am sure he will, he will not change the view that he has put forward in the House today.

6.37 pm

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): The Chief Secretary gave one of the shortest speeches on record in defence of his Government's expenditure plans. He danced from stepping stone of statistic to statistic while the torrents of industrial and economic chaos raged below. He could not leave the Dispatch Box for his seat on the Bench fast enough. He scuttled from one set of topics to another as quickly as possible. No wonder, when spending in Scotland on industry, housing and health is projected to fall. No wonder, when the budget of the Scottish Office will fall by £69 million next year and by £317 million by 1991. Would that Scottish unemployment were falling at the same rate.

It is a disgrace that neither the Chief Secretary nor his colleagues showed any contrition over the appalling state of the NHS in Scotland. The hon. Members for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) and for Slough (Mr. Watts) whined, as is the wont of many Conservatives, about the higher costs of the NHS in Scotland. I invite both hon. Gentlemen and their hon. Friends to visit my constituency and learn some of the facts, such as that in Scotland the average health authority covers twice the area of a health authority in England and Wales. As a consequence, costs, including overheads, are higher.

The reality behind that level of spending in Scotland is plain for all to see. In hospital wards in my constituency, old people have been left lying in bed in the morning because nurse shortages have reached critical levels. However, the Government are not planning to do anything to reduce long-term hospital waiting lists, which are now standing at a record 81,000 in Scotland. The Government have done nothing to increase the number of National Health Service beds, which have been cut by 5 per cent. in Scotland during the past decade.

The Government are precipitating the crisis in the National Health Service, not only in Lothian but throughout the country. Tomorrow, Lothian health board is to discuss 500 job cuts to balance its budget. Those job losses will not be restricted to non-medical staff, bad though that would be. Mr. Winston Taylor, the general manager of Lothian health board, has spelt out that no group among surgeons, nurses, consultants, doctors and ancillary staff will be excluded from those cuts. That is happening in a health board that the Minister responsible for health in Scotland has said is the third best funded in the whole of the United Kingdom. In Scotland, the Government are investing 1 per cent. less in health than is needed to keep pace with costs.

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Of course, the Government have a magic solution to health problems in Scotland—privatisation. That policy has less support in Scotland even than in the Tory Reform Group. Seven out of 10 Scots reject privatisation, which has been condemned by the chairmen of the health boards who have been appointed by the Tory Secretary of State, such as Mr. Hector MacKenzie of Argyll and Clyde health board. However, the Government still persist in that policy, knowing that it will bring chaos, but caring not a whit, and no wonder, because no Cabinet Ministers use the National Health Service when they are ill.

What has the Chancellor promised for higher and further education? He has promised more—more cuts. Is it not bad enough that the university budget in Scotland, and in the rest of the United Kingdom, has been cut by 13 per cent. in the past four years alone? University budgets in Scotland have been cut by more than one fifth. The Government's public expenditure plans offer nothing to Glasgow university, which is already suffering a cut of 8 per cent. The Government's plans do nothing to enhance the reputation of Edinburgh university, which has lost 11·5 per cent. of its budget. The Government offer only despair to Aberdeen university, which has lost one quarter of its budget in four years. This week, the Edinburgh university court is meeting to discuss further cuts of nearly £3 million. That is the reality behind the Government's public expenditure plans.

We know that the Chancellor is not alone in taking pride in those facts. Japan is rejoicing about them. That country has more than double the number of university places that are made available to young people here. The Chancellor is receiving support from the United States of America, France, West Germany and even Taiwan. All those countries are pulling way ahead of us in providing university places and investing in their young people.

Even if the Government are not committed to placing university funding on a proper footing, surely they should at least respond to the requests for assistance in persuading private industry to invest in universities? I know that that topic is dear to the hearts of the Chancellor and his Cabinet colleagues. I welcome the relief in taxation on one-off grants to universities from companies and some review of the VAT that is still levied on gifts of equipment to university departments and laboratories. If the Government can do no more, they would at least gain a little respect by conceding those small benefits.

Housing barely rated a mention in the Chief Secretary's speech. The Government's plans have brought despair to housing authorities and to the millions of people who live in overcrowded, substandard and inadequate accommodation. About 330,000 council houses in Scotland need modernising, and the figure runs into millions for the United Kingdom as a whole. Some have dangerous electrical wiring; in others, windows are rotting in their frames. More than 300,000 Scots and millions of people in the United Kingdom live in homes that need urgent and major structural repairs. In many, water seeps down the walls; dampness destroys the fabric of the buildings, rots funiture, clothes and bedding and eats away at children's lungs.

However, the statement makes less than £465 million available to housing in Scotland—that is a 2 per cent. cut—and it represents only half the money that every housing expert in Scotland agrees is needed. Every local authority, housing association and residents' group has begged the Government to use some of their windfall money to invest in our housing, with all the jobs that would flow as a consequence.

Today, when everyone in Britain is begging the Government to invest in our industries, services and people, Conservative Members have spoken like the tired old politicians that they are, ignoring the facts that stare them in the face—*[Interruption.]*—laughing with scorn at the problems facing millions of people, not only those on the dole in this country, but those who live in the substandard houses that I have mentioned.

People who are begging for jobs visit their job centres, but the Government know that the jobs simply are not there. Again, I extend an invitation to the hon. Member for Bridlington, who is sneering and laughing, to visit the job-centre in my constituency——

Mr. John Townend *rose*——

Mr. Griffiths: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. I invite him to come to the jobcentre in my constituency to see the shortage of jobs and then to watch the dole queues.

Mr. Townend: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I was laughing at the comment that he made about myself and my colleagues being old and tired politicians; I was not laughing at the arguments that the hon. Gentleman was making. However, I remind him, as a young man, that one is not always as old as one looks. One is as old as one feels.

Mr. Griffiths: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has not chosen to hide his ignorance under a bushel.

The fact is that the Government have brought despair and misery, and have done so for years, with the excuse that the money was not available and that the cuts were necessary. Now, when we find that the money is available, we see the real face of the Government—the uncaring face. Now that the money is available, not only will they not invest in our housing and take people off the homeless lists, but they will not invest in our Health Service to keep people off the waiting lists. In fact, as we all know, their investment is in those who have high incomes and high capital and savings. The Government's concern is to ensure that people who want to invest in forestry gain more respect in terms of tax concessions than individuals who want to invest in their own jobs and go to work.

On 15 March, the Government have a chance to put the nation's resources to good use. We hope that they will, but, sadly, we fear that they will not.

6.47 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I begin by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on his most able and lucid speech. I agreed with virtually all that he said. I hope that nothing that I say in my brief remarks will detract from that. In presenting his statement, my right hon. Friend must surely have had one of the easiest tasks of any Chief Secretary for some years, because a buoyant economy has enabled progress to be made in almost every area. That certainly includes the Health Service. However, as has been voiced in many quarters, and not only today, the reality is that there is an acute problem in many areas, not because of mismanagement or overspending, but because of serious underfunding in many areas.

As an example, I take one of the health authorities covering my constituency, Bassetlaw district health authority. During the past two years it has consistently improved its services at the same time as reducing its costs by more than £250,000. That has been done by testing many of its services against competitive tenders in the private sector, reducing duplication of services and reducing its administrative and clerical staff. All new posts are seriously scrutinised. That is the background.

Unlike many Opposition Members, I am not seeking an open-ended commitment to the funding of wage awards in the public sector in the Health Service, but the fact is that last year the funding of only 90 per cent. of the pay awards that were nationally agreed put my authority, and no doubt many others, in extreme difficulty. Expecting the health authorities to make up that shortfall by paying the extra 10 per cent. of salaries for doctors, nurses and other ancillary workers has meant a shortfall in my health authority of some £700,000 this year.

I agree with the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee that if wage awards are accepted by the Government they should be funded directly by the taxpayer. Our health authorities, and mine in particular, would not be in the sorry state that they are today if such wage awards were funded directly. To expect them to find sums of this order, after their year's allocation has been made, is to put them in an unfair and unrealistic position if, at the same time, they are expected to balance their books.

In my constituency, as a direct result of that, the casualty department in Retford hospital was closed about two weeks ago and an elderly persons' ward is to be closed. Here is not the place to go into detail about the hardship that that will cause my constituents, but it is the place to tell my right hon. Friend of the great damage which the serious underfunding of pay awards is doing to the public's perception of the Government's total health care provision.

It gives me no pleasure to say so, but it gives me even less pleasure to attempt to justify to my constituents the closure of a casualty ward when we hear from the Government that our plans for the expansion of the NHS will improve patient care. I accept that statement, but it is difficult, in the light of realities, particularly of underfunding, to explain the one in the light of the other.

There will be calls from the Opposition to make 15 March National Health Service day. I hope that both sides of the House will resist that temptation. What the public do not realise, and the Opposition should realise, is that Budget day is for raising or lowering and collecting taxes and revenue. We hope that there will be increased expenditure on the NHS next year, but the fact is that how we spend our revenue is not a matter for the Budget.

Nevertheless, it would unacceptable to the public generally if my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer should choose to reduce income tax without at the same time giving some broad indication, this year above all, of how that reduction in taxation might be accompanied by some extra funding in other areas. The pubic are not always wrong. They have a legitimate expectation of Budget day, and this year, above all, we should be thinking about fulfilling some of their expectations for the NHS.

Where does my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's statement today leave my casualty ward and my old people's ward in Retford hospital? The nub of any Member of Parliament's problems is how his constituency is affected. Do the expenditure plans mean that I shall be standing here in a year's time saying that they have been re-opened? I very much hope so. If I cannot say that, and if other communities at local level cannot do so either, our fine words, proposals and expenditure plans are bound to ring hollow to the constituents whom we are here to serve. As a loyal supporter of the Government and their policies —there is probably none more loyal—I hope that I shall never have to say that.

6.55 pm

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate, particularly as I am a member of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and so have been involved in the preparation and adoption of the Committee's report on the Government's public expenditure plans. As many hon. Members have said, the report contains many useful points which I hope the Government will take on board. The Chief Secretary referred to some of them, but others need to be referred to, and I hope that I shall be able to do so in the course of my speech.

First, I want to say a few words on the Government's general strategy. In their introduction to the public expenditure White Paper, the Government proudly claim to have consistently reduced public spending as a proportion of GDP. I was glad that the Select Committee none the less incorporated an amendment which pointed out that our public spending as a proportion of GDP is already lower than that of most European countries. According to the statistics that I have seen, it is lower than that of any other EEC country with the exception of Spain. During the past few years, Spanish public expenditure has been increasing and so will probably overtake ours in the next couple of years.

It is also true that in particular sectors, such as health, the average share of all health spending of GDP for OECD countries is about 9 per cent., as against only 6 per cent. in the United Kingdom. If our Government were to reach 9 per cent. of spending on health within the NHS, that would mean an additional £12 billion for the Health Service. Perhaps the Government will take that point into consideration.

Mr. Watts: Will the hon. Lady acknowledge that the figures that she has quoted, I think accurately, were for all spending on health services and that in the other OECD countries there is a much higher proportion of privately funded health expenditure than there is in Britain and that the proportion borne by taxpayers in other OECD countries is broadly the same as it is here?

Ms. Quin: There is indeed a mixed pattern. What the hon. Gentleman says is partly true, but there is no reason why, given the amount of money that the Government have available, expenditure on the Health Service should not be substantially increased. That point has been made by many hon. Members today and that view is shared by some Conservative Members, as was clear from the deliberations of the Select Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) asked, rightly in my view, how long the Government would maintain their commitment to reducing public expenditure as a proportion of GDP. Do they intend to keep that as their goal in perpetuity? Do

[Ms. Quin]

they have an optimum level which they hope to achieve, or is it a matter of dogma which they will somehow adhere to with no long-term ideal in mind? Like many other speakers, I do not understand why the Government should keep to that tired old approach when the circumstances in respect of the amount of money available to be spent have changed. That point must be emphasised, particularly in the run-up to the Budget.

There appears to be an assumption that cuts, or reducing public expenditure, are good per se. I do not share that assumption, particularly given the present obvious needs in our country. The Government are inconsistent in many of their basic tenets regarding public spending because Ministers have frequently said that revenue determines expenditure. If that is so, when revenue is on the increase and all that extra money is available, why cannot the Government determine expenditure in the public sector?

The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee's report states that, even if the Government's guidelines were adhered to, it would be possible to increase the planning total by £1 billion or £2 billion without undermining the Government's criterion. Therefore, why will not the Government go down that road? They still appear likely to adhere to their belief in tax cuts as the way forward, yet their figures show that we are not heavily taxed by comparison with other countries and, therefore, there is not a great burden of taxation which needs to be reduced.

Labour Members have spoken eloquently about the needs of the National Health Service and the need fully to fund the nurses' and ancillary workers' pay increases. I agree with everything that they have said in that respect, but there are other examples of underfunding when one considers the Government's public expenditure and their public expenditure plans. Capital spending is the poor relation in their spending plans.

That was pointed out to the Select Committee in written evidence supplied to us. Paragraph 60 of the Select Committee report refers to the decline in capital spending and the projected decline — 5 per cent. for central Government capital spending, and 14 per cent. for local authority capital spending. Nevertheless, I am glad that the Select Committee adopted an amendment which I proposed, that capital spending should be related to needs and, in particular, the need to renew the nation's infrastructure and to provide for its long-term effectiveness.

Many estimates have been made about the amount of money needed to renew our infrastructure. I have seen the figure of £92 billion suggested. That covers the total backlog of repairs in housing and schools, the NHS, roads and water supplies. The reference to water supplies is particularly important because we are faced with the need to renew our out-of-date infrastructure in the water industry and to comply with EEC directives on improving our water quality standards. The Government have failed to come up with a figure for the sum needed to carry out that necessary work. Compliance with European directives would be most helpful in that respect.

The hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), who is no longer present, raised the issue of obtaining from the Treasury a regional breakdown for Scotland, Wales and the English regions. A regional breakdown is necessary, although not for the reasons put forward by the hon. Gentleman. He appeared to imply that unjustified subsidies were being given by the English to Scotland and Wales. I want to see a regional breakdown because, in an absurdly over-centralised country such as England, we can see what is spent in the different standard planning regions in those countries. That information should be available to us, and the Treasury is well able to provide it, if it has the political will to do so.

In a recent debate about the Government's proposals for regional development grants, my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) made many telling points about the amount of public money spent in the south-east of England compared with other regions of England. According to figures in *The Economist* last April, the highest spending in public administration, defence, education and health in England occurs in the south-east —£884 per head of population. I should like to know whether those figures accord with the Treasury's views. It is important for the inhabitants, particularly of the least prosperous regions of the United Kingdom, that those figures should be made available.

At present, the Labour party has a "Labour listens" campaign. I should like to suggest to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his team that they embark on a "Treasury listens" campaign because, if they did so, they would find that the message that they receive from the general public about taxation and public spending is very different from the message that they are putting forward. It is clear from many opinion polls that the public want to see a properly funded Health Service and that they see that as a greater priority than cutting taxes, particularly those of people who are already well-off.

I hope that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will listen to people and will come up with a Budget that does not favour the already favoured few but provides benefits for the necessary public services upon which we all depend for the future.

7.6 pm

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): The hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) asked many pertinent questions about the work of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, but it is difficult to believe that it should come as a surprise to her that the Conservative party and the Government believe that the country is heavily taxed by comparison with our main industrial competitors. That is evident merely by comparing the level of tax rates in this country with those of the United States, Japan, France and West Germany.

I challenge the hon. Lady's comment about spending money merely because it is available. I hope that she will agree with me that everyone in the House wishes the right amount to be spent on the Health Service, regardless of whether sums of money happen to be available in any particular budget. It is certainly in the interests of all politicians that the appropriate amount should be spent on the National Health Service.

I agree with the hon. Lady that we should be listening to what people think about the matter. The main issue of the debate is whether a major additional sum should be spent on the Health Service. Opposition Members suggest that we should spend an additional £2 billion over and above the additional complement to the Health Service contained in the expenditure plans.

I wonder whether hon. Members are listening to their constituents accurately and sensitively on this issue. When I discuss with constituents the size of the increase in expenditure on the Health Service since 1979, they are surprised. When I tell them that each family is spending £31 a week out of taxation on the Health Service, they are surprised. It is right to say that the expenditure plans before us for next year involve additional expenditure of £1·50 per family on the Health Service. According to my calculations, expenditure of an additional £2 billion would mean an additional £3 per week for each family. I question whether our constituents want such a large increase to be taken from their pay packets without any choice.

A great campaign has been launched in hospitals in my constituency, as in many others, and many of the letters that I receive from constituents say that they are concerned about waste in the Health Service. They are also rightly concerned about the amount of theft and widespread pilfering. They are concerned about the huge number of administrative staff in the Health Service — over-administration. One letter to me said that we should increase expenditure on the Health Service and that person was prepared to contribute more to it. He suggested that everybody should pay an additional 10p per week for it. I question whether our constituents want to have to pay automatically the additional amounts that have been implied in speeches during the debate.

The Opposition tender such advice to the Government, but one must look at what they did when they were in office. They did not go wild spending money on the Health Service. They set up a Royal Commission, which spent a good deal of time deliberating. It delivered its verdict after the 1979 general election. This is one statement from the report:

"It is misleading to pretend that the NHS can meet all expectations. Hard choices have to be made. It is a prime duty of those concerned in the provision of health care to make it clear to the rest of us what we can reasonably expect."

Listening to Opposition Members, I believe that it is not clear how much more we can expect from the additional £2 billion expenditure that they propose. Listening to the health authorities in my area and to the health administrators, I find it difficult to see what they think they are delivering now with the money that is available, and it is impossible to get a clear idea of what one would obtain with more expenditure.

There are the most extraordinary variations in what is being provided in the Health Service throughout the country. Many things that are provided on the NHS are highly questionable. In Charing Cross hospital, sex change operations are performed. People come from many parts of the country to have them. The variations in community dentistry and family planning between different health authorities are striking, and are not accounted for by differences of quality or requirements in the areas concerned.

I support the efforts that have been made by the Government to get a clearer idea of the services that should be provided and to improve the allocation of resources. I welcome the statement, in the first volume of the document before us, that pilot schemes for the better management of clinical resources are under way.

I remind hon. Members that the Griffiths report in 1983 said:

"Concern with levels of service, quality of product, meeting budgets . . . motivating and rewarding staff, research and development and the long-term viability of the undertaking"

were crucial matters. The report said that the NHS

"still lacks any real continuous evaluation of its performance against criteria such as those set out above."

Apart from profit, those are all criteria which the Griffiths report said any successful private business would follow during its work, and which it would regard as crucial.

I remind the House that the Griffiths report stated categorically that it was necessary to

"involve the clinicians more closely in the management process consistent with clinical freedom for clinical practice. Clinicians must participate fully in decisions on the use of resources."

From my observation of the Health Service, I believe that that is simply not happening in most parts of the Service. The report stressed the need for closer involvement of doctors, which was

"so critical to effective management at local level."

I have endeavoured to follow the progress of the pilot schemes that were mentioned in the Griffiths report, through the various circulars that have been issued by the Department of Health and Social Security. It looks as if they are running into great difficulties. In several cases, they have plainly failed and run into great problems because the new material, the new management information, was produced not visibly for the benefit of the medical staff, but for the benefit of the administrators. Apparently, considerable resentment has arisen between the medical side and the administration, which, in some cases, has led to the modification or even abandonment of the process. There is tremendous scope for improvement in the Health Service with the involvement of the professionals in the crucial decisions of management which have to be taken in the course of the service.

In the West Middlesex hospital—one of the hospitals serving my constituency—the consultants have found it necessary to pay for an advertisement in the local newspaper to express their views about the way in which the Health Service is being run. That is indicative of the fact that they are not able to exercise proper influence in the management of the health authority. They do not feel that they have an influence. Inquiries reveal—they are confirmed by the administration — that they are not playing the role in management decisions which was envisaged in the Griffiths report and which it is clear from all the subsequent reports is crucial to the proper running of the service. Indeed, one consultant told me that he felt that there was a division in the Health Service between authority and knowledge and that many of those taking the decisions did not have the necessary knowledge to decide on priorities.

Therefore, I was interested to read an account by Ian McColl in *The Times* of 16 February of what happened in Guy's hospital. I believe that Guy's hospital has been carrying out the experiment suggested in the Griffiths report and that effectively the doctors have taken over the management of the hospital. Mr. McColl said that between 1974 and 1978, the finance department had expanded from 30 to 90 employees, precisely at a time when computers were being introduced, which should have led to economies. He said:

"When the hospital became part of Lewisham and North Southwark district health authority the district's finance

[Mr. Patrick Ground]

department contained 200 people. Its performance was considerably improved when its numbers were reduced to 105 as a result of a sustained campaign by surgeons."

He described the restrictive practices of the nurses in preventing him from operating on someone who needed an operation for which no staff was necessary. He described how the surgeon got round the problem:

"He brought the patient with her physiotherapist daughter to the hospital, put them into surgeon's clothes and walked into an empty operating theatre. There he carried out the operation under a local anaesthetic without the patient suffering a single twinge of discomfort. She then climbed down from the table and was driven home to an awaiting gin and tonic, delighted to have bypassed four sets of hospital workers. Next day the nurses filed a complaint against the surgeon for behaving inhumanely to the patient."

It takes a professional with experience and knowledge to find his way though professional restrictive practices. It takes a professional, or perhaps a group of professionals, with experience and judgment to make sensible decisions about what is important and unimportant in the services provided by a department.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I am no specialist, but what on earth would have happened if something had gone wrong?

Mr. Ground: The surgeon was prepared to take the responsibility; indeed, a surgeon takes the responsibility anyway. It was not for the nurses to lay down regulations. Here someone took responsibility for the operation and rightly saw his way through a lot of nonsense.

There is a great deal of nonsense in the National Health Service. It requires professionals to make choices about what is important and unimportant. If it is left solely to the administrators, or to the administrators operating in an atmosphere of hostility and alienation from the professional staff, correct decisions will not be made. Therefore, I urge the Government, notwithstanding the difficulties, to persevere with their inquiry and research and to ensure that more sensible decisions are made and that the aspirations of the Griffiths report are continually borne in mind so that we will have better value for money and more suitable use of the resources of the Health Service.

If that process is followed, the Health Service will be in a better position to say how much more is required and what services can be provided. At present it is virtually impossible to say from the information available what services can be provided or what other services could be provided with an additional £x million. It is important that the Government should persevere with the inquiry. It is wholly in tune with the approach of constituents who are looking for better value from the National Health Service and who do not necessarily want to pay vast sums for it out of their limited resources.

7.25 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I agree with one or two points made by the hon. and learned Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground). We should decide on the absolute level of service that we want from the Health Service, as opposed to fixing a figure and fitting everything else in. I am not sure that I agree that the message I am getting from my constituents is the same as the message that the hon. and learned Gentleman is getting from his. As someone who lived in Heston for four years, I have some knowledge of his constituency as well as mine. I have no doubt that, faced with the choice in my county of Gwynedd, where five hospitals are scheduled for closure because of the financial crisis of the health authority, my constituents would rather retain income tax at its present level than have a reduction in income tax and face cuts in Health Service provision. We face real cuts in the service, not just rationalisation, in my county, as the health authority has acknowledged.

I accept what the hon. and learned Gentleman said about the cost of administration in the Health Service. In my area much of the increase in administrative costs has arisen in recent years. The Government have been in office for nine years. If the administration of the Health Service is in such difficulty, the Government should look into their own court to put things right.

The procedure that we follow on public expenditure and budgeting causes problems. This has been touched on earlier in the debate. In an article by Sarah Hogg in, I think, *The Independent* recently, under the heading

"When two bites at the Budget are rather worse than one",

she made a perceptive comment:

"The first and long-standing problem is Britain's Budget is extraordinarily misnamed."

Later, she said:

"Under this curious system, spending departments compete for cash before the Treasury decides what to do with the rest."

That is part of the problem that we face. The White Paper was published in the autumn, and now there is the possibility for more money being available, but the Government are determined to keep to the spending programme that they laid down.

From the comments of the Chief Secretary in opening the debate, it appeared that he was unwilling to give a commitment that money will be available to fund in full the increase in nurses' pay, because he does not know how much that will be. However, on 15 March the Chancellor is prepared to make a decision about reducing income tax. In other words, the Government's priority is not to ensure that the NHS provides an adequate service, with an adequate cash availability as determined at the end of April or when the figures are available, but rather what the Government want to do politically on Budget day about the public sector borrowing requirement and income tax rates. I should have thought that that priority was wrong.

I concede immediately that the Government are taking a sensible step in changing the procedure for the future so that these things will be better phased. That is welcome and long overdue. Having said that, I should have thought that within the ambit of the figures we are talking about it would be possible for the Government to say now that they are prepared to fund in full any wage award.

After all, the wage award that we are discussing is not thousands of millions of pounds. The press mentions £300 million, £400 million or £500 million. I should have thought that it was within the scope of the contingency reserve and flexibility on the PSBR for the Government to give such a commitment, and then to be that much more cautious, if necessary, about tax reductions. Tax levels could be adjusted next year, or even in next autumn's statement. Surely that would be more sensible than making the level of service dependent on residual cash availability.

The hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) pointed out that people in Wales and Scotland, and possibly in regions of England, were getting too much

public expenditure. The White Paper will be of more comfort to him than to us in Wales. What we heard a few moments ago from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), also applies to Wales. The figure for the planning total in Wales shows a decrease for 1990-91 from the 1987-88 outturn, whereas the overall planning total in the same table shows an increase from £141,000 million to £151,000 million—an increase of some 7 per cent.

In other words, we are facing a decrease in the Welsh Office departmental budget, which deals largely with health and personal social services — the budget for which in the United Kingdom as a whole, according to the DHSS figures, is increasing from £18,000 million to £19,000 million—with education in Wales—in England, the education budget has been increased—and also with housing, the budget for which in England has been increased from £2,350 million to £2,620 million. There is also an increase in England for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

We have grave misgivings about the effect of the White Paper in Wales. As I said in an earlier intervention, the Dwyfor area in my constituency has an unemployment rate of 24 per cent. That is not a tolerable level, and Government intervention is needed to overcome it. However, over recent years, the funds available for regional policy have been run down. Wales has seen a reduction from £154 million in 1981-82—at 1986 prices —to £30·5 million in the 1987-88 financial year, and the figure for next year is £24·8 million. This means that it will be approximately one sixth of the 1981-82 level, at the very time when we need more money to help to provide jobs.

Conservative Members have referred to the cost of the recently negotiated EEC package. In the grant settlement for lesser developed regions in the EEC, although the overall figure has been doubled, there has been a tacit understanding that the money will go on limited areas only —perhaps to Spain and Portugal and, within the United Kingdom, to Northern Ireland. We fear that there will not be enough money available to compensate, in areas of high unemployment, for the worsening position that will arise for example, from changes in the agricultural regime.

I feel, as does my party, that the White Paper provides inadequate money to deal with the need to regenerate the economy in Wales. I know that my colleagues in the Scottish National party are also concerned that, while United Kingdom expenditure is expected to increase, Scottish Office expenditure is expected to decrease by £300 million by 1990-91.

Let me add — this is particularly geared to the comments of the hon. Member for Bridlington—that in Wales personal income per head is also well below the United Kingdom average. The United Kingdom average was taken as 100 in 1975, when the figure for Wales was then 90·5. By 1985, the gap had increased, and we were 12·5 per cent. below the figure for the United Kingdom. *[Interruption.]* I accept that the same would be true for the west midlands, as I see the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) commenting on my remarks. Part of the change in that area is also due to structural unemployment.

Specific Government action by way of public expenditure is needed to try to overcome the problem. Income tax reductions will not be adequate, because they do least in the areas with the lowest incomes.

The main theme of today's debate is the priority that we should or should not give to the National Health Service. In his Budget statement last year, the Chancellor said:

> "We have now reached what I judge to be its appropriate destination—a PSBR of 1 per cent. of GDP. My aim will be to keep it there over the years ahead. This will maintain a degree of fiscal prudence".—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1987; Vol. 112, c. 818.]

If we retained a PSBR of 1 per cent. of GDP, that would give the Government the flexibility that they need to fund in full the nurses' pay settlement. It would help to meet the other requirements of the medical fraternity—on whose behalf representations have been made by the British Medical Association and others—for an additional £1·5 billion for the NHS.

The background to the hospital closures in my county was made clear by the consultants appointed by the Welsh Office, who said that the financial problems of the Gwynedd health authority had arisen from a shortfall of £2 million in the funding of wage awards over the past two or three years. There was a further estimate of a £750,000 shortfall in the coming year. We read in the *Financial Times* of 14 January that the Secretary of State for Social Services has acknowledged that the NHS needed more cash. The Chief Secretary virtually acknowledged that earlier in the debate when he suggested, with a nod and a wink to health authorities, that they should not go ahead with closures and reductions in services because of the possibility that by the end of April it might be possible to fund the wage award in full.

Surely Budget tax reductions can be made a little more prudent so that enough money is at hand for a total commitment, to be given now, as to full funding and for the Health Service to know that it will be adequately financed for the coming year. Surely some of the sillier closure decisions—not just in my patch, but throughout the United Kingdom—can be replaced by a coherent approach to the future of health care.

Mr. Ground: Is the hon. Gentleman really saying that he thinks there is a serious risk of five hospitals that serve his area being shut without any replacement?

Mr. Wigley: I shall not go into too much detail, as other hon. Members wish to speak, but I have in my hand one of several consultative documents which deal with the future of Caernarfon cottage hospital, whose closure is proposed. The hospital is greatly valued by the community, as cottage hospitals generally are. People want to retain such facilities, which are close to them. It is important for the Treasury to note that some 40 or 50 people who would be going to the hospital for short-term care—people who live alone with disabilities or in old age—will probably have to go into institutional care if that cottage hospital closes. They will probably have to go into private nursing homes, which will cost the Treasury between £200 and £250 a week per person in supplementary pensions. In other words, it will cost about £10,000 a year per person and for 50 people, a total of £500,000 per annum. That is twice the saving that will result from the hospital's closure. However, the saving will affect the Welsh Office budget, whereas the expenditure on supplementary pensions will come out of the DHSS central budget.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Peter Lilley): If these people need only short-term care in hospital facilities, why will they need long-term care in private facilities?

Mr. Wigley: For a simple reason. These people either live alone and have nobody to look after them, or they have relatives to look after them. Without respite care—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have heard of that — which is relevant both to the elderly and to the disabled, they could not continue to live at home. These estimates have been given by the general practitioners in the area at the consultation meeting, arranged by the health authority, which we had two weeks ago. The doctors said that these people would have to go into some form of institutional care and, given that the other hospitals are full, the only possibility would be private sector homes, and almost all those people are dependent on supplementary pensions. The Government would have to pay from another pocket to provide a saving of half that expenditure for the Welsh Office.

I did not intend to go down that avenue, but I was invited to do so by the hon. and learned Member for Feltham and Heston, and I can set out the details for the other hospitals if he wishes me to do so. However, I think that I have said enough to underline the nonsense that occurs when decisions are taken in isolation. Decisions should be taken in the overall context of the various departmental expenditure responsibilities of central Government and as part of a long-term coherent pattern of decisions in both capital and revenue expenditure, and not as a short-term expedient to meet the cash crisis that is hitting the Health Service. That is the background to this debate, and that is the message that the Treasury should take from the debate.

7.41 pm

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): There is no doubt that the Government have shown, through the Treasury team in particular, tremendous political judgment and courage, and a great deal of skill. As with all politicians, there has also been a good helping of luck, without which skill and good judgment rarely come to anything. Because of that, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor finds himself, as against his plans laid out a year ago, when he talked about a PSBR of £4 billion, in one of the most enviable positions of any Chancellor. Not only can he, quite rightly, pay back borrowed money to the tune of a few billion pounds; he can also cut taxation and change the basis of taxation, which has been so airy-fairy and unjust. He can spend a few billion on that and then he can also decide on what to spend another billion or two that he has to spare.

The decisions that we all make, whether we in our private lives or Governments, are not just fiscal and economic, but moral. That is what politics is all about. One comes into politics to make decisions about what one wants — whether it is defence, housing or health. Whatever the problems, they raise moral and political issues.

My position on what should happen to some of this money has always been clear. It is most irritating when people talk about destroying the Health Service or deliberately starving it. When Nye Bevan was the first Minister of Health on that long road in the adventure of freeing people from the worry of ill health, the first budget for the Health Service was £150 million. Under a Government who, according to some people, wish to destroy the Health Service, its budget is £22,000 million. When we came into office, it was £7,000 million.

That does not mean that anybody is destroying the Health Service. However, it is still not enough. One could always use the argument, "How long is a piece of string?" There is no doubt that if the budget suddenly went up to £30,000 million in one year there would still be somebody saying, "But my daughter is waiting for an operation," or, "My husband needs an operation," or, "My varicose veins need operating on." Whatever sum we spend will never be sufficient for everything, yet some people in high places keep on giving figures as though they will act as a Chinese good luck charm and people with complaints will go away.

In the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, we recommend that the Health Service should be rigorously investigated. I backed that recommendation because two things have to be done. They are not decisions that we in this House alone can make. They are decisions in which people beyond our boundaries—the taxpayers — will have to be involved, because the sums are so large. That is why anybody who suggests that the investigation into the Health Service should be internal does not understand some of the decisions that will have to be made. They involve more than politicians and doctors. If wars are too immportant to be left to generals, there is no doubt that the running of the Health Service is too important to be left to doctors, nurses and administrators.

Medicine has advanced greatly. Let me give two examples of the sort of problems with which so many of us in Parliament, whether in government or not, have to grapple. Let us think of a young girl—if she were my daughter, no amount of money would be too great to keep her alive because she is a human being—who will have £100,000 a year spent on her. Is it spent to keep her alive or to keep her in existence? For somebody who has had a heart transplant, £3,500 a day is spent on anti-rejection drugs. A few years ago, one might have talked about going to the moon as being more likely than people having heart and lung transplants.

That is why the investigation that we shall need so that we take people with us on the need for these costs will have to transcend parliamentarians throwing figures like confetti at a wedding. We need to make decisions, because the growth of the private sector is not enough. I subscribe to it and, thank God, of late it has been a waste of money, and long may that be so. Private health alone will not be able to cope with the nation's health. Anybody who thinks that it can is living in a different world. At least 70 per cent. of health care will have to be provided by us as taxpayers.

When Governments or politicians say that £22,000 million is enough, I think of what happens at the Queen Elizabeth hospital, where cancer beds are being closed. A sister there, known affectionately as Ike, each morning acts as a god. She rings one person and says. "Yes, you can come," and rings another and says, "No, you can't come in." The chances of survival for somebody who comes in are 80 per cent. but for somebody who cannot they fall to 55 per cent. Those are the decisions that sisters and doctors make each day, in spite of the £22 billion—as against the £150 million of the happy days of Nye Bevan's launching of the Health Service — that we are now spending.

These are not the decisions of a mean Government. How can they be mean, when the money allocated has increased by as much as it has? But parliamentarians are human beings. In God's name, we are sent here as human beings to talk on behalf of other human beings because we care for the system, we like our people and we enjoy our areas. It is our duty to tell the Chancellor and the Treasury team, who have done so well, that they face a happy morning because the money that is available means that we can now do two things.

We can properly and rigorously investigate where the Health Service is going in the next 20 or 30 years. It may not be as well administered as it should be, but I saw figures in a letter to *The Times* showing that our management costs are 4·5 per cent. They are 12 per cent. in France and 21 per cent. in the United States. Of course, there may be too many administrators and porters—let us examine those things. We are running ambulances that cost more than hiring a Rolls-Royce. Let us examine that, too. It is right that we should, because this concerns other people's money. That is tomorrow's problem — it certainly needs examining—but today people have their needs.

By all means, let us reduce taxation. The Government very properly did that and it fuelled the economic recovery that is going on now. Let us go on reducing taxation; we can do that on the Government's own figures. Let us, as all prudent Governments want to do, reduce borrowing. On the Government's figures we can do that, too, but still, if we have the moral will and the commitment to our people, we can also give extra money for the nation's health. In the end, however much wealth one has, without health one is dead. In the final analysis, it is not increased expenditure that matters—not even if it is a 30 per cent. increase. When one is dead, one is 100 per cent. dead.

We have the money; let us make sure more people live. All things are possible this year. If we have the will, we have the ways and the means.

7.52 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): The public expenditure White Paper must be seen in the context of 1979, with that year being used as a benchmark. The Government manifesto of that year stated that the state takes too much of the nation's income, and that its share should be readily reduced. The question on all our lips today is: to what level? The report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee does not accept that public expenditure should be reduced further; nor does it accept the underlying assumption that a reduction of public expenditure is in itself desirable.

In the past, the Government have said that revenue determines expenditure, which I consider erroneous. However, if it is true, we should take them at their word. If we believe the estimates that are going around, that between £5 billion and £12 billion is ready and waiting for the Chancellor's Budget, the Government are not even obeying their own dictum. Their perversity of approach is manifest; it is nothing more than a blind act of faith.

The public expenditure White Paper shows an antipathy to the public services. According to the manifesto of June 1987, the White Paper plans to spend £1·3 billion less this year than the Government promised at the election. Only the other week on the radio waves the Home Secretary lectured us on morality. I suggest that there is a selective myopia in the Government's non-recognition of their moral duty to supply what is required for the greater good of the people of the country.

Public opinion is overwhelmingly in favour of such investment. Only last week an opinion poll in *The Daily Telegraph* said that 70 per cent. of people would pay more tax if they were comfortable in the knowledge that all was well with the National Health Service.

The reams of statistics that the Prime Minister grinds out at the Dispatch Box are not convincing. The debilitating effect of the lack of provision in the health and social services is daily manifesting itself. The Prime Minister's rhetoric should be contrasted with the veracity of the statement by the Secretary of State for Social Services, who spoke to the Young Conservatives conference at Scarborough only two weeks ago. He said: "It seemed to me clear that, as many have said, we needed extra resources."

If the Secretary of State for Social Services, who is supposed to be at the helm of his great Department, can see that for himself, what do the people who use the services daily think? There is a link between the Secretary of State's comment and the gut response of the public, as shown in the opinion poll that I mentioned.

Mr. Watts: Will the hon. Gentleman continue the quotation, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had to for his right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) during Prime Minister's questions last week, as far as the bit when the Secretary of State explains whence he was going to obtain the additional resources — charges for dental and optical care? Will he also explain that the Secretary of State's comments were in context of primary health care, not hospital services?

Mr. McFall: He said:

"I secured my discussions with the Chancellor for the next three years through the public expenditure run, increases on top of all of the last eight years of something like £570 million . . . But I did not think that was enough."

The Government say that they are increasing the health budget by £1 billion next year, but the public expenditure plans are meaningless unless proper allowance is made for inflation—and it is not.

The commentary on public expenditure for Scotland was issued on 17 February. It states that the health budget must stay 1 per cent. ahead of inflation merely to keep pace. But the Secretary of State for Scotland announced that the budget would be only 0·7 per cent. greater than inflation, which leaves a shortfall of 0·3 per cent. Translated into cash terms, Scotland's health budget will be £85 million short next year.

Let us also examine the waiting lists in Scotland, taking 1979 as our benchmark. Waiting lists then were 71,247. In March 1987 the waiting list was 81,324, an increase of 26 per cent. in eight years. The availability of beds has fallen by more than 3,000 — by 5 per cent. Comparing the waiting lists increase with the decrease in availability of beds, we can only conclude that, whatever the Government say they are spending on health in Scotland, it is not enough. In my health authority area, waiting lists have increased and there are fewer beds.

Scotland today experienced a protest by nurses and ancillary workers. More than 15,000 protested in Edinburgh. There were more than 20,000 in Glasgow and 5,000 in Dundee and almost 10,000 in Aberdeen, making a total of more than 50,000. The protest is not galvanised

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or led by a minority. It involves people who regard the Health Service as our most precious public asset and who perceive that the Government have nothing but wanton disregard for it. The turnout is a tribute to what the people of Scotland feel about their Health Service.

There is a debate about privatisation in Scotland. The Minister has put out a circular demanding health boards to put their services out to tender. But let us be clear: privatisation is not about quality. It is about the lowest common denominator of provision. In my constituency, the Vale of Leven district general hospital has been asked to put its catering services out to tender. Two years ago, management and unions made an agreement for the following three years. One year of the agreement has yet to run, but, in spite of local agreements, the Minister has seen fit to intervene and order the health board to put services out to tender. That is not an act of concern for the Health Service but sheer dogmatism.

There is no enthusiasm for privatisation in Scotland. It is regarded as a distraction from the main issue, which, as in England and Wales, is resources. If it stands still, the health budget is too small to cope with the demand, whether it arises out of demographic change, increased services or increased medical sophistiçation. I suggest that the Secretary of State is being dogmatic—nay, obtuse—when he claims that public expenditure in Scotland is rising.

The Secretary of State is clearly being obtuse, because somebody has knocked his proclamation on the head; that somebody is none other than the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whose figures show that Scottish Office funding will fall by £70 million by next year and by £317 million by 1990-91. The commentary on public expenditure for Scotland makes a bleak story. No area is spared. Spending on Scottish industry is down in cash terms by £2 million, from £120 million to £118 million. Once inflation is taken into account, that deficit becomes £7·5 million, so the opportunity for investment in infrastructure in Scotland is seriously diminished.

Housing has suffered. Since 1979, investment has decreased by 64 per cent. In Scotland, investment will drop next year by £84 million. The commentary reveals that, whereas in 1979 8,607 houses were completed in Scotland, only 3,500 were completed in 1987—a cut of more than 100 per cent. Whereas there were 7,871 house starts in 1979, there were only 3,900 in 1987—a cut of almost the same magnitude. Notwithstanding the fact that the Scottish housing programme is in crisis, the Government have decided to cut, and cut again.

Nor is education spared—£38 million has been lost. We have already heard about cuts in universities from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths). My region is considering school closures because it has pared spending to the bone and has no other option. The Government's inner-city programme has been described, aptly, as a crusade without cash. But every aspect of their policy is a crusade without cash, because each capital investment programme except that for prison building is being cut.

In addition, it is a crusade without heart or concern, in which people are absent from the main stage erected by the Government. We should forget statistics for a moment and consider people and what the White Paper does for them. Sadly, it does nothing for the overall benefit of individuals. Quite simply, the policies we see enunciated are not the politics of caring—they are nothing but the politics of pain and, because of that, the White Paper should be rejected.

8.5 pm

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): Listening to the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), it is difficult to recognise the true situation in Scotland, especially with regard to health. We did not learn from his speech that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland announced a couple of weeks ago that there would be an increase of 8·6 per cent. in spending on health in Scotland, of an extra £225 million.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton did not compare what is happening now with 1979. He did not tell us that the number of day cases in Scotland has risen by 95 per cent., that the number of operations performed has increased by 41 per cent., that the number of in-patients treated has gone up by 15 per cent., that the number of patients treated in bed has gone up by 20 per cent. and that the number of out-patient attendances has gone up by 8 per cent. In Scotland, the Health Service has advanced significantly. Spending is up by 27 per cent. in real terms. I hate to think what it would be like if we had the crippled economy that we inherited from Labour in 1979. I dare say that those figures would have been quite the opposite.

I have the honour to stand here as a member of the Conservative minority on the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) has achieved that level of seniority which puts him above and beyond party politics, and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) defies conventional classification. I know that he will take that in the spirit in which it is intended. That means that there are four gallant Conservative supporters of the Government, who I am sure the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) would say are slavish Thatcherites, who are left to hold the fort.

One thing which I welcome greatly about the White Paper is its continued commitment to reducing the proportion of gross national product taken by public expenditure. There are good reasons for continuing with this pledge for the foreseeable future. I am happy to say that, when we considered whether to insert an amendment to the effect that we did not accept the underlying assumption in the White Paper, that reducing public expenditure is in itself somehow desirable, it was rejected. We can therefore infer that it is a shared assumption that it is a good thing to carry on reducing the proportion of GNP taken by public expenditure.

The successful economies are the low-tax economies, low public spending economies. It is not possible to reduce taxation unless public spending is kept under control. I believe, as the election result last year showed, that such a course is popular in the country.

Much has been made of the fact that this year a considerable amount of money is available to the Chancellor to increase spending, cut taxes, or reduce borrowing. What a splendid thing it is that the argument over the public expenditure White Paper this year, as indeed for several years, is not about how to make real spending cuts, as was the miserable position in which we

found ourselves in the latter part of the 1970s, but how to spend the windfall that Opposition Members are at a loss to explain, except in terms of good luck.

We would not have that windfall to distribute today were it not for the prudent policies that the Government have followed in the past nine years—sometimes during difficult periods — which have kept public spending within bounds, allowed us to reduce the tax burden, and give the incentives that have produced growth in the economy.

I agree with what my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary said in evidence to the Select Committee. It would be wrong, just because this year may be exceptional —we do not know what will happen in future—simply to have a one-off dollop of cash thrown around within the public services. My right hon. Friend expressed it rather more eloquently than I have. His words deserve wider currency than perhaps the arcane report that the Committee has produced. He reminded us that

"the converse of rushing to spend what seems to be increased revenue would be rushing immediately in-year to make very substantial in-year retrenchments if revenue falls short of your expectations. That has happened in the past . . . it is not an attractive way to conduct affairs. It is better to have a smoother flow . . . I would argue that that is a prudent way to proceed in terms of public expenditure if one is interested in ensuring that you have a regular and consistent flow of public expenditure rather than a jerky pattern, which does no good either for individuals or for programme expenditure plans."

Every business must have a plan for several years and try to plan for its expansion in an orderly way. One should not simply go up and down with the tide. One should try to make one's expenditure increases stick year by year, rather than have to make real cuts in one year and unforeseen increases in another.

In addition to cutting taxation, our great opportunity this year is to use much of the surplus to continue to reduce the burden of debt interest upon public revenues. In the past nine years, we have been successful in reducing the burden of debt. In 1982-83, we spent 5 per cent. of gross domestic product on financing the national debt. In 1988-89 that has been reduced by 1 per cent. to 4 per cent. That means that we are saving about £3,500 million a year, which, of course, can be spent on improvements in the National Health Service, and so on.

According to the White Paper, by 1990-91 we plan to reduce that proportion of gross domestic product still further, to 3·5 per cent., which will be the equivalent of £5 billion a year, spent not just on interest, but, for example, on real patient care in the Health Service. That is one reason why we have been able to make a £1·1 billion increase in spending on the Health Service this year.

During the past few months, there has been what we can only call an hysterical campaign about the Health Service. That can easily be explained. Labour Members are clutching at straws. They are able to complain about a crisis in the Health Service only because they are unable to complain about a crisis anywhere else in the economy. Before the last election, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) desperately attempted to drum up some potential crisis lurking in the background, in the vain hope that he would be able to gull the public into believing that the Labour party would be elected. All that he seems to have done—perhaps rather more effectively than Lord Whitelaw has done—is to go around the country stirring up apathy, because the election result was not satisfactory to him.

Today, the Health Service is in crisis in political terms only because there are no bigger or better alternative crises. There is always some crisis. There must be something to give vigour to political debates. When we consider the increase in spending and the amount of patient care that has been provided during the past nine years, we cannot say that the National Health Service is in crisis.

That is not to say that it is perfect. It is a long way from being perfect, and in its present form it is nowhere near perfectable. The National Health Service is failing in many respects. It is disappointing that there are no ideas on the Opposition Benches about how the Health Service can be improved, except by the most crude mechanism of increasing the amount of money that we spend on a defective system.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my hon. Friend agree that the letters that he has received are mostly from those who are on the payroll of the National Health Service? I have received few letters from patients. Most of the letters that I have received have stated that the Service is excellent.

Mr. Hamilton: I have had the same experience. I receive letters about the Health Service. Many letters have been prompted by the publicity that the arguments have received on television and in newspapers — often presented in the most tendentious and inaccurate terms.

It is no good thinking that we can solve the problems of the Health Service simply by increasing the amount of money that we spend on it. The Health Service is more like a leaky steam engine, with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services, the fireman, year by year shovelling bundles of pound notes into the engine to get up steam. So much power is lost through the holes in the engine that the proportion of extra speed that it is able to generate, relative to the quantity of fuel, is small. The more money that we put in on that basis, the less effective the Service becomes.

I reject the notion that the people of this country are prepared to pay considerably more money to continue to fund the Health Service in its present form. If we ask somebody whether he believes that more money should be spent on the Health Service, the answer will be yes, because he wants more health care. It is a question without cost, and a question without cost is not a real choice. It is a most unscientific way of inquiring into public attitudes to choice.

I know of only one survey that has gone into the matter in a proper scientific way. In a book called "Welfare Without the State", published not long ago, the Institute of Economic Affairs Ltd. published the results of a survey, which it has carried out every 5 years since 1963, on attitudes among the general public about whether they wish to see more money spent on public services or on tax cuts. The results are interesting. When asked in early 1987 whether they would prefer to pay higher taxes to spend more money on the Health Service, 55 per cent. of people said yes. That figure would be higher today as a result of the publicity that the Health Service has received in recent months.

When they were asked how much more they would be prepared to pay in higher taxes, the figure dramatically altered. The vast majority of people are prepared to see more money spent on the Health Service only if other

[Mr. Hamilton]

people pay the taxes. It will be a small minority probably 10 to 15 per cent. Opposition Members are free to look at the figures if they take the trouble to go to the Library and examine the document. A small minority of people in this country are prepared to forgo real increases in disposable income to put more money into a service that, in the nature of things, cannot overcome its deficiencies simply by the amount of money that is provided.

Mr. McFall: How does the hon. Gentleman explain the Gallup poll in an issue of *The Daily Telegraph* last week? When people were asked whether they were willing to pay more, 67 per cent. said yes. The poll was quantified and related specifically to the NHS – £1 a week, £2 a week, £3 a week, and even more. Overall, 67 per cent. said that they would pay more. That was a specific question.

Mr. Hamilton: I regret to say that, unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not subscribe to *The Daily Telegraph*. However, I would be prepared to examine the figures from that poll.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Actually, most of the people interviewed said that they would give only £1 a week. That is less than the increase that the Government will give.

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend is right to state that the £1·1 billion projected increase in the White Paper is virtually equivalent to one penny on income tax. I suspect that many people are unaware of that. There are many ways in which we can improve the Health Service and increase the quality of patient care without having to increase the amount of money that we put into it through tax-funded revenues.

To give an example of the degree of public misconception of the position, the health authority in my area has received a 60 per cent. increase in spending since 1982-83. However, this year wards are being closed and waiting lists are lengthening in exactly the same way as hon. Members have described tonight. A 60 per cent. increase in spending in cash terms over six years can by no stretch of the imagination be called a cut.

What causes these so-called cuts and reductions in provision, happens when an authority is unable to manage its budget year by year. That may occur for a variety of reasons. I believe that the main reason is that the authority does not have the information to hand to enable it to monitor spending against budget adequately and effectively throughout the year. I believe that that happens in authorities throughout the country and that it explains much of the hysteria over recent months about so-called cuts in the Health Service.

One of the glaring absurdities of the existing system is that there is a two-year gap between doing work and being credited with payment for that work. For example, Macclesfield is treating 14 per cent. more of its residents now than it was treating two years ago, while Manchester is still receiving the credit in revenue terms for that. Macclesfield will get the benefit in two years' time.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): The hon. Gentleman has presented his argument in an extremely clever way, no doubt as a result of his training and background. Will he explain, without reference to his manipulation of figures, why wards are closing, operating theatres are not being used and there is a shortage of nurses? The hon. Gentleman is familiar with my constituency and, if he would like to visit it, he can witness those things happening. However the hon. Gentleman may adjust or manipulate the budget or the figures, the point is that the service is not being provided. It would be wrong to suggest otherwise.

Mr. Hamilton: I agree that it appears that wards are being closed and that there are cuts in the service. However, any business which must operate to a budget must try to adjust its expenditure smoothly and not spend the entire revenue by the ninth month of the year. Because authorities cannot discover accurately the costs that they are incurring in the early part of the year, there are panic measures at the end of the year when the authorities discover that they are running out of money and will not be able to pay the bills. If there was a more even spread of expenditure and better management, there would be fewer problems.

I am not saying that the Health Service is perfect or that the existing waiting lists are acceptable—they are not—but there are many ways in which the position can be improved.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that, in each successive year since 1979, there has been a real, substantial increase in the number of nurses employed in the Health Service? That does not appear to be a decrease in provision.

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend is quite correct to comment on the enormous increase. Indeed, tens of thousands more nurses are employed in the Health Service now than 10 years ago. I notice that Opposition Members are always keen to stress how many nurses are leaving the Health Service, but they are not so keen to state how many administrators and ancillary workers are not leaving it. If Opposition Members were more interested in that figure, the problems with the Health Service might be considerably reduced.

There are many ways in which the effectiveness of the Health Service can be improved. I hope that we will get away from this national wage bargaining system in the Health Service, which has bedevilled the budget year by year, and opt for a more market-oriented system where regional and specialty differences are taken into account. We have a long way to go before we get rid of the existing restrictive practices within the Health Service which prevent new working techniques from being introduced. There are still absurd unbreachable overlaps between technicians, nurses and porters. We can use the manpower, which accounts for 70 per cent. of the cost of the Health Service, more effectively than at present.

Many marginal services could be provided more effectively. I cannot understand why we must provide highly expensive taxi services using ambulances which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Selly Oak said, cost more to run than a Rolls-Royce. Many false choices are made under the present system. For example, because remedial care is visible, any cuts in its provision provide a potent force for putting pressure on the Government. On the other hand, preventive care, which in the long term will considerably reduce pressure on the Health Service, is not

visible and increases are not made in that because that is not politically advantageous. The emphasis is very often wrong within the system because of its structure.

I believe that the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) had a point in some respects when he said that we should concentrate more on community hospitals and facilities. The move towards large district general hospitals at the expense of cottage hospitals and wider provision through doctors' surgeries has been greatly overdone. There is poor cost awareness within the system. Supplies are often used once and then thrown away. Tests and treatments are carried out which are of marginal value. Capital items are treated as free gifts and not properly accounted for. Expensive pieces of equipment lie idle until they become obsolete. They are then given away to the Third world as part of the aid budget. There are many ways in which the existing system is abused and we must do something about that.

I was very pleased to see the headline in *The Times* yesterday:

"GPs and their patients may be privatised."

According to the article, a series of radical health plans may be considered by Ministers today. I hope that we will follow the route of the health maintenance organisations which have been very successful in the United States.

The Opposition have not been able to provide a convincing case for spending more money on the Health Service. They were completely floored by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) who challenged them to quantify the extent of underfunding. What do they mean by underfunding? My hon. Friend asked whether they would be prepared to give a commitment that they would reopen all wards, abolish all waiting lists and agree in advance to fund all nurses' pay awards if, to our misfortune, they ever won a general election and had responsibility for these matters. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) was completely unable or unwilling to answer that question. He knew that the unpalatable answer was that he could not responsibly give such a commitment.

Opposition Members are not only playing with words in these debates, but, for a cynical and political purpose, are taking advantage of people who are sick and suffering. They cannot match this Government's record of increasing provision for the Health Service, and they know it. Therefore, they have given up all hope of providing any convincing alternative to our proposals, and, happily, the people of this country have given up all hope of the Labour party getting back into office.

8.29 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Having listened to the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), one wonders in which world he is living. The problems that we see every day on our doorstep result from the underfunding of the Health Service and they are a daily reminder of the desperate need for more resources to be made available to the NHS.

The hon. Member for Tatton wanted such underfunding to be quantified and there are a number of ways to do that. For example, let us consider my constituency's area health authority, Mid Glamorgan. It has worked out a budget for the coming financial year that tried to take account of inflation and the possible costs of pay awards to nurses and other Health Service workers. It came up with a figure that was some £3 million less than the amount then allocated by the Welsh Office. The Welsh Office thought it had done that health authority proud because the increase in funds was 5·1 per cent. more than last year's spending.

We are well aware that the increases in pay for the nurses and other hospital workers will be much more than the sum allocated by the Welsh Office, yet the Government have given us no guarantee that they will completely fund that pay award. The major problems faced by the Health Service in the past few years have been due to the underfunding of nationally negotiated pay awards.

Let us consider another example of underfunding in the Mid Glamorgan health authority that occurred two years ago, yet the effects are still being felt. In July 1986 the Mid Glamorgan health authority had a guideline for capital expenditure. However, in January 1987 the Welsh Office cut its allocation by more than £9 million. At a stroke, the authority had to revise its capital expenditure programme under which it was planned to provide the facilities that the area was sadly lacking.

Bridgend has a splendid new district general hospital that is providing effective and efficient services. It is just about the cheapest hospital in which to be treated in Wales. However, instead of the second phase of its development being started in 1991—at the moment it is a split-site hospital that costs hundreds of thousands of pounds extra to run a year—it may be 1994, 1995, or never before it is stated. It depends on the amount of money that the Government are prepared to give to fund the cost of the pay awards in the Health Service.

The Government say that money is available, and they appear to be committed to tax cuts. However, that money could be used to help fund the Health Service. We are not suggesting—as the hon. Member for Tatton tried to make out—that we should ask people to pay more money. It is a simple request to hold back on major tax cuts and to use the money to fund the Health Service.

At the start of the financial year—not in the ninth month of the financial year and not as a result of bad management—the Mid Glamorgan health authority already knows that, on the basis of the money allocated by the Welsh Office, it will have to find £5 million to make up for the cuts—on top of cuts already carried out. Despite the fine record of Health Service staff in treating more patients, the unpalatable fact for Conservative Members is that there are longer waiting lists and there is a crisis in the Health Service. The Government can throw as many statistics as they like at us about the wonderful extra funding. However, the plain fact is that there are more unwell people who need treatment and there are more people dying who need care.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) spoke about the economic recovery that has been engineered by the Government. However, it has resulted in a level of unemployment which is still more than double the 1979 level. Even if the present rate of reduction in unemployment continues, it will be 1992 or 1993 before we get back to the 1979 level of unemployment. What a wonderful economic recovery.

Let us consider what the Government have done with regional spending. Let us consider some of the facts and figures behind the British economy. Today in Wales, compared with 1979, there are about 100,000 men and 40,000 women who are no longer in full-time employment. Regional spending in Wales has been reduced from £265

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million in 1979 to £149 million in 1987. The public expenditure White Paper proposes further cuts in future years.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman and I served on the same Committee in the European Parliament which dealt with regional spending. Does he maintain that the money spent was cost-effective in jobs? In my part of the world, and certainly in parts of Cheshire, I found that vast sums were being spent on capital spending, but, far from increasing the number of jobs, the number was reduced. That spending was not helping to increase regional employment; there were merely cash handouts regardless of the merit of the project.

Mr. Griffiths: That is one way to consider investment that keep jobs in an area.

In my European constituency of South Wales, in Baglan bay there is a chemical works that over the years has received considerable funding from the Government. Because of changes in the chemical industry, there has been a reduction in employment. Nevertheless, there are still many hundreds of workers employed in that plant and they would not have those jobs without Government grants.

In the county of Mid Glamorgan nearly 29,000 men and women are unemployed and there are 1,907 advertised job vacancies. In my constituency of Bridgend and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) there are more than 7,000 men and women unemployed and there are 397 job vacancies advertised in the jobcentres. In 1979, the amount of regional aid spent in the Bridgend travel-to-work area was more than £62 million; this year it is £8 million. We need more public expenditure in such areas to create more jobs to take people off the dole. The dole is one type of public expenditure that we should try to cut.

The hon. Member for Tatton tried to claim that there was a crisis only in the NHS, but let us consider the spending on education. Apart from the two financial years before the general election, public expenditure in education has been on a downward trend. Judging from the White Paper, it is apparent that education spending for the next few years, in real terms, is also on a downward trend as a percentage of national output. Apart from one year, there has been a downward trend throughout the 1980s.

Yet Government spending plans include a reduction in the proportion of the money spent on education. They plan to reduce local authority spending, but at the same time they are to increase spending on administration in the Department of Education and Science by 8·6 per cent. in real terms next year. One wonders why. They will increase in real terms expenditure on the assisted places scheme by more than 10 per cent., yet the increase in spending on the under-fives will be less than half that increase. The increase for primary education will be less than one third and there will be no increase at all in spending on secondary education. Provision for transport will go down by 3·3 per cent. and provision for milk and meals—carrying on the honourable tradition of the Prime Minister—will be reduced in real terms by more than 8 per cent.

The Government's spending targets suggest that, even if they make a minimum commitment to maintaining the value of teachers' salaries, extra spending to take account of other needs of the education service will be less than 2 per cent.—well below the projected rate of inflation.

The Government are to spend more money on repairing school buildings. They have been told in the schools survey of last November that they need to spend between £2·5 million and £3 million to put our schools back into a good state of repair. However, that extra money to be spent on school buildings will be at the expense of the maintenance budgets for colleges and other higher education institutions. Therefore, the crisis in the schools in the 1980s may partially be dealt with by the 1990s, but then there will be a crisis in the colleges and institutes of higher education because of the cutbacks that are being made now.

In real terms, capital expenditure will go down by nearly 4 per cent. The Government are proud of being able to talk about tax cuts. If they really want to help people who need help, they should provide for investment in our schools, hospitals and factories so that people can live decent lives. It is amazing that the public expenditure White Paper does not contain any reference to the Education Reform Bill currently in Committee. That Bill makes some quite significant changes to the shape of spending on education, yet there is no evidence of them being taken into account in the public expenditure White Paper.

Unfortunately, the public expenditure White Paper throws a shadow over the prospects in the Budget for investing in Britain's future, because, for the sake of short-term gains in tax cuts, we are to lose the long-term gains which could have led to an improvement in people's health, education and lifestyle by providing more jobs. That is what people want when they come to our surgeries. Let the Government deliver it, if they say that they have the money.

8.43 pm

Mr. John Watts (Slough): In 1979, the Government's target for public expenditure was to reduce it in real terms. By 1983, the target was level funding to keep public expenditure constant in real terms. Currently, we have the most lax of targets that the Government have adopted—that is, to reduce public expenditure as a proportion of GDP. If that were the Government's only target, and if that were the only constraint to be observed, it would be far too lax to be the basis of a prudent fiscal policy.

It is clear from this year's public expenditure White Paper that there is no predisposition to spend up to the ceiling permitted by the policy guideline. Certainly the current target is more achievable than those which have preceded it and those which have been achieved since 1984-85, when public expenditure was absorbing 46·25 per cent. of GDP. This year it is down to 42·5 per cent. and it is destined to fall further, to 41·25 per cent. by 1990-91.

The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) claimed that there was no economic justification for the policy objective of reducing expenditure as a proportion of GDP. It may be a pure coincidence, but the decline in the share of public expenditure over the past few years has coincided with accelerating economic growth and falling unemployment. This accelerating growth has created the buoyant tax revenues that allow those of a spending disposition to indulge in the luxury of advising my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on how to spend the "windfall", as they describe it.

The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee report points out that expenditure could be £1 billion or £2 billion higher next year without breaching the policy constraint of a declining proportion of GDP. That is merely a statement of fact, based upon arithmetic. "Could" does not mean "should". There is no virtue in public expenditure, and a Government do not become more virtuous just because they spend more money. Conceivably that might be the case if the Government had substantial financial resources of their own to disburse beneficently.

The process that leads to public expenditure involves taking away from individuals income or capital that belongs to them and spending it in ways that the Government choose. Therefore, the Government must accept a duty to take in taxation only what is essential. The Chancellor has a choice of spending more on public services or "spending" on tax cuts. Cutting taxes is not a method of spending. It involves leaving more money with the individual to whom it belongs and, in my submission, that is fundamentally different from choosing to spend it in some other way.

Too much of the recent discussion about public expenditure has been concerned with the volume of expenditure, the financial input, rather than with the output of services that are generated by that financial input. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), when pressed extremely hard by a number of my hon. Friends, finally was forced to quantify the further funding needs of the NHS at an extra £2 billion. The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) adduced the argument that the public are willing to pay more in taxation to fund increases in expenditure on the Health Service. He quoted a Gallup poll in *The Daily Telegraph* last week. Perhaps he was a little economical with the truth.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) confirmed, 67 per cent. of those interviewed said that they were prepared to pay more in taxes if it was to be spent on the National Health Service. That applied to expenditure of £1 per week. When the question arose whether people would be prepared to spend £3 a week extra — my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) explained that this would be the broad cost to a family of an increase in expenditure of £1·5 billion, which is less than the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East suggested—the number of willing respondents fell to only 16 per cent. Only one person in six covered by the Gallup survey was prepared to contribute in extra taxation an amount somewhat less than that which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East suggested was necessary to fund the NHS.

In adducing the need for this increase in funding, the hon. Gentleman gave no thought to the efficiency with which the existing £22 billion of resources is spent. There is plentiful evidence of the scope for increasing efficiency. The national average cost of treating a patient in a major acute hospital in 1985-86 was £724. The costs within that average range from £467, which is 35 per cent. below the average, to £1,231, which is 70 per cent. above the average. The average length of stay in hospital after general surgery ranges from three days in the health authority which deals with its patients quickest, to 11 days in the one which is the most tardy.

To give a further example, last weekend St. Bartholomew's hospital hired the operating theatres at a London independent hospital and shipped its surgeons there to perform operations to reduce the waiting list, making use of the additional funding that the Government have provided for reducing waiting lists. The district general manager admitted in a radio interview that it was cheaper for the health authority to hire the theatres of a private hospital than to use the operating theatres in the NHS hospital.

One must ask why that should be. I can only conjecture that part of the answer must be the hordes of additional porters, receptionists, administrators and so on who are required to be present before anyone can do anything in a NHS hospital. That is the type of constraint which clearly does not apply in the private sector. Each example shows the possibility of achieving a much greater output of health care for the existing expenditure of £22 billion.

This year's White Paper contains about 1,800 measures of output and performance, but, as Treasury officials admitted in evidence to the Committee, less than half these are performance indicators which relate inputs to outputs. Public expenditure is planned to rise by £4·5 billion next year, but the expected output for that increased input is nowhere quantified in the White Paper. It is essential to our ability to judge whether value for money is being achieved that such targets should be set.

Furthermore, the indicators chosen should be used on a consistent basis from year to year. It should be an immutable principle that, if a target is adopted in the White Paper for one year, the following year there should be a comparison of the performance against that target. If that is not done, those of us with a suspicious turn of mind might be led to believe that it is those targets that are achieved that are reported on in subsequent years, and that those which are not are ignored. That is not the way to report on the efficacy of public expenditure.

I know that several hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall draw my remarks to a close. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer contemplates his Budget, he is right to reaffirm the view that the buoyancy of the economy and the tax revenues are not reasons to have a more relaxed view of public expenditure. His priorities should be, first, to eliminate the need for any PSBR, not for any doctrinaire reason, but for a practical one. As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary explained earlier, reductions in the levels of borrowing since 1978-79 are now saving us £8 billion a year—the equivalent of 40 per cent. of the total budget for the NHS.

Secondly, it should be a priority to reduce the burden of income tax at all levels. A 25p in the pound basic rate should not be the end of our aspirations: 2p off the basic rate is the minimum that our constituents now expect. On past experience, reductions in the higher rates of tax have not involved a reduction in revenue, as Labour Members have suggested, but have increased the tax take from those who pay higher rates, not just in cash terms, but in real terms. That knowledge should give the Chancellor of the Exchequer the courage to remove at least another 10p from the higher rates. Perhaps we could have a 25p, 35p, 45p profile.

Thirdly, there is a unique opportunity, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) suggested, to reform the taxation of married women to end discrimination against those who stay at home to care for children. The Budget on 15 March should not be an occasion for announcements of increased spending. It is an opportunity to slash taxation and borrowing.

8.55 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): The Government tell us that there must be tax cuts because we must provide greater incentives. Hon. Members will all agree that tax cuts will stimulate demand in the economy, but we will differ on whether tax cuts lead to greater incentives. During the last Parliament, the Treasury commissioned a study at Stirling university, under Professor Brown. I know that Treasury officials feel uncomfortable at the results, which show clearly that whether or not one reduces taxation, that will not provide an incentive for the average person. If anything, if taxation is increased, people feel that they need to work harder to make up their take-home pay. No nation and no person will volunteer for high taxation.

The Prime Minister continually reminds us at Question Time of her admiration for the Japanese economy, and perhaps we should admire it. Nations such as Japan are not so stupid as to believe that public expenditure should be cut to fund tax cuts. Japan's medium-term forecast for the budget that is being considered in the Diet estimates that real growth between 1986 and 1990 should be 2·7 per cent. per annum. At the same time, the Japanese Government estimate an increase in Government expenditure, of 3·7 per cent.

Clearly the Japanese believe that certain action must be taken on public expenditure if the economy is to be successful. They believe that at this time public expenditure can be increased by more than the rate of growth. The Japanese people are far too practical to give up investment in tomorrow, in education and training, in research and development, and in industrial aid, just to pay off their rich friends today. When Conservative Members, such as the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), make comparisons with successful economies worldwide, I wish that they would get their facts right.

There are, of course, two views about the role of public expenditure in our country. One view, which is relatively uncontroversial—or at least it used to be—is that, when we have the resources, we should spend money on those things that people believe lead to a better society, such as the Health Service and housing. The Chancellor and the Treasury officials know that this year revenues can match expenditure. We all know the inadequacies of the National Health Service; even the hon. Member for Tatton conceded that point. The Secretary of State for Social Services has admitted that he needs to spend more money if he is to meet the objectives that he feels are important, but Treasury officials are still not allocating the necessary resources.

It is often said that Governments should put their money where their mouth is. On the question of Health Service expenditure, this Government will not do that. In saying that, I know that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury will recognise that the officials of the Department of Health and Social Security are not usually shy in this respect, but on this matter they are very shy.

Such is the Government's lack of compassion, and such is their support for privilege, that they will neither put their money nor their mouth on the line for those who are suffering because of the crisis in our National Health Service. Thousands of people up and down the country are waiting in pain because they cannot get a hospital bed. There are terrible cases in different parts of the country of families losing their loved ones we have heard recently from the midlands about families losing their young loved ones—as a direct consequence of Government action and their inadequate provision for the National Health Service.

I know that time is short, but I want to make some brief comments on the second important role of public expenditure. There is a relationship between public expenditure today and the prosperity of our economy tomorrow. That view of public expenditure relates to the way in which it can directly affect prosperity. We need a public expenditure commitment if we are to make provision for the future in education, but the White Paper makes it clear that there are no scheduled increases for the period 1987 to 1991. The importance of a public expenditure commitment to science is recognised, but there is to be a 6 per cent. cut in the science programme between 1987-88 and 1990-91.

That view of the public expenditure commitment recognises the importance of it in relation to training, transport and our regional economy. I think that most of us would recognise that the economy is somewhat overheated in certain parts of the south, but there is dreadful under-capacity and under-utilisation in most parts of the country. Therefore, surely it makes sense to recognise—I hope that we do—that we cannot address the problem of levelling out economic activity throughout the country unless we have a public expenditure programme. Yet regional aid has been cut by 39 per cent. since 1979 and the White Paper schedules a further 6 per cent. cut from the industrial budget.

For all those reasons, I believe that the Government should think again. If tax cuts are the option that is chosen because of the weakness of our economy, that will undoubtedly lead to an increase in imports of manufactures, which will have a subsequent and damaging effect on our balance of payments. What we should be doing, with whatever resources are available—we can argue whether that amount is £2 billion, £5 billion or £10 billion—is investing in those areas that are important to the economy, to the people, and to tomorrow.

I ask the Financial Secretary to think again and not to wreck tomorrow and the future. I ask him to think about what our competitors abroad are doing; about the needs that we all recognise as necessary in education and in training; and to consider the disparities in our regional economies. Most of all, I ask him to think about the crying need for extra resources in our Health Service. The Financial Secretary should think again, and I look forward to his response.

9.3 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I should like, in the brief time that I have, to deal with a major curse which bedevils the consideration and management of public expenditure in Britain. That major curse is national pay bargaining. That is such nonsense that, if we did not live in Britain and were not familiar with it, I doubt whether anybody would believe that such a system was in place. An educated man or woman from Mars with some knowledge of economic affairs and principles and no prejudices of mind would be completely horrified by our system.

That system amounts to a collective decision on our part to prevent ourselves from benefiting from the existence of a rational pricing system. In collective pay bargaining, we have set up an insuperable obstacle to the

establishment of equilibrium in Britain's labour market. We could not have devised a more efficient means of bringing about in Britain the co-existence of pockets of unemployment and larger pockets of potential overheating and the regional disparities about which Opposition Members understandably frequently become excited.

Let me take a specific example of the pernicious impact of the system in that great county of Lincolnshire, a portion of which I have the great honour to represent. This year, we have been forced to give pay increases of 10 per cent.—twice the level of inflation—to unskilled county council workers. There was no productivity agreement, not even a bogus productivity agreement; and that occurred in a county where there is still significant unemployment in precisely that category of unskilled work.

The effect of that is first, an enormous waste of public and ratepayers' money, and that is to be greatly regretted. Unfortunately, that is not the end of the damage. There is the enormous economic cost. Sadly, there is also the great cost to employment because the county council cannot afford to employ as many people as it otherwise would have done. It either pays the increases and reduces employment to the extent that it can, or increases rates, which of course reduces household incomes, domestic consumption and the margins of business enterprises, thereby having a further deleterious effect on the level of employment.

A great deal of the debate has focused on the NHS. Local government and the NHS are the largest employers in Britain, and it is in those two areas that we see the greatest damage done by the absurdity of national pay bargaining. I put it to the House this evening that much of the agitated debate that we have had on the matter of fully funding or not fully funding, of health authorities being able to plan forward or not being able to plan forward, would never have arisen in the first place were it not for the collective nonsense that we have enforced upon ourselves.

We know why we have to face this nonsense. We know how difficult it is to get rid of it. It is a piece of primitive medieval nonsense, but, as in other medieval dramas, a dragon prevents us from doing the right thing and ridding humanity of it. The dragon is the powerful trade union movement—Opposition Members cannot deny this—with nationally based hierarchies, power structures and overheads which are determined to perpetuate the present system, whether or not that is in the interests of their members, and of course it is not.

My right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench in this Government and the two previous Governments have shown that they are not lacking in those chivalrous virtues of courage and resolution which are necessary from time to time to slay the dragons which threaten Britain's vital interests. My great hope is that they will not fail to identify and to tackle this particular dragon in the course of this Parliament. Our public expenditure accounts will be greatly relieved thereby and we shall be able to go further forward in building Britain's prosperity, having removed a self-inflicted burden which I regret that we have suffered for far too long. Away with this nonsense, and let us not delay in tackling it.

9.9 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I am grateful to the members and officials of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee for their second report on the Government's public expenditure plans. I should like to echo the thanks expressed from the Dispatch Box by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown).

The report makes some important and less contentious points about the presentation of the information before the House and about the implications for the format of our future debates. I welcome the work of the Select Committee in that regard. I appreciate the measured contribution of the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), the Chairman of the Select Committee. I hope that I do not get him into too much trouble by saying that. I was impressed by what he said about the relative price effect as a useful measure of real changes in public expenditure, although I am sure that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury will say that that is self-serving, in view of the way in which the debate has gone.

On the main item of the debate—the question of public expenditure and its effect on the National Health Service—the Select Committee said:

> "We do not accept the underlying assumption in the White Paper that reducing public expenditure is in itself somehow desirable. Indeed there is a strong argument that, given the present state of many of the essential public services, spending should be increased. We have particularly in mind the NHS and the acute need for new public sector housing construction and improvement work, as well as grants for urgent repairs for older owner-occupied dwellings. Certainly, given the choice between reducing income tax or public spending on essential services, we are firmly of the view that it is the latter course that should be pursued."

Labour Members wholly endorse that view.

Mr. Higgins: I am puzzled by what the hon. Member has just said. That is not in the report.

Mr. Brown: I have the report here. I am referring to a majority resolution at the back of the report.

Mr. Higgins: Will the hon. Gentleman give the exact reference? He will find that it is an amendment which was not carried.

Mr. Brown: I am reading from page xviii of the report, which states that the Committee divided and that the Ayes were five and the Noes were four. That suggests that the amendment was carried.

Mr. Watts: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Higgins *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I have made my point. I shall take the intervention from the Chairman of the Select Committee.

Mr. Higgins: I am sorry but, if the amendment had been carried, the hon. Gentleman would have found it in the body of the report. I do not have a copy of the report here, but he will find that it is not in the body of the report. He needs to consider the sequence of events in the proceedings.

Mr. Brown: The best that I can do is to read what is written here. The report states that it commands the support of the majority of the people. Let me end the argument by saying that it most certainly expresses the view of Opposition Members. I hope that that at least will not be contentious.

Mr. Higgins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall not give way. It would only cut into my time.

[Mr. Brown]

The majority of the arguments today have concentrated on that point. So far, 20 hon. Members have spoken, excluding myself and the Financial Secretary. Twelve hon. Members have expressed some reservations about the Government's approach to public expenditure in the Health Service and have called for an increase in spending. Only eight hon. Members have wholly endorsed the Government's point of view.

Mr. Higgins: I must put it clearly on the record that the passage which the hon. Gentleman quoted is not in the report.

Mr. Brown: It is a resolution which, according to the report, was carried. *[Interruption.]* All that one can do is take up the matter afterwards. I read what is written in the report. If the Chairman of the Committee says that it is not so, I willingly take his word for it. Of all the things that we have to quarrel over, I do not want to get bogged down in a quarrel over that. Let us quarrel about something meaningful.

The Chief Secretary said that there should be no expectations of a public expenditure package in the Budget. He expressed surprise that Health Service workers were taking industrial action. He described the strike in Scotland as unnecessary, pointless and damaging to patients, which I am sure is his view.

Before being elected to the House, as many hon. Members know, I was an officer of the General and Municipal Workers Union. In that capacity, I attended meetings of our members who were nurses working in the National Health Service — meetings at which they discussed and rejected industrial action. I speak from personal experience, and I can assure the House that such meetings are fraught.

There is real concern, as much as has been expressed in the House today, about the nature of the job that nurses do, about the future of the Health Service and, above everything else, about care for the patients. To suggest that members of the nursing profession would take industrial action frivolously or do so out of casual motivation is wholly wrong. The issue is debated tensely in the profession and feelings run high on both sides of the argument. Always the dominant factor in the debate is nursing care.

The nurses who have taken industrial action do not feel that it is unnecessary and pointless. They feel that they have been taken for granted by a Government who do not value them. It is impossible not to note with cynicism the fact that the only year when the nurses received a decent pay award was, by coincidence, the general election year. That state of affairs has bred cynicism in the nursing profession.

There seems to be a view among Conservative Members that reducing expenditure in relative terms will make the NHS more efficient. That is not so. All that it will do is make it smaller. The Chief Secretary referred to tendering for services, and to the £100 million of savings that the Government have achieved by putting cleaning contracts and so on out to private tender. He did not say that those savings have been achieved almost entirely through wage reductions, not through any other efficiency exercise.

The argument that we used to hear from Conservative Members was that no more money was available for the Health Service, but the Government were doing their best with the money that was available. The argument has moved on now. There is potential for more money to be spent on the NHS, so the argument now from some Conservative Back Benchers is that no more money is needed. One hon. Gentleman asked what we would spend the money on, and another recommended efficiency savings that would involve getting rid of some of the ancillary staff.

Many Opposition Members have quoted specific examples from their constituency experience. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) gave constituency examples. I should like to give one from the northern region. The retinal eye service at Sunderland Royal infirmary is the only one of its kind in the north-east of England. Vitreoretinal treatment is virtually an emergency procedure. There should be no waiting list. About 240 people are waiting for a first appointment in the north-east. The regional health authority recognises the need for an extra surgeon and back-up staff, but it cannot pay for them. Indeed, it does not even have enough funds for its present expenditure commitments. Therefore, one of the three out-patient clinics is to close so that the surgeon can concentrate on the 37 cases awaiting surgery.

The tragedy is that the surgeon has already reached the stage where he has attempted to operate but has been unable to save a patient's sight because he had to wait too long. In other words, because of under-resourcing of the National Health Service in our wealthy, advanced industrial society, we have allowed one citizen to lose his sight and are probably condemning more to the same fate. I cannot believe that the people would tolerate that for the sake of a reduction in the basic rate of income tax. The case surely offends against every decent human instinct. It is all the more shocking because it is not an isolated example.

Do the Government accept the need for more National Health Service funding? As my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East pointed out, the Secretary of State for Social Services, addressing the Young Conservatives, said something different from the Chief Secretary. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) also referred to the speech to the Young Conservatives, helpfully reading us an extract. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton gave the Chief Secretary a chance to clarify the position and to say whether he or the Secretary of State for Social Services was accurately describing the Government's financial mechanisms. If the Chief Secretary would like to do so now, I will willingly give him the opportunity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) and the *Financial Times* of 21 January 1988 put it differently. The *Financial Times* said:

> "One of the ironies of the present row is that it is thought that had . . . the Health Secretary pressed last Autumn for more money . . . he would have got it."

Whether or not that is so, it is not a flattering reflection on the efficiency of the Secretary of State for Social Services. Of course, it is an indication of the power wielded by the Treasury—not that we needed that.

Much of the debate has concentrated on the Health Service but my hon. Friends the Members for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) and for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) rightly referred to housing in Scotland and in England. Probably one of the most iniquitous examples of the

Government's public expenditure policy has been the continuation of the 20 per cent. rule for local authority capital receipts.

Local authority housing investment programmes have a current allocation of 74 per cent. of their 1979 allocation, yet the figures of the Department of the Environment show, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East pointed out, that £19 billion is needed to repair and remedy the public sector housing stock. Not only will the Government not provide for the repair of council housing stock, but they will not let councils spend their own money on it. If all that were not sufficient injustice to inflict on council house tenants, the Government have swamped the housing benefit changes with an inflation plus 5 per cent. rent rise designed to push up the real level of rents for tenants.

I should like to get myself a reputation for respectability among Conservative Members by quoting from February's *Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin*, which sounded two cautionary notes, one on personal consumption and the other on levels of company investment. The bulletin highlights a growth in personal consumption of 5·7 per cent. in the third quarter of 1987 and compares that to a 3·4 per cent. growth in real personal disposable income for the same period. It says:

"There must, however, be some question about the sustainability of growth of domestic demand in this country at a rate above that currently being achieved by most other major countries."

The Bank of England points to this trend being paralleled by a sharp fall in the personal savings ratio. The level for the third quarter is estimated to be lower than that of any period since 1959. It is a trend that encourages expenditure on imported consumer goods, with its consequent effect on the balance of payments. All the available evidence suggests that public expenditure is less import-intensive than tax cuts. Surely the underlying problem is that British demand is not being met by British goods and services. At a time when the Government are contemplating tax cuts, it is ironic that a former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan), is warning the Government — he is quoted in today's papers — to adopt a cautious approach. Indeed, he is pressing for a further rise in interest rates.

Let me make a second point, from the same respectable source. The bulletin states that companies are highly profitable, but goes on to make the point that capital spending has risen only a little so far:

"Given the level of profitability and the apparently high degree of capacity utilisation, it may appear surprising that business investment has not been growing more strongly."

The level of company investment surely gives a guide to the future success of industry, yet it has been a feature of the last five years that that link between profitability and investment has been broken. Surely the Government have a duty to supplement and encourage the investment programme of industry, both private and public, and, in particular, research and development.

I accept that that would require an increase in public expenditure. To further my bid for respectability, however, I should like to quote from the first report of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, prepared in the other place. The key conclusions are as follows:

"Two conclusions about the support of civil science and technology emerge unmistakably from the evidence. First, the advance of science and technology must be a central objective of government policy. The Government has, in the words of Sir David Phillips, a general responsibility to support science and technology because this is fundamental to the social and economic well-being of the country . . . The Committee strongly agree. Secondly the overwhelming weight of opinion from almost every sector of the research community and from the private sector is that R & D in many fields is underfunded, and in some cases seriously underfunded. It may be objected that much of this opinion is based on self-interest or sectional concern. But the Committee are persuaded that the case has been made out."

The Committee is persuaded, but the Government are not.

There is another major item of public expenditure which has not attracted much comment tonight but to which it is surely right to refer because of its prominence in the overall spending figures. Substantial changes are proposed in the spending plans for social security, which mean that the main losers will be pensioners, devising rules for social funds that will make claimants compete for a severely rationed amount of help.

The new rules not only introduce a loan element, which will comprise up to 70 per cent. of the total social fund budget, but suggest that officers should refuse a loan to claimants who will be too poor to pay it back. That is hardly an efficient targeting of aid. Only a Government wedded to a savage concept of Victorian values would refuse citizens welfare benefit if the social fund officer believed that the claimant should more properly approach a charity.

The Government have safeguarded themselves and their officials from charges of injustice in individual cases, not by ensuring that there will be justice, but by abolishing the right of appeal to a social security appeal tribunal. That cannot be fair. The Government claim to target help more efficiently, but let us consider the efficiency of this: only six local DHSS offices will receive social fund allocations above the level spent in 1986-87. They are Dunstable, Lewisham, the Isle of Wight, Thanet, Exeter and Bognor Regis. Does anyone really believe that that is targeting aid where it is needed?

The north of England, which must inevitably be mentioned, has a cash allocation of only 16·4 per cent. of the sum spent in the region's supplementary benefit single payments in 1986-87. There is not much help, efficiently targeted or not, in that figure.

We have made our views known and we have moved an amendment. It deplores under-investment, as a result of public expenditure plans, in services and technologies vital to the future of Britain. We urge the Government to take additional action to reduce unemployment. We condemn the Government's antipathy to public expenditure on vital community services. In particular, we call upon the Government to take note of the evidence, from two Select Committees and from health care professionals, that the NHS is inadequately funded and that they should make extra provision in the Budget to end the funding crisis faced by our Health Service and especially by our hospitals. I commend the amendment to the House.

9.30 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Norman Lamont): As the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) said, we have had the benefit not only of the White Paper but of the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. A number of points in that report have been echoed in various speeches, particularly that by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins). He referred, for example, to possible alterations in the two-volume presentation of the report.

[Mr. Norman Lamont]

The Committee has suggested that as much as possible of the material from volume 1 should be incorporated into the Autumn Statement. That approach has a great deal to recommend it, although some problems need to be overcome. The Committee has also suggested that volume 2 should be split into separate departmental booklets, as the Estimates now are. That might be of some disadvantage to libraries, but we shall be considering this and replying in full to the Committee and to my right hon. Friend.

My right hon. Friend also made the point that, if the White Paper were divided as he suggested, and the overall policy content of volume 1 were absorbed into the Autumn Statement, it would call into question the need for a separate debate on public expenditure plans in February. Again, we shall reply on that point.

My right hon. Friend also spoke about the relative price effect. I appreciate that he was not suggesting that we should abandon the discipline of cash limits. Rather, he was saying, ex post, that if we were looking at programmes and trying to analyse the volume effect within the Departmental programme — a point supported by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East — then perhaps the relative price effect had a part to play. We shall certainly consider that point, but, as my right hon. Friend knows, the use of the relative price effect in the past has acted against the discipline of cash limits, although I know that that is not what my right hon. Friend is suggesting.

My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr. Watts) made a number of comments about the different input and output indicators. Again, I do not necessarily disagree with many of his points. However, he will appreciate that we are at an early stage of the development of the indicators, and I am sure that he will agree that the White Paper, by having the indicators, is an improvement on previous White Papers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) raised a couple of points. One related to the European Court of Auditors' report. We shall shortly be having a debate on that, and he will have the opportunity to put his point directly to my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General. The debate will be immediately preceding the discussion of the Court of Auditors' report at the Economic and Financial Council in Brussels.

My hon. Friend also asked about staff in the DHSS and whether there had been an increase in numbers. There has been an increase, but a small one. It is not quite as he said, because, of the figures that he was quoting, one was the year average figure and another was the figure at a particular point in time. I shall write to him and explain the point in more detail.

The control of public expenditure has been at the heart of the success of the Government's economic policies. The facts of that success are evident for all to see. Only yesterday, the figures for the output measurement of GDP showed an increase of almost 5 per cent., the largest increase in output since 1973.

Mr. Rogers: Come on, Fast Eddie. Enter the Japanese Olympics.

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman is not so far wrong for once. Our economy grew faster than that of Japan in 1986, and it is expected that it will have done so in 1987. In 1985, 1986 and 1987, our economy grew faster than Germany's too. The fact that our economy is now outpacing traditionally stronger economies underlines how complete and dramatic the transformation of our economy has been.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in coping with this important and, I am afraid, somewhat inconvenient fact for the Opposition, it is a bad argument to say that we have had a wonderful windfall from North sea oil? We have heard it several times in the course of the debate, but it works against the Opposition's case. North sea oil, which in 1985 accounted for 5 per cent. of GDP, now accounts for 2·5 per cent. If we had not had North sea oil, our current growth rate would be even higher than it is because North sea oil has brought down the average GDP rate.

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. Sometimes the strength of the oil economy has had an impact on the exchange rate, which has not had such a good effect on the manufacturing sector and the non-North sea oil economy, which was my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Minister referred to the wonderful economic recovery that we are now undergoing. When does he expect unemployment in Britain at least to be back at the levels of 1979? When does he expect unemployment to be below that of Japan and West Germany?

Mr. Lamont: Unemployment has been falling rapidly; indeed, there has been the largest fall since figures began to be compiled. I am at least much more confident and optimistic than the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who, at the end of 1986, in an article in *The Guardian*, said:

"The Government simply cannot reduce unemployment by present economic policies."

Since then, there has been a record fall in unemployment.

Our economy is undoubtedly strong, but there is one worrying factor, one bearish sign. Even the official Opposition are beginning to admit that the economy is growing strongly. For years we have held debates in which they have reinterpreted every economic indicator and tried to show that the economy was not growing when it was. Now they are admitting that it is growing and, given their usual sense of timing, if it becomes too well known that they think that, it will undoubtedly cause a sharp collapse in the financial markets.

The fruits of our success are also apparent in the White Paper, because the Government have managed significantly to increase different departmental programmes at the same time as having managed to reduce — and continuing to reduce — public expenditure as a proportion of GDP. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East said, that, as far as I could see, was and is welcomed by my hon. Friends. It is not unconnected with the success, growth and strength of our economy.

In reviewing the individual departmental programmes, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East said that four or five programmes were not growing as much as the average. The hon. Gentleman seems to have a curious idea that every programme can grow faster than the average. He did not name a programme. He might have mentioned education, health, law and order or social security, which,

despite the fall in unemployment, will all enjoy significant real increases. Other important budgets, although they may not be for major Departments, will also enjoy significant increases. Government support for the arts, aid, and, contrary to what the hon. Gentleman said, science and technology, will show a real-terms increase.

Such significant growth has been possible partly because of growth in the economy and, as my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said, partly because we have reduced borrowing. The Opposition have spent seven years urging us to increase borrowing to reflate the economy. It is a blandishment that we have resisted, and we have been amply justified by events.

The White Paper illustrates another reason why we are right. The reduction in borrowing has caused a reduction in debt interest, which has meant that expenditure in Departments and on services on which the Opposition are keen has been able to increase more quickly than public expenditure as a whole.

Opposition Members talk about the Treasury being awash with money. We recently received an interesting letter from a member of the public who said that, the next time a member of the Opposition Front Bench talked about the Treasury being awash with money, we should firmly remind them that that was not an excuse that could be levelled against them. Submerged in debt would be a more accurate description of Labour's management of the economy.

When urging my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to spend immediately whatever money he might have available, Opposition Members say only that they do not understand how the success has been achieved. That is not perhaps surprising. We cannot expect them to understand the Government's policies, but we might expect them to understand the Labour Government's policies. They were the opposite of ours and had precisely the opposite effect. Whereas we have cut taxes and increased revenue, they put taxes up to a confiscating level, increased spending massively, drove people into the black economy, drove companies abroad, and brought the economy to a shuddering halt, as a result of which there had to be savage public expenditure cuts, especially in the NHS and its capital spending. There were real falls in the living standards of people who worked in the NHS as a result of the reckless policies which Labour pursued.

Mr. Winnick: The hon. Gentleman is boasting about the Government's record. Did he listen to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) who made the same point as I did in an earlier intervention — that between 35 and 40 wards at the Queen Elizabeth hospital, where cancer patients are treated, were closed only last year and that there is tremendous pressure from people who want to go to hospital or people who are trying to get their loved ones into hospital, but who cannot be admitted? Should we tell them that the Government are doing all right?

Mr. Lamont: I was about to consider the NHS. Before I deal with the hon. Gentleman's intervention, I should like to say something about another matter raised by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. He attacked the Government's record on making resources available for training. If any one programme has received large allocations of money since 1979, it is training. No Government have put so many resources and so much policy thinking into training as this Government have. Since 1979, training has doubled in real terms.

Of course, the hon. Gentleman approaches the problem of training just as he approaches every area of policy—it is only a matter of money. He did not for a moment acknowledge that what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science is doing with his Education Reform Bill will have a profound impact on the quality of our work force and make more skilled manpower available to industry. The core curriculum, which will make technology one of its subjects, will be of considerable advantage to British industry.

A large part of the debate has been about the National Health Service. It is certainly not surprising, as it is the only subject that the Labour party feels safe talking about. My hon. Friends and I welcome the prominence that Opposition Members have given to the National Health Service. They have brought to the forefront ideas that could not be discussed before—ideas that are now on the political agenda and can be discussed in the Government's fundamental review of the Health Service.

I have no doubt that Opposition Members intended to expose the Government. Their campaign has exposed many of the issues and inadequacies that go right to the heart and nature of the National Health Service. For that reason, we should be profoundly grateful to Opposition Members for widening the debate on the Health Service.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: What message does the right hon. Gentleman have for the people of the northern region—admittedly, a small proportion — who will lose their sight because the unit to which I referred has not been properly funded?

Mr. Lamont: I would say to the hon. Gentleman, as I would say every time a particular case is put to me, that today everyone, whatever his condition and problem, has a better chance of receiving adequate treatment than in 1979.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East complained that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary used too many statistics in his speech. Whenever we debate health issues, Opposition Members always attempt to place us at a disadvantage. They say that we must not bore them by reciting our statistics about patients who are treated and new hospitals that are built. It is all very well to tell us that we must not cite statistics, but they reserve to themselves the right to publish in booklets, with red crosses on the front, misleading statistics about the Health Service. When they tell us that they will go on peddling their statistics but that we are not to peddle our statistics about the Health Service, although they are all honourable men and women, they put me in mind of the former American President who commented that if his opponents would stop telling lies about him he would stop telling the truth about them. That is a good basis on which to have a truce about the swapping of statistics on the National Health Service.

There may be arguments about what is achievable in the National Health Service with a given level of spending. One point is indisputable and undeniable. The Government, for all their determination to control public spending, have given a higher priority to the National Health Service than the Labour party did when in Government. We have increased spending on health as a proportion not only of public spending but also of GDP.

[Mr. Lamont]

While we have been in office, GDP has been growing strongly. It has been growing strongly, absolutely and proportionately, under this Government. The Labour Government reduced spending on health as a proportion of a GDP that was stagnant and falling.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the uncertainty caused in the Health Service by the uncertainty of wage awards and what they are likely to be. That problem is not unique to the National Health Service. It faces every Government Department, commercial organisation, private sector company and nationalised industry. Other costs, in addition to wage costs, create uncertainty for the management of the Health Service.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House, and particularly my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, gave a warm welcome to the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury about the timing of decisions on the review body awards, which will be brought forward so that decisions can be taken at the end of January or mid-February. It was agreed that uncertainty will be removed from the district health authorities as a result of my right hon. Friend's announcement. They will be better able to understand the outcome and what they have to deal with. The Government have given a commitment to reach a decision by the end of April. There will be no great uncertainty this year and there will be no need for individual area health authorities to make cuts because they do not know what the funding position will be.

Nevertheless, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, Easst continued to press the point and say that the Government should give a commitment now that they will fund nurses' pay totally. No responsible Government could possibly give the commitment that he demands while the review body is still deliberating and in advance of its conclusions.

In the past four years, we have had an excellent record on nurses' pay. Furthermore, we have funded nurses' pay and, with the findings of the review bodies for other professions, we have funded 90 per cent. of the wage awards. The area health authorities have had to find only 10 per cent. of the wage increases, and that 10 per cent. amounts to only 0·5 per cent. of the total cost.

I do not believe that it was wrong to give the authorities that incentive to make them aware that they must balance the needs of wage costs against other costs. Nurses have no cause for complaint against this Government. Since this Government have been in office, nurses have seen their real take-home pay increase by 30 per cent. No doubt that is why there has been an increase in the number of nurses by 47,000 to more than 400,000.

None the less, we are told that there are still unmet needs. If we have done all these things — increased resources, put in all the money —and if there are increased numbers of doctors and nurses, why are there still sick patients and unmet needs? That is a good question and it deserves a good answer. Opposition Members have given their answer. Indeed, perhaps Opposition Members are anticipating imminent careers as television evangelists and that is why their answer lies in a quotation from the Book of Proverbs:

"Money answereth all things."

Unfortunately, that is their answer not just to this problem, but to all problems.

The Opposition's demands for the Health Service have been increasing all the time. On 26 November 1987, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) said that the crisis would be solved if the National Health Service was given another £200 million. The hon. Lady made it clear that she was talking only of hundreds of millions, not billions, of pounds. Yet on 14 January the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said that the NHS needs an extra £1·3 billion. Three days later, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said that the NHS now requires an extra £2 billion, and that was confirmed by the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), the Leader of the Opposition.

I am amazed at the modest speed at which the Opposition have escalated their demands. If they believe that £21 billion is inadequate for the NHS, what makes them convinced that £22 billion or £23 billion will solve all the problems for ever?

Labour Members are interested in money, but they are far less interested in value for money and in the management of the NHS. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) made an excellent speech, in which he referred to a number of management deficiencies in the NHS. He also referred to an extremely interesting article by a consultant and director of surgery at Guy's hospital, Professor Ian McColl. My hon. and learned Friend detailed some of the points that Professor McColl made. Perhaps it would be of interest to the House to hear part of what Professor McColl said in that article:

"No one needs to die for lack of an operation in the NHS. Behind the cases which hit the headlines generally lie management faults, inefficient bureaucracy and restrictive practices. These failings, rather than lack of money, are responsible for the low morale throughout the service. Pouring in extra cash, or legislating for yet another reorganisation, is not the answer. We need to concentrate on making the present system work."

I have no doubt that Professor McColl's words were not particularly well received by his NHS colleagues— they were certainly different from some of the things we hear. However, precisely because Professor McColl has been prepared to speak out and pose a number of questions, it is all the more worth while studying them as they deserve answers.

Let us consider the end-of-year closure of beds by district health authorities. That is something that, quite rightly, causes distress to hon. Members on both sides of the House. District health authority managements carry out such closures because they say it is the only way in which to regain control of their budgets. If we had proper financial control within the district health authorities, would it always be necessary to take such dramatic end-of-year measures? Certainly the opinion of Professor McColl is quite clear:

"Too often no one knows until the end of the financial year whether the budget will balance. When the news finally breaks that there is a deficit of, say, £1 million, panic reigns. In the mistaken belief that they can save the necessary funds, the administrators close a large number of beds, and so provoke the doctors into waving shrouds and attacking the Government for alleged underfunding."

The management and administration of the NHS are important, but we have heard not one word from the Opposition about that. They are not interested in ideas about collaboration between the public and the private sector; they are not interested in ideas about developing an internal market or ideas about competitive tendering.

However, perhaps I do them an injustice because we all know that they are very interested in the idea of competitive tendering. They are totally opposed to it, and that is why today, when they have sat in the Chamber pretending to fight for the NHS, they have, at the same time outside the Chamber, encouraged the Scottish TUC to institute a day of action to strike against patients. How can a strike against the Health Service ever be justified? It is a strike that hurts patients; and it is simply against the release of resources that would give a better, proper deal for patients.

Labour Members have pressed for a large-scale injection of funds into the NHS. They forget that we no longer live in a world in which mini-budgets occur every month or every second month. We have one Autumn Statement that deals with public expenditure and one Budget that deals with taxation. It is that steadiness and that strategy that have brought us our economic success.

The NHS is important, but it is not the only programme in the White Paper. Indeed, there are another 450 pages in the White Paper, although one would not believe that having listened to Labour Members. The continued support for the Government and the success of our strategy are vital, and the individual programmes and plans in the White Paper are basic to that success. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to support those programmes.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 220, Noes 327.

Division No. 193] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ray Powell and
Mr. Alun Michael

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*

Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.
Main Question put and agreed to.
Resolved,

That this House takes note of the White Paper on the Government's Expenditure Plans for 1988-89 to 1990-91 (Cm. 288—I and II).

Housing Support Grant (Scotland)

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I beg to move,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 3 February, be approved.

It may be for the convenience of the House if we discuss also the next motion:

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 3 February, be approved.

Full details of the housing support grant settlement are set out in the report which accompanies the draft housing support grant order, and, in view of the time constraints on this debate, I shall not burden the House with excessive detail. I will, however, explain the thinking behind the proposals.

We have again had consultations with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the formula for the distribution of housing support grant this year. I should like to place on record our thanks to the convention for its contributions. In the housing support grant settlement for 1988-89 the Government have continued to concentrate resources on those authorities which, in our view, require them. The formula change approved by Parliament last year, involving the use of lower rate fund contributions, is again incorporated, to the benefit of local authorities. We have estimated eligible expenditure at £308·2 million on all local authority housing revenue accounts for 1988-89, and relevant income at £253·6 million. Housing support grant will therefore total £54·6 million. This will be distributed among the 25 authorities which we believe would otherwise incur deficits on their housing revenue accounts in 1988-89.

Local authorities' expenditure on housing is of course very sensitive to changes in interest rates, and we are again applying an average rate of interest to authorities' individual volumes of debt — 10·2 per cent. has been assumed in this settlement for 1988-89. If, however, in practice, interest rates prove to be significantly different from our current assumptions, we will bring forward an appropriate variation order in due course. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] There have been plenty of precedents. There have occasionally been precedents for two variation orders.

The 1987-88 variation order before the House reflects a similar undertaking given at this time last year. Because average pool interest rates have fallen from 10·4 to 10·1 per cent. during the year, authorities' loan charges are lower and housing support grant payable is reduced by £4·6 million to a revised amount of £41·9 million.

The cost of managing and maintaining the housing stock is the other major item of expenditure on housing revenue accounts. For 1988-89 we have uprated the management and maintenance provision in the 1987-88 settlement by 10 per cent. We believe that this is extremely generous on top of the 7 per cent. increase included last year. It is more than double present inflation rates and should allow real growth on repairs expenditure in 1988-89. The new figure is £333 per house for management and maintenance and £270 million in total.

On the income side, we are assuming for the purposes of the settlement that rents will increase by £1·60 per week over 1987-88 order levels, bringing rents to £17·45 in order terms. Taking those housing support grant assumptions together with the Government's decisions on rate fund contribution limits, with which I shall deal shortly, we estimated in December that average council house rents would rise by about £1·65 per house per week in 1988-89, giving a Scottish average of £16·30.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the Minister explain the basis for his assumption about rate increases in the coming year?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A complex formula is worked out with COSLA. I am under a statutory obligation to negotiate with COSLA, and a complex formula is worked out and taken into account for distribution.

Mrs. Fyfe: Will the Minister explain that complex formula for the benefit of hon. Members who know nothing about it?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is highly technical, but, if the hon. Lady wishes me to give a detailed analysis, I shall be happy to do so in my winding-up speech. The formula takes into account, for example, the number of high-rise flats in a district council area.

The Government must take difficult decisions about the total resources which the country can afford to devote to housing, against the competing pressures upon public expenditure as a whole. Although I am pleased to have been able to increase housing support grant, as I have already outlined, our policy objective continues to be to reduce the total of indiscriminate subsidies to enable us to devote greater resources to investment in the stock.

Between 1981 and 1985, many authorities, by keeping rents unnecessarily and artificially low, and by requiring ever-higher contributions from ratepayers to balance their housing revenue accounts, chose to forfeit £112 million of capital expenditure consents which could, and should, have been used to carry out modernisations, to deal with dampness, condensation and so on. Since we took the statutory power to limit rate fund contributions, first exercised in 1985-86, that unacceptable trend has been reversed. We have reduced the rate fund contribution aggregate from an outturn of £139 million in 1984-85 to a statutory limit of £22·2 million for 1988-89, in the order.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I should like to get on, as many hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The Minister is talking about the order concerning rate fund contributions. Is he aware that some doubts have been raised about whether the order is ultra vires? Will he comment on that, and on the apparently incompetent drafting of the order?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Select Committee on Statutory Instruments has expressed a doubt about the vires. Obviously, if that doubt were substantiated another order would be introduced. I wish to make it clear that I am referring to the housing support grant orders and not to any other orders, although I am referring to the subject in general, as the subject is discussed with COSLA in its entirety.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) asked about the formula. I was a little concerned about that, so I went to the Vote Office and found that the formula is in the orders before us tonight. I should have thought that the hon. Lady would have a copy of them.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's perceptive comment.

We have increased capital allocations on the housing revenue account block by more each year than the rate fund contribution reductions required. For 1988-89 the rate fund contribution limit aggregate is £21 million lower than for 1987-88, and that has contributed substantially to the £24·5 million increase in the provisional HRA allocations announced for next year compared with 1987-88.

In setting an aggregate limit to rate fund contributions of £22·2 million we have consulted widely about the implications of the individual limits set. *[Interruption.]* This is important for district councils. The provisional limits that we announced in November took account of the number of council houses in each authority, but they also included additional amounts to ensure that where local authorities had raised rents over the past three years by more than the Scottish average, implied average rent increases would be restricted to a maximum of £2 per house per week. We subsequently invited representations. In considering the representations that we received, we looked very closely at the implied rent increase and rent level in 1988-89 in each authority. Of course, rent implications for the 56 housing authorities vary widely, but we increased the rate fund contributions limit for 12 of the 20 authorities which submitted representations.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: May I continue? Perhaps I shall give way a little later. I was mentioning that 12 of the 20 authorities received an increased rate fund contribution limit—[HON. MEMBERS: "Name them."] I can easily give hon. Members the names later.

The concessions that we made were calculated as follows. First, we used more up-to-date assessments of income and expenditure. In the case of local authorities which had raised rents over the past three years by more than the Scottish average, further concessions were needed to restrict rent increases to £2 per week.

Secondly, we increased the rate fund contribution limits of the authorities with current rent levels above our implied average Scottish rent for 1988-89 of £16·30. The concession was calculated so that their maximum rent increases should be restricted to £1·65 per week. Finally, as in the previous year, we set an upper threshold figure for rent levels. Rate fund contribution limits were increased for three authorities to ensure that they need not raise average rent levels above £18·75 per week, that being the upper limit. That is approximately last year's upper limit, plus the average rent increase figure we now predict for 1988-89. In our calculations, as I have said, we assumed that authorities would spend 10 per cent. more on management and maintenance than last year. Taking all those figures into account, we calculated that average rent increases next year across Scotland as a whole would be about £1·65 per week. If authorities were to choose to increase expenditure on management and maintenance by less than 10 per cent., the average rent increase required would naturally be less.

Since we notified authorities of our final decisions on rate fund contributions and housing support grant, most councils have taken their own decisions about rent increases for next year. The information that I have received so far, which covers virtually all authorities, suggests that the average will in fact be around £1·62 per week. This is very similar to the figure that we had estimated and will take average council house rents in Scotland to some £16·25 per week in 1988-89. I do not think that that is unreasonable. The £16·25 average next year is well below the current year's average council rent of £17·40 in England and Wales.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Will the Minister advise the House of the relationship that the rent increase bears to inflation, and whether it will have an inflationary effect?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It was essential to concentrate on increased standards of management and maintenance to improve the housing stock. That was why we assumed a 10 per cent. increase in management and maintenance expenditure. I accept that that may be above inflation, but we believed that the improvement of the housing stock in the public sector was so important that that was fully justified. As I mentioned, the £16·25 average next year is below the current year's average council rent of £17·40 in England and Wales. It is also below current rent levels in housing associations, the Scottish Special Housing Association, new town houses and the private sector in Scotland.

Although local authority rent increases have been higher than inflation over the last few years—because they started from a very low base—let me remind the House that registered rents in Scotland rose faster between 1979 and 1986 than local authority rents, by 180 per cent. against 164 per cent. Of course, if tenants have genuine difficulty in meeting their housing costs, relief is available to them through the housing benefit system. The assistance is targeted directly at those households which need it and is reflected in the level of housing benefit payments in Scotland of some £570 million in 1986-87. For 1987-88 the figure is £664 million. *[Interruption.]* We will have figures as soon as they are available.

In conclusion, let me emphasise that the figures included in the orders before the House tonight are designed to reinforce our policies for housing in Scotland.

Dr. Godman *rose*—

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am not giving way. I want to give plenty of opportunity to hon. Members to speak in this brief debate.

Reductions in rate fund contributions and housing support grant, taken together, are evidence of our continuing resolve to concentrate on using the resources available for housing on capital investment. The reduction in rate fund contributions will offer further relief to hard-pressed ratepayers, and has contributed towards announced increases in capital expenditure. These increases, together with the 10 per cent. increases for management and maintenance expenditure built into the calculations of both housing support grant and rate fund contributions, will ensure that tenants benefit through a higher standard of housing provision.

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

We have consulted widely on the orders. I am satisfied that the figures they contain are fair and reasonable. I commend the orders to the House.

10.31 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), in his inimitable way, says that he has consulted widely on the orders. He was kind enough earlier in his speech to place on record the Government's thanks to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Perhaps I might place on record the fact that COSLA does not think much of the Government or the orders.

There is something dreadfully predictable about Government statements on housing. I do not know why the Minister, his predecessor or any Conservative Member bothers to try to dress up the sorry story of housing in Scotland so as to make it sound as though the Government were doing something positive. The House is not impressed, people in Scotland are not impressed, and I doubt whether the Minister believes what he is talking about. This evening we have had the usual attempt to present a rosy picture of a package which represents a further cut in funding for housing in Scotland, regardless of the growing crisis of homelessness, overcrowding and decaying housing stock.

I intend to concentrate on the main housing support grant order for 1988-89. The variation order, which we are also debating, simply lops £4·5 million off last year's housing support grant to take account of fluctuations in interest rates, which shows how much the moneylenders make out of public sector housing in Scotland in a good year. For what it is worth, we acknowledge that there is to be an increase in rate support grant in the coming year from last year's figure of £47 million to £55 million. Of course, a significant proportion of that increase is likely to be swallowed by higher interest rates, as the Minister acknowledged. So we have a small increase, but the Government cannot deny that their objective is to do away with housing support grant altogether.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Hear, hear.

Mr. Home Robertson: I am glad that the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) has confirmed that, with all the authority of an ex-Minister in the Government.

The Government have already run down housing support grant from well over £200 million a year in 1979 to less than a quarter of that figure last year. Only one third of Scotland's public sector housing stock is supported by housing support grant, and fewer than half of our local housing authorities receive any housing support grant at all. Only 14 of Strathclyde's 19 district councils receive it, and none goes to any district council in Fife, Central region, Lothian region or Tayside region.

Housing support grant, however, is only one part of the equation. There is also the question of housing capital allocations, and the rate fund contribution to the housing revenue account. We are supposed to be debating rate fund contribution tonight, but we understand that there is a suspicion that the Housing Revenue Account Rate Fund Contribution Limits (Scotland) Order 1988 may be ultra vires. It seems that the Government are becoming particularly slap-happy with their statutory instruments nowadays, and that they may have been found out—not for the first time—by the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments.

Obviously, it is up to the Select Committee to decide what to do about the matter, and we want to preserve our position, so I shall not say much about the rate fund contribution issue. I shall, however, say that the threat arbitrarily to halve the rate fund contribution from £44 million to £22 million is harmful, and an unwarranted interference in the freedom of Scottish local authorities to determine their housing policy.

The cumulative effect of all the Government's proposals is to cut the total resources available to public sector housing in Scotland in the coming year by another £49 million, to £284 million. As usual, the Government are seeking to conceal the cut by including in the calculation a mass of other factors, such as an assumption that councils will increase their income from the sale of council houses to £60 million. That starts from a fundamentally dishonest premise; local authorities are being compelled to sell those houses for a fraction of their value. It also prompts the questions whether the projected purchases will materialise, and — most significantly — whether enough sales will be completed in time for the proceeds to be used during 1988-89.

Even if we accept the Government's analysis of the figures for housing spending—which of course we do not—we would still find an overall cut of 2 per cent. in real terms in Scotland's public sector housing budget. As Opposition Members know, the real position is considerably worse than that.

I understand that the funds available for home inprovement grants to the private sector are also being cut by 16 per cent., from £147 million to £123 million. I should love to know how the Minister squares that with the Government's much-vaunted commitment to encourage the private sector and owner-occupation in Scotland.

The orders, combined with the Government's proposals for rate fund contribution restrictions—which may or may not return to the House in due course, depending on whether the Government can get the drafting right—are all part of a strategy to increase the rents paid by Scottish tenants. As my hon. Friends who are serving on the Standing Committee considering the Housing (Scotland) Bill will recall, a parallel debate took place there yesterday, when the Minister defended clause 38 of the Bill, which removes all restrictions from the rate of increase in private sector rents in Scotland in the interests of encouraging landlords and regardless of the impact on tenants. The housing support grant orders are driving council house rents inexorably upwards too, and the Minister knows that. In 1980, the average council house rent in Scotland was £4·92 a week. By last year, it had trebled to £14·65 a week.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South) *rose*——

Mr. Home Robertson: I would be very willing to give way to a member representing a Scottish constituency, but I am not aware that the hon. Gentleman's constituency contains any district council tenants, so I am not clear about his interest in the matter.

It is, I believe, quite likely that council house rents somewhere in Scotland will shortly exceed £20 a week—and this from a Government who claim to be crusading against inflation. They have been intervening to force up

rents at more than double the rate of increase in earnings, and almost three times the rate of inflation. So much for their anti-inflation policy. On top of this there will be the poll tax and the social security changes in April, all of which make up a recipe for great and growing hardship for a large number of households in Scotland.

Sadly, district councils in Scotland have precious little control over this escalation in rents. Housing costs to local authorities have increased by over 35 per cent. since 1980, but meanwhile Government interference with grants has directly increased rent levels in Scotland by 107 per cent. Tonight's orders will again increase rents by about £3 a week—more than double the rate of inflation this year.

Tenants in Scotland know very well that their councils are fighting to increase standards and keep rents reasonable, but this absurd Minister, with all the authority that can be conferred by a pitiful minority of 10 Scottish Members of Parliament, is imposing cuts and the restrictions that are forcing standards down and rents up. It is interesting to contrast this with the growing value of subsidies to owner-occupiers with mortgages, the majority of which is flowing to the south-east of England. Scottish council tenants are subsidising prosperous owner-occupiers in the home counties through their taxes, on the poll tax principle of robbing the poor to pay the rich.

Mr. Bill Walker: Earlier, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) made an intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister concerning calculations and how the figures were arrived at. In his calculations, and on the basis of his proposition about subsidising, is the hon. Gentleman including all the housing benefit calculations and figures? If he is not, he is feeding rubbish in and getting rubbish out.

Mr. Home Robertson: The profile in *The Scotsman* has gone to the hon. Gentleman's head. I am talking about subsidy to public sector housing in Scotland, and comparing it with the indiscriminate subsidies to other sectors. The Minister condemned indiscriminate subsidies, but the Government are happy to hand them to owner-occupiers.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the total subsidy to English private housing is some 80 times Exchequer expenditure on Scottish public housing? Is that an equitable percentage?

Mr. Home Robertson: I tend to be a bit suspicious of figures quoted by the Scottish National party, but I shall look into those figures as they sound interesting.

We remain committed to a fair system of mortgage tax relief, but we must insist on a return to a more appropriate level of grant for public sector tenants in Scotland. We urgently need investment in public sector housing in Scotland. Our deepening crisis is a national scandal. Last year, no fewer than 30,000 Scots became homeless, and 200,000 people are stuck on housing waiting lists, which is a tragedy for all those families and young people. We have the shocking situation that one in four of the people of Scotland live in overcrowded accommodation.

The housing stock is decaying. Of 843,000 council houses, over 356,000 need to be modernised, over 88,000 need to be rewired, over 234,000 are affected by damp and over 153,000 need major structural repairs. The situation is getting worse every year, as the Government know because they are not prepared to provide the subsidies and create the necessary financial framework to overcome these problems. The Government are imposing more cuts and introducing the half-baked Housing (Scotland) Bill in the vain hope of reviving the defunct private rented sector in Scotland.

We recognise that the Government are hopelessly out of touch. They represent, I suppose, less than one seventh of Scotland's constituencies and are neither willing nor able to communicate with the majority of Scottish public opinion. But Scotland was trying to make a point to the Government on June 11 last year. Among other things, our people resoundingly rejected the strategy of cuts in, and restrictions on, housing investment. They certainly did not vote for madcap experiments such as Scottish Homes or born again Rachmanism, which the Government seem to support in their Housing (Scotland) Bill. The Scottish people voted to endorse their right to live in decent, secure homes on fair terms in their communities. This order does not begin to measure up to that objective, and if the House has any respect for the nation of Scotland it should reject it.

10.46 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) on his brass neck, as a well-known millionaire absentee landlord, in refusing to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on the ground that my hon. Friend had no Scottish council tenants in his constituency. It is easy for the hon. Member for East Lothian to attack mortgage relief. He is one of the lucky people who do not need mortgage relief to purchase a house. His speech contained one piece of interesting news, namely, that the Labour party in Scotland is still completely opposed to discounts for tenants, however long they have rented their public sector houses, who wish to turn their houses into homes of their own.

My hon. Friend the Minister fully explained the strategy behind the orders, and I fully support it, but why should a Back Bencher such as I support the continuation of housing support grant in Scotland at all? It is a selective handout from the taxpayer to particular areas of Scotland. It is a handout from which none of my constituents in Eastwood, Barrhead or Neilston benefit in any way. It is a movement of resources from Barrhead and Neilston to Glasgow. Why should I support that?

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East) *rose*—

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend the Minister rightly emphasised the increase that he is planning for management and maintenance. The hon. Member for East Lothian referred to rents. The average rent in Scotland will be about £16·25 a week, which compares with an average in England and Wales of about £17·40. Why is this justifiable, given that average incomes in the north of England and in Scotland are roughly the same? Is that not a clear and continuing disincentive for people in Scotland to buy their council houses?

My hon. Friend also rightly pointed out that the Government have reduced the rate fund contribution from an outturn figure of £139 million in 1984-85 to £22·2 million in the orders for 1988-89. That is £22·2 million too much. There is no justification in theory for a continuing subsidy from ratepayers to particular tenants. It is right that resources should be concentrated on capital, on management and maintenance and on investment.

[Mr. Stewart]

I hope that when my hon. Friend winds up the debate he will be able to confirm that this is the last time that the House will consider a rate fund contribution order or a successor to it. Next year, when the community charge will have been implemented, there will be no justification, on social or economic grounds, for this wholly indiscriminate subsidy from those who pay the charge in favour of certain tenants in some local authority areas. I support my hon. Friend's general strategy, with those reservations on the detail. I hope he will be able to confirm that that is the Government's intention for next year.

10.50 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): It seems to be accepted on both sides of the House that the orders will do nothing for housing in Scotland. I do not think that I am alone in thinking that the Minister's heart was hardly in it when he opened the debate. Perhaps I might remind him of his former trade as an advocate. He gave all the impression of a man about to address the jury who has passed a note saying that his client did it after all.

The Minister's presentation was a triumph of expediency over reality, because the Government know —or ought to know—that there is a crisis on its way in housing. One in seven people live in overcrowded conditions. Thousands of houses have inadequate amenities and suffer from decay and disrepair. The Minister need only drive through the council house estates in his own constituency, which I have had occasion to do recently, to see clear evidence of that.

Since 1979, capital expenditure by local authorities on housing has been reduced by 27 per cent. We should consider housing support grant, rate fund contribution, he reduction in net capital allocation and income from sales when asking ourselves what the financial consequences of the orders will be. The result will be a 2 per cent. reduction in real terms in expenditure on housing in Scotland in the coming year.

The Government's behaviour is shoddy and uncaring. Others will be able to speak more eloquently of the problems in urban areas, but, in rural areas, the problems are frequently no less. North-East Fife district council is now Liberal-controlled, but it used to be Conservative-controlled. It has sold 2,179 houses, or 24 per cent. of its stock. It has sold a greater proportion of its houses than any other local authority in Scotland without objection and without cavil about the discount. It has followed the Government's policy in spirit and to the letter, but that earns it no support. It earns no help. It does not even earn a meeting with the Minister. Some 2,946 families are on the waiting list and 2,322 are in immediate need. There is nothing in the orders that will help the council to deal with the problem of those who are in immediate need.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that he could have made that point if he had been here for question 8 during Scottish wuestions this afternoon? Why was he not here?

Mr. Campbell: I suppose that, after a while, one learns that there are those to whom one should give way and there are those to whom one should not. The hon. Gentleman seems to have put himself rather more firmly than he is accustomed to doing anything into the latter category.

The Government propose a rate fund contribution of nothing for north-east Fife. The sale of one quarter of the stock in north-east Fife has severely reduced its rent revenue. As a consequence, a relatively small number of tenants have to meet an increasing burden of interest charges on the council's housing account. Rents have had to be kept high to meet that burden and to provide for necessary repair and maintenance. Hon. Members should be in no doubt that the council and I accept that there is a need for repair and maintenance. It is all the more acute because of the aging nature of the housing stock in north-east Fife and in many other places in Scotland.

It is often said that immigration cases are the most tragic and difficult for Members of Parliament to deal with. In my short experience as a Member for Parliament, in many respects, housing cases may rival them. The Minister should come to my surgery when people come to me with complaints about their inability to obtain council houses. Perhaps he could read to them the prepared brief that he read to the House. He should listen to the response, which I suspect would be peremptory, vulgar, and, possibly, monosyllabic. Better still, the Minister should meet the district council of north-east Fife. He has just declined to do so.

It is most curious that a responsible local authority that has carried out the Government's policies to the letter is incapable of having a meeting with the Minister responsible for housing to discuss with him the very problems that have arisen because of that authority's willingness to carry out the Government's policy.

The orders do nothing for the problems of those in north-east Fife who require houses, and they do nothing for north-east Fife district council's management difficulties in relation to its existing housing stock. The truth is that the orders only compound the problems. For that reason, the Minister will find no comfort from my colleagues and me.

10.56 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): We began the debate by referring to calculations, statistics and figures. I am sure that they are interesting. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) told the House that the Liberals' figure for overcrowding was one in seven, yet the Labour figure, which was given just a few minutes earlier, was one in four. That is not the narrow kind of discrepancy that one would expect. There are many divisions in the Opposition. Members of the alliance are unable to get their figures and their act together. The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) is living on borrowed time on the Opposition Front Bench. It is only a matter of time before one of the more able hon. Members behind him sits in his place. The hon. Member for East Lothian, with his acres and estates, being an absentee landlord, would probably find that his image is more in keeping with the Scots' image of aristocrats.

Labour Members continually refuse to face the fact that, when they came to office, the Government recognised that Labour, at local and national level throughout Scotland, had bought votes with a policy of cheap rents. That policy meant that inadequate funds were going into housing coffers to maintain housing stock.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *rose*

Mr. Walker: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a minute, if he will wait to hear what I have to say.

Unless sufficient funds go into housing coffers, the Department will be unable to maintain its housing assets. There are two ways of getting funds into housing coffers. The first is through rents. The second is through public support in whatever form that takes. I deliberately said "in whatever form it takes" because housing benefit is one of the many forms of support.

Mr. McAllion: The hon. Member will recall that the Minister, when he opened the debate, said that the Government were very concerned to use the resources available for housing on capital expenditure and for that reason they were switching resources from housing support grant and rate fund contributions towards capital expenditure. The hon. Member seems to be arguing that, rather than switching those resources to capital expenditure, the Government are switching them to housing benefit and are pauperising people living in council houses. That seems to be the tenor of his argument.

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman is one of the individuals whom I expect to see sitting on the Opposition Front Bench in place of the hon. Member for East Lothian, if only because I believe that he attempts to do his homework a little more carefully. He does not indulge in the same vitriolic personal attacks which I believe are abusive and wasteful. In this case, I am sorry to say that the hon. Member for Dundeee, East (Mr. McAllion) seems to have got it wrong, like so many Opposition Members.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) *rose*——

Mr. Walker: The hon. Member is always very courteous and I will give way to him in a moment.

The hon. Member for Dundee, East must recognise that the Labour party has never got its act together properly on the difference between capital account and revenue account. He knows full well that that was one of the problems with the Labour clubs in Dundee. It was typical of the fact that the Labour party cannot differentiate between the various sources of funding and expenditure.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman clearly has a grasp of how best we can be promoted to the Opposition Front Bench. How does he account for the fact that he is where he is—and where he was in June 1979?

Mr. Walker: By choice—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Walker: Only two people in the House know the truth of that, and I am one of them. The other is in 10 Downing street. Not many people can say that. Not many people can claim that they believe firmly in what they are doing and in the value that they place on what they are doing for their constituents over and above personal ambition. I hold the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) in high regard and believe that the Labour party never properly or fully appreciated his abilities as a Whip and particularly as Deputy Chief Whip. If the Labour party had the sensible arrangement that exists on the Conservative Benches, the hon. Gentleman would have been appointed a full Whip because he was so good at it.

The Government's policies are working towards a position where, when the community charge is introduced, we will no longer have to bring these orders before the House. I hope that this will be the last time that we will have to consider them. They do nothing for my constituents and, like my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), I recognise that this evening we will do nothing for our constituents. For far too long our constituents have been subsidising the profligate, vote-buying policies of the Opposition, through various forms of taxation.

11.3 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): While listening to the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) I was astonished at my right hon. and hon. Friends laughing when he said that he is where he is—where he was in 1979—by choice. The question is: whose choice? The answer is, the Prime Minister's.

When I heard the Minister reading his brief, I understood clearly for the first time what Ruth Wishatt meant when she wrote in *The Scotsman* today:

"If he did not have a sore back, he would not see the present Scottish Ministers in his way."

When introducing the orders, the Minister clearly displayed himself as one of the Ministers whom the hon. Member for Tayside, North would not see in his road. I am only grateful that I do not have to make the choice between them.

This type of debate suits the Minister because it is not about the formula by which the housing support grant is calculated, because the Minister does not understand it.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The following facts have to be taken into account when considering the distribution of grant to authorities: estimated loan charges, supervision and management allowance per council house, additional allowances for some council houses in low-stock areas, basic repair and maintenance allowance per council house, supplementary allowance in recognition of certain additional needs, such as high-rise houses, allowances to represent other expenditure, a basic income factor per council house, estimated rate fund contributions and adjustments to represent other income factors. The actual details of working out the formula, which has been carefully done in conjunction with COSLA—I have had several meetings with that organisation—are complex.

Mr. Ewing: I know that the formula is complex for the Minister to understand because it has taken him 45 minutes to give the House that information. My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) asked for it during the Minister's opening speech, but he simply could not give it.

The Minister referred to adjustments for other income factors, which cover an extremely wide area. They cover factors such as the level of unemployment in the housing authority areas. The Minister has simply not taken account of the level of unemployment in many Scottish areas. Average income is another factor that must be taken into account when calculating housing support grant.

In the past five years the housing support grant for Falkirk district council, as a result of this order, has dropped from about £4 million to not a penny piece. Unemployment and the inability to earn wages in that area has increased from 15 per cent. to 19 per cent. of the adult population. Therefore, as the housing support grant has been reduced, unemployment has increased. The Minister and his civil servants have taken absolutely no account of the economic factors that prevail in that area.

[Mr. Ewing]

I cannot speak with authority about any other district council areas. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) could confirm that the Inverclyde and Port Glasgow area is one of the most devastated of the United Kingdom. That area's allowance to make a rate fund contribution to the housing revenue account is a disgrace and takes no account of its economic circumstances.

Dr. Godman: It is my considered opinion that the Government are utterly indifferent to the plight of many thousands of people that I represent.

Mr. Ewing: My hon. Friend speaks with greater authority than either the Minister or myself about the problems in his own area. It is significant that only last weekend it was widely reported in the media in Scotland that there was a vigil outside New St. Andrews house by people from the Inverclyde area complaining bitterly about their plight and seeking to draw the Secretary of State's attention to their problems.

However, I shall return to the orders. The Minister totally failed, certainly in the case of Falkirk district council, and I suspect of many other district councils, to take account of economic circumstances. That is one of the main criteria to which the Minister should pay heed when calculating housing support grant.

I turn briefly to the ability to make a rate fund contribution to the housing revenue account. That is no business for the Government. They should not be interfering in whether a district council makes any contribution from the rate fund to the housing revenue account. If a district council chooses to make no contribution from the rate fund to the housing revenue account, that is a matter between the district council and its electorate when the district councils are elected in the first week of May this year. Equally, if a district council decides to make a substantial contribution from its rate fund to its housing revenue account, that also is a matter between the district council and its electors in the district council elections in May.

The Minister has absolutely no business to interfere in what is a local government matter, but that has been the hallmark of the Government. As people in Scotland continue to elect Labour councils, including in the capital city of Edinburgh, the Government take the huff and pull into the centre the freedom of local authorities to decide their own domestic housing policies.

The Minister, in a significant remark during his speech, told the House about the way in which registered rent had risen between 1979 and 1986 compared with the increase in local authority rates. The Minister should know—and I would caution him that he should be better briefed—that registered rents have risen by such a percentage because Rachmanism has run riot. Registered rents throughout Scotland apply to furnished housing. Racketeers are charging astonishing rents, and the rent officers are registering them at a very high level. When the hon. Members for Tayside, North and for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) complain about housing benefit, they should take a good close look at how much of that housing benefit is finding its way into the pockets of the racketeers who are bleeding young couples dry in furnished accommodation, for the simple reason given by my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. Gentleman and I have similar back problems. The hon. Gentleman will recognise that I have never complained about paying housing benefit because that benefit goes to the individuals who are in need. It does not subsidise the property.

Mr. Ewing: I really do not have the time to conduct a teach-in. For the benefit of the hon. Gentleman, housing benefit does not go to the individual; it goes straight to the local authority; and in the case of private rented accommadation it goes straight to the private landlord. That is where the bulk of housing benefit goes. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian said, many young couples who cannot get local authority housing are living in rented accommodation at very high rents, and I have just given the reason for that.

This is the fourth time today that I have heard the hon. Member for Eastwood speak. He was called three times at Question Time and again in this debate. I live in hope that he will eventually say something sensible, but so far my hopes have not been fulfilled.

Last year in the United Kingdom 64,000 council houses were taken back because those who had bought them could not keep up the mortgage payments. In Scotland —the Minister should have the figures—6,000 council houses were returned to building societies and local authorities because those who had bought them simply could not pay the mortgage. In Falkirk a couple went to their building society, threw the keys on the counter and told the society that the house belonged to it. They are now housed by Falkirk's district council in accommodation for the homeless. That is what is happening.

These orders, coupled with the Housing (Scotland) Bill, are removing rights from local authority and SSHA tenants and compelling them to buy, whether or not they want to do so. That is what Conservative Members are up to and that is why I shall willingly join my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Lobby to vote against these orders.

11.16 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Tonight we have had a good laugh at the speeches made by Conservative Members, and we cannot help but laugh when confronted with such buffoonery. We are discussing a serious subject which is no laughing matter, but we just cannot help ourselves, considering some of the contributions.

We are talking about the conditions in which people live and the housing that they must accept for want of anything better. In these orders the Government are cutting in half the rate fund contributions, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) said, are provided entirely by local ratepayers. Not a penny of it comes from central Government, and it is simply not their business how much or how little a local authority contributes. Nevertheless, two or three years ago the Government intervened to force these cuts willy-nilly, thereby making it even more difficult for councils to operate any sort of sensible housing account.

Where does the formula come from, for example, to justify cutting Glasgow's rate fund contribution by £6,500,000 for the current year? The Minister has not explained how the formula works. Are the figures plucked from the air and then cut? As has been pointed out, not a penny comes from the Government.

Presumably the Government have read COSLA's submission on this. It points out that the introduction in

1984 of statutory rate fund contribution levels is an intrusion into the affairs of local government and a further unacceptable erosion of local democracy. Since then the rate fund contribution limits have decreased from £112 million, or 18 per cent. of total costs, to £22 million, or 3 per cent. of total costs for next year. So if the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) thinks that there should be no rate fund contribution whatever, he is certainly well on the way to getting what he wants.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Not quickly enough.

Mrs. Fyfe: Net capital allocation has been cut by £35 million. Capital receipts have increased by £60 million, but even the Government admit that that figure is a guess. There is no means of knowing whether that will be provided. When one considers that attempts to buy council houses tend to dry up as people fall increasingly into unemployment, and those who have attempted it have to give it up as a bad job, it is clear that we cannot realistically expect any vast increase in capital receipts, yet the Government write in that figure. Again, where is the explanation? Where is the Government's explanation of the formula for arriving at this figure?

Even what the Government are doing for the private sector is nonsense. To reduce the grant by £24 million makes me wonder what feedback Conservatives are getting from their surgeries. People tell me that they do not feel that there is any point applying for a grant, as they know that the money has dried up. Conservatives need only look around them at the state of the private sector to see that there is obviously a great deal of need for the repair grants to continue. To cut them as they have done is highly irresponsible and will do great damage to private sector housing stock.

Let me concentrate on Glasgow's needs. Every hon. Member present must know that Glasgow had to seek an independent review of the state of its housing. Having appealed year after year to the Government to take a serious look at Glasgow's housing, the council had to invite independent and highly respected people to conduct that investigation. It must be about two years since that report came out, but what are the Government doing in response to Glasgow's housing needs?

How will the formula benefit Glasgow? The rate fund contribution was cut by £6·5 million, but not a penny of that is Government money anyway. The housing support grant has been raised from the current year to next year, but it is still only half the 1980-81 level. It comes nowhere near meeting the needs of Glasgow. Even previous Tory Governments accepted that Glasgow needed a far better level of housing support grant than this Government will give it.

If I make no other point tonight that gets through the heads of Conservative Members, I must make it clear that capital allocation is not a resource given to the council. The hon. Member for Eastwood said—I hope I quote him correctly—that resources should be concentrated on capital. After all his years in government, does he not know that all that the Government are doing in setting a capital allocation is allowing the council to spend its own ratepayers' money? Not a penny comes from the Government. Capital receipts are simply what the council gets from selling its housing stock. Again, not a penny of that comes from the Government. All that they are doing is reducing the good housing stock, but not getting any money in to replace it.

How is Glasgow supposed to pay off its massive debts? I remind Conservative Members that 40 per cent. of Glasgow's entire spending goes to pay off housing debt because of Glasgow's vast programme to clear slums and build houses after the war. Quite apart from the vast debt to be cleared, which is a millstone round Glasgow's neck, people live in intolerable housing conditions. Some houses are so damp that people are forced to shut off the bedrooms and sleep in the living room. Some have dangerous wiring and loose slates that take years to replace.

The Minister recently paid a visit to Maryhill. He was pleased to open a pleasant new housing association development, with a beautiful set of houses, with reasonable rents, which were a pleasure for anyone to move into. But he was not so willing to go a few yards up the road to see how people live in Ruchill, for example. The council cannot afford to do anything about the general environmental conditions of the people who live there. The Government are happy to be associated with the nice housing, but will not do a damned thing about the state of affairs for many thousands of people in Glasgow.

In conclusion, I can only say that the anger of the people of Glasgow has certainly been shown politically against the Government time and again. The Government have the cheek to talk about us buying support. What do they think they are doing when they keep on subsidising mortgage tax relief hugely, year after year, with no fancy talk about formulae to justify it? We want the same fair deal for council tenants.

11.24 pm

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): This is a black day for housing in Scotland. It is a black day for the 350,000 families who live in houses, with rotting windows and leaking roofs, which require modernisation. It is a black day for the 88,000 tenants living in houses that require rewiring. Many houses have wiring that is positively dangerous; some have rooms without electric sockets and others have kitchens with barely adequate electricity supplies. It is also a black day for the 153,000 houses that need major structural repairs and for those tenants who have to live in them. It is a black day for the 234,000 Scottish families who have to live in damp houses.

We have had an unedifying lecture from the Minister about the fact that two thirds of Scottish councils no longer receive any help from the Government or the taxpayer. We know that the combined cut in the rate fund contribution and the housing support grant this year is £14 million. We know that, under the Conservatives, almost no help has been given for housing those families—30,000 people in all—who, particularly at Christmas and in the winter, do not have a home of their own or a roof over their heads. The Conservatives have cut support to those families to an all-time low so that fewer than half the Scottish councils now receive help in housing the homeless.

That contrasts with the situation under the last Labour Government when 56 out of 56 district and island authorities received some support to help those who needed houses. Do Conservative Members wish to challenge that? They are prepared to sit and snigger among themselves. They will not get up on their feet and challenge those figures because they know that they are correct. Under the Labour Government, every Scottish council knew that the homeless people in its area could obtain some help.

[Mr. Nigel Griffiths]

What have the Tories done? They have ensured that no ratepayer or taxpayer has to spend any money to help the homeless. They have narrowed down the field so that only one third of local authorities in Scotland receive any help towards housing the homeless and that, within that one third, only council tenants bear the burden of helping those homeless families. That is the reality of eight years of Tory rule.

The orders perpetuate and exacerbate that policy. The homeless are now receiving help from the smallest number of people ever. It is not the better-off home owners, in Edinburgh and Glasgow, for example, who are being asked indirectly, through taxes, to help those homeless families, but the council tenants. The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) said that council tenants are among the poorest people. That is why they receive the housing benefit that he supports.

Unfortunately, the Secretary of State for Social Services does not support that policy. After 11 April, millions of people, including 1 million pensioners, will suffer as a result of cuts in housing benefit. All Opposition Members and the vast majority of the people in this country feel some compassion for those who are down-and-outs, but the people who are being asked to dip into their pockets are council tenants whose earnings are below average and who form the poorest section of the population. That is the effect of the order which the Minister presented so proudly from the Dispatch Box. The poorest people of this country are being asked to help those who are even less fortunate than themselves. It is a great tribute to the people of this country that the poorest are willing to do that. People in my constituency are willing to help.

The hon. Member for Tayside, North said that Labour is buying votes by helping council tenants. That is far from the truth. The hon. Gentleman just has to open his eyes, even though that is difficult for him, and look around. Only a tiny minority of people in south Edinburgh own their own houses, but Labour's new heartlands are in Marchmont and Morningside.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): The largest amount of home ownership in Scotland is to be found in my constituency. It has the smallest number of council houses. That gives the lie to the suggestion by the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) that Labour is buying votes through providing council houses. Our support is coming from home owners.

Mr. Griffiths: That point is well made.

Mr. Bill Walker: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Griffiths: I hear the cry, "Point of order." I shall happily give way if the hon. Member for Tayside, North wants to make a bogus point of order.

Mr. Walker: I called out "Point of order" because I thought I heard the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) suggest that I was lying.

Mr. Griffiths: No Opposition Member would allege that the hon. Member for Tayside, North has the brains to lie, to tell the truth or to think anything out.

The problem is that council tenants, the poorest people, are being asked to foot the bill for homelessness in Scotland. Since 1979, Eastwood has lost £330,000 of grant to help the homeless. Eastwood district council matched the Government's contribution towards housing the homeless, but the Government are welshing on that partnership. Since 1979, Nithsdale has lost £1 million in housing support grant, much of which went towards housing the homeless. Kyle and Carrick, where the Secretary of State for Defence saw his majority slashed to fewer than 200, has had its budget slashed from £9 million to nothing by this Government. Edinburgh, the city that I am proud to represent, has lost £22 million under this Government.

I have received a letter from the Scottish Council for Single Homeless that spells out the effects of the housing support grant cuts in Edinburgh. There is a deficit this year of £330,000, and there will be a deficit of over £330,000 in the next financial year. That deficit will have to be met from the housing revenue account.

How does the Minister expect Edinburgh to provide that money when there is to be no support from the Government or the taxpayer? There is no answer to that question. The Government are not giving even a penny towards the provision of hostels. Both the Minister and the Secretary of State for Scotland take great pride in opening hostels, sheltered housing units and other showpieces that are largely local government and Labour council initiatives. They go along at the last minute and take the credit, but they give precious little support to those initiatives.

If the Government need to be convinced about that, they need refer only to the Secretary of State for Scotland's answer to me last Friday about Housing Corporation expenditure in Scotland between 1974 and the next financial year. They will see that under the Labour Government the Housing Corporation, from which so many Scottish housing associations receive money, was provided with enormous bounty. In real terms, spending increased fivefold under Labour. Under this Government, spending has barely increased by 50 per cent. in eight years.

When the Labour Government were in office, spending on housing associations and the Housing Corporation rose by 87 per cent. in 1975, 36 per cent. in 1976 and 46 per cent. in 1977. This spending increased in each year after that while the Labour Government were in office. We know that under the Conservative Government the projects that Ministers boast about have had their budgets cut. In 1984, the Government cut the Housing Corporation's budget. It was cut again in 1985, followed by a further cut in 1986. It is only in recent years that they have managed to increase the corporation's budget. A 2 per cent. increase in real terms has been squeezed for 1988-89.

The nub of our argument is that the Government have tried to steal the credit for what was done by the Labour Government. They have tried to denigrate the great work that was carried out by the Labour Government between 1974 and 1979. During that period there was a fivefold increase in spending within the private sector and housing associations. It is a disgrace that the work of my colleagues in the previous Labour Government is being denigrated. The lies must stop now. I challenge the Minister to challenge my figures, he having made a poor attempt to do so in Committee.

Even when we move from the co-operative and housing association sectors into what might be described as the

Government's strong points, such as repair grants and the help that is given to home owners, we are aware of their woefully inadequate and pitiful record. This year, help given by the Government to home owners throughout Scotland will be cut by 16 per cent. The Minister knows that in south Edinburgh there will be thousands left on the waiting list, for 90 per cent. grants were nothing more than an electoral gimmick. It was made in the year before the 1983 general election, only to be dropped almost the day after the election by my predecessor.

The Government's housing record is abysmal. Notes are being passed to the Minister from the civil servants' Box. The only one that we want him to read this evening is, "I resign."

11.37 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): There have been contributions of fervour and feeling on a subject that is deserving of them. That cannot be said of the two token contributions from the Conservative Benches, which have been virtually deserted.

I do not have to declare an interest, because Angus district council gets precisely nothing from the Government in terms of housing support grant. It receives nothing, zero, zilch or nil, and it is allowed to provide a similar amount in rate fund contributions. All housing improvements within the area of the district council fall on the shoulders of council house tenants. They receive no help from central Government. Housing support grant in Angus fell from £4·37 million to zero within three years. The Government do not understand the effect that such a dramatic reduction in resources has on a local authority that is endeavouring sensibly to plan its housing policy.

Prudent authorities are treated with the same contempt that is shown to authorities which the Government consider to be bad boys. Indeed, prudent authorities sometimes receive the worst treatment. Prudent budgeting is no safeguard against a Government who are so biased against local government.

It is ridiculous that housing policy in Scotland is being determined by the resources that can be raised from the selling of council houses and not by the needs of the people. It is clear that the Government's policy, in partnership with the private sector, is to starve Scottish authorities of the funds that are required to provide adequate housing for the Scottish people. Resources are being squeezed from councils. Only 25 authorities in Scotland are receiving help from the Government, and that number will dwindle to nil in the coming years. The figures show that two thirds of the total housing stock receives no central Government financial support. Yet local authorities should be a major engine in any drive to solve Scotland's housing problems.

The fall in the Government's support for Scottish housing contrasts starkly with their support for the political heartlands in south-east England, where huge public subisidies are given through mortgage interest tax relief. With 30 per cent. of the United Kingdom population, south-east England receives 50 per cent. of total relief, equivalent to well over £1 billion. Would that that money were spent in Scotland on our housing needs.

Specifically on the variation order, I ask the Minister how taking £707,000 from Roxburgh district will help its housing position, or how the £94,500 clawed back from Annandale and Eskdale will help that district. Indeed, how will the money taken from Argyll and Bute district do anything to help solve its rural housing problems? Based on a technical adjustment for interest rates, it would be better for these sums to remain within the housing system in each of the districts. In other words, the money is going in the wrong direction.

The calculations sum up the Conservative Government's attitude towards one of Scotland's major and long-lasting problems. *[Interruption.]* In view of the groaning on the Labour Benches, may I point out that I do not take long on my speeches, but I have the right to speak, and I will finish this speech. If hon. Members allow me to continue, I will finish promptly. If there have been delays, blame should be pointed in the direction of other hon. Members.

The Government's rate fund contribution is merely another way of stopping local independence of decision-making. It seems scarcely credible in the middle of a Scottish housing crisis, with homelessness and waiting lists increasing, with the cessation of public authority house building, and with dampness and other massive problems facing us, that these orders are before us to cheesepare sums of money which could otherwise be spent on helping to solve the problems. A proper Scottish house conditions survey could have been funded by the money that the Government are taking from Scottish local authorities, but nothing is happening.

We have a clear indication that the Government are going in the wrong direction. Instead of dealing with Scotland's housing problems by injecting more resources, they are squeezing money out of Scotland's private and public housing systems. These are technical documents which once again betray the Government's failure to deal adequately with Scotland's housing needs.

11.42 pm

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In response to the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh), may I say that Angus district council has decided not to increase rents next year.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) raised again the question of improvements grants. For 1987-88 Edinburgh received a non-housing revenue account allocation of £8·5 million, plus £26 million which was earmarked for dealing with the grant backlogs. Glasgow had a share of that. The council's provisional non-HRA allocation for 1988-89 consists of £9·5 million, plus £14·5 million, earmarked for grant backlogs. In other words, the basic allocation on the non-HRA is up by £1 million if we take out the backlogs.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) said that much of the increase in housing support grant is due to interest rates. That is not so. The interest rate assumed for next year, 10·2 per cent., is only 0·1 per cent. above the rate for this year. The reason for the £12 million increase in housing support grant for 1988-89 is increased management and maintenance which is necessary to ensure that the housing stock is well looked after.

Sums spent on housing in Scotland in the public sector will increase from 1987-88. The planned gross capital expenditure was £719 million. That will go up to £748 millon. Hon. Members should not doubt that. In view of what has been said tonight, it should not be forgotten that the Government have again increased the provision for capital investment in Scottish housing. Although the housing revenue allocations for 1987-88 stood at record

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

levels, the provisional allocations for 1988-89 are nearly 7 per cent. higher than the equivalent allocations for the current year. Of course, with the major disposals of stock to the private and voluntary sector, even greater investment is now being made in what was seen hitherto as local authority stock.

More local authority dwellings were improved last year — some 58,000, which is more than in any of the previous 10 years. More than 298,000 local authority dwellings, about a quarter of the stock, have been included in modernisation schemes costing about £1 billion——

It being one and a half hours after the motion was entered upon, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put successively the Question already proposed from the Chair and the Question on such of the remaining motions relating to Housing (Scotland) as were then made, pursuant to order [19 February].*

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 203, Noes 137.

Division No. 194] **[11.45 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Richard Ryder and
Mr. David Maclean.

NOES

Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.

Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Nigel Griffiths.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 3rd February, be approved.

Housing Support Grant (Scotland)

Resolved,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 3rd February, be approved.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

11.55 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand that the Opposition Front Bench is not to move the prayer on the Order Paper. That is due to the fact that the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments has not yet completed its consideration of the relevant order because the Committee has asked the Department for an explanation of the vires of the instrument, which is important. It is important, too, to acknowledge the Opposition's position in ensuring that before a prayer or any other motion on an instrument is debated the Committee has the opportunity to complete its consideration and report to the House.

It is not a Standing Order that an instrument should be debated when it is reported to the House by the Joint Committee, but if the Opposition believe that a prayer should be laid against an instrument the Government should give them time in which to report it to the House. It would be unfair if the Opposition did not move a prayer in order to allow consideration to be completed and the Government did not then allow time for it to be moved in subsequent proceedings.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The hon. Gentleman realises that it is not for me to comment on the substance of what he has said. On the procedural point, the House is indebted to him for putting that view on the record.

EUROPEAN LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That Mr. Richard Caborn be discharged from the Select Committee on European Legislation, and Mr. George J. Buckley be added to the Committee. — *[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

PETITIONS

Rating Reform

11.58 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Now that the House has dealt with a measure designed by Scotland's minority Tory administration to force up rents in Scotland, I take this opportunity to present a petition signed by 417 residents of the burgh of Cockenzie and Port Seton calling for the repeal of the legislation that is set to impose a grossly unfair poll tax on the people of Scotland.

The legislation has been overwhelmingly rejected by the Scottish electorate and it is still not too late to avoid the injustice and the chaos of the poll tax. I strongly support this appeal for the repeal of this dangerous legislation.

I have another petition on the same subject which I have been asked to submit. It is signed by 80 members of the Edinburgh 7/131 branch of the Transport and General Workers Union, which includes some of my constituents. The petition warns that the poll tax would discriminate against poor people in Scotland and favour more prosperous areas, so it would be likely to do great damage to the social fabric of our nation.

Once again, I join the petitioners in urging the House to reject this damaging legislation.

To lie upon the Table.

Hospital Complex (Downpatrick)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn. —*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

12 midnight

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I am pleased and grateful to have this opportunity to speak about the crisis that faces the Downpatrick hospital complex in my constituency. I am also glad to see that the Minister responsible has returned to full health—the theme of the debate is good health.

When I applied for the debate, it was to ask for the provision of sufficient capital to rebuild what is known as the Downe hospital at Downpatrick—a building which is 104 years old and was built for another purpose entirely. We have since had an announcement from the Eastern health and social services board, which is responsible for the Downe unit of management, that it has been notified of a budget which is totally deficient for its purpose of supplying an adequate hospital and medical service to the entire board area. The board has said that it will face a deficit in 1988-89 of £7·6 million, not taking into account the fact that, in the next fiscal year, it must meet a wage and salary increase. The consequence of that shortfall is that the board is frantically—perhaps indecently—trying to close hospitals and wards to meet its unrealistic budget.

This is an old debate. It is 20 years old. I have had this argument with the Eastern board for that time. We are still without any capital programme to provide what it was recognised was needed as long ago as 1965. Notwithstanding that, we are now faced with the closure of a maternity hospital and the decimation of acute surgical wards. The hospital problem in Downpatrick has changed in the past couple of weeks, from seeking capital expenditure, to stemming the rot of closures and cuts.

I have the privilege to speak on my own behalf and on behalf of the entire community of Downe, of whatever political persuasion. I have received the unanimous support of the medical and paramedical members of the community.

Some 23 years ago, in the debates in Stormont and the then Department of Health, it was recognised that the Downe hospital needed to be replaced. Funds were earmarked for the enterprise. Unfortunately, we had only talk, and the money was redeployed to the Masserene hospital in Antrim.

A couple of years ago it was with a sense of déjà vu that, when I was seeking £6 million or £7 million of investment in that aging structure, we were told that no capital was available. Yet, out of the blue, £33 million suddenly became available for a hospital. Will hon. Members believe that again it was a hospital in the Antrim area? I do not begrudge money being well and usefully spent in the Antrim area, but our long-term approved need was not met in any way by the health board or by the Department.

In considering the problem, it is important to note the background against which I speak. Down is a rural area of 646 sq km, with a scattered population of 82 persons per sq km. It has no railway system, a poor bus service, and a road system that is still in the 18th century. Geographical features have a considerable impact on the delivery of health and community care services. None the less, the people of Down expect reasonable access to medical and surgical services.

That expectation was recognised by the Royal Commission on the National Health Service, which, in its 1979 report, stated:

"A fundamental principle of the national service must be an equality of provision, so far as this can be achieved without an unacceptable sacrifice of standards."

It went on to state:

"If inflexibility is to be avoided health authorities should implement national policy in the context of their particular geographical and demographic constraints."

That is the basis on which I urge the Minister to reconsider the Down district.

All rural areas have a service centre to which the rural community looks. At the moment that service area is the town of Downpatrick. I ask that a good hospital service be provided in that town. The alternative is totally inconceivable. It would mean that 40 per cent. of the entire area of the Eastern health board would be devoid of any real hospital and medical services.

In addition, there is an influx of inhabitants during three months of the year. Hon. Members may, or may not, know that the county of Down is the most beautiful and most tourist-oriented county in Ireland. It is not surprising —indeed, the Department of the Environment accepts this — that 1·2 million persons visit the area during a 12-week period. This means that, on a day-to-day basis, there are 11,500 extra people. On top of that, there are 900,000 overnight stays within that 12-week period, which means that another 9,800 people are resident in the area during the summer months. That is a total population surge of about 21,000.

Tourists and short-term stay people require medical services, just as the rest of the community do. In addition, injuries and accidents related to sailing, climbing, horse riding and other vigorous tourist pursuits put a greater demand on services than that which is normally expected in such a rural community. Again, the Royal Commission's report states:

"Hospitals must be accessible to the population they serve."

Another aspect of the background of Down relates to socio-economic factors. It is a poor, deprived area, which, in parts, has 21 per cent. unemployment. Other hon. Members may quote similar pockets of unemployment. There are other socio-economic factors.

The 1981 census of the Down district, as distinct from other local government areas in the Eastern health board district, produced certain facts. The census showed that the district had the highest average number of persons per household; the highest number of persons per room; the lowest percentage of households connected to the public water supply; the lowest percentage connected to public sewers; and the highest birth rate. I will add that, thankfully, it has the lowest perinatal mortality rate, due entirely to the presence of the maternity hospital. The district has a higher proportion of the population in the higher dependency bracket — the under-14s and those over 65 years of age. I am proud to boast that it also has the highest natural increase in population of all the districts.

In addition to those socio-economic factors, 32 per cent. of householders have no car. Of those in employment, 25 per cent. must commute outside the district. That adds another considerable dimension to the number of households without a motor car during the working day. Because of the lack of transport and the lack

of a transport system, people cannot avail themselves of the hospital service unless that service is within a reasonable and convenient distance.

All those factors show a great need for an available and local service in the local hospitals, but what is being planned for the areas? There are plans for the closure of the maternity hospital and the destruction of our acute and surgical wards. Our maternity hospital was opened during 1981-82. Since then it has achieved a bed occupancy of 78·4 per cent., which is the third highest of the maternity units in the Eastern board area. However, the hospital has been singled out for closure simply because it has not reached that magical figure demanded by the authorities of 1,000 throughput births a year. Anyone would think that we were talking about cattle instead of human beings.

The total number of births in the district in 1986-87 was 1,073. Unfortunately, 355 were misdirected — in my opinion — to other maternity units. That statistician's delight, that bureaucratic blunder of 1,000 births, must not stand in the way of making adequate provision for the mothers-to-be, who very often will have to travel considerable distances from mountainous areas, but I doubt whether that will have occurred to the authorities.

I have no doubt that infant mortality will increase again to its previous levels. Infant mortality in the Down district was reduced to 5·34 deaths per 1,000 births, against a Northern Ireland average of 13·4 and a United Kingdom average of 11·4. That, if no other, is a justifiable reason for the maintenance and continuation of our maternity hospital.

What savings will be made? If those patients are placed elsewhere, they will need the same treatment and care, but with additional transport costs, additional stress and psychological factors that will probably extend the stay in hospital and so increase costs. There is no monetary sense in the matter at all. A monetary budget that takes no cognisance of the needs and welfare of the patient is flawed in the medical sense.

The other factor is the proposal to cut our surgical beds by almost 50 per cent. In practice that means that upwards of 1,000 people in the Down area who have received acute medical services in the past will have to go elsewhere, with the same costs for transport, the same stress, the lack of visitation and the psychological deprivation and new surroundings that I said would occur if the maternity unit were to close. The real effect will be to end the viability of the hospital as an acute hospital service.

I have not mentioned the fact that there is a large psychiatric hospital in the area, which, in turn, is dependent upon the maternity and surgical hospitals. Who, or what, is going to service the mentally ill and the seriously mentally retarded in that psychiatric hospital? The services are already being run down. Our ambulance service was transferred in 1986. Ear, nose and throat services and optical specialties were transferred in 1987. The financial administration organisation is to be transferred in 1988.

We are suffering from the past and continuing policy of the board and the Department — a desire for centralisation. Presently, centralisation is the god of medical administration. It is interesting to note that this week an eminent surgeon at the Royal Victoria hospital, who is one of the chief proponents of centralisation, in relation to Downe district hospital, said:

"This issue in this case is again not between peripheralisation and centralisation, but the extreme difficulties that would be involved for patients if Downe hospital were closed."

I am a layman, but it is clear that the medical opinion of Downe is unanimous and firm. The following observations have been made:

"1. We feel it is extremely unwise to make major policy decisions about the provision of services based solely on financial considerations.

2. The arguments about the pros and cons of retaining a maternity unit in Downpatrick have been rehearsed many times already, but the medical advice has been clear throughout, namely that the maternity services should be retained in Downpatrick because of its geographical isolation.

3. Closure of the maternity hospital would remove obstetrics and gynaecology from the GP rotational training programme of the unit. This programme is vital to the junior staffing of medical, surgical, geriatric and gynaecology departments."

It is also said that a 50 per cent. reduction in the number of acute surgical beds would mean that the unit would be unable to function effectively and therefore would be subject to future closure. It is also believed that the provision of existing facilities represents the minimum viable size of the unit.

I have expressed my grave concern about the effect of the proposals for the Down district. I ask the Minister to intervene directly to exercise his authority to prevent the gross deprivation of medical, maternity and, ultimately, psychiatric care. I ask the Minister and his Department not to stand aloof from the decision-making process of the Eastern health board. The Minister must not hide behind the departmental argument that it is for the board to decide. He must exercise his right to oversee the medical services for the Down district. The Minister and the Department must ensure that Downe receives equality of provision that is of an acceptable standard.

I am sure that the Minister is already in receipt of two reports from independent sources — one from PA Consultants and the other from Coopers and Lybrand. One deals with the need for the services and the other the costing of a modest, modern hospital for Downpatrick. I ask the Minister to consider urgently the points that I have made and that I know would receive the support of hon. Members if they were applied to their particular areas.

I ask the Minister to intervene to stop the closures and, at a reasonable date in the future, to lay aside a modest sum for the replacement of a 104-year-old building.

12.18 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): I thank the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) for commenting upon my health. My general practitioner was on holiday and therefore I have not made any use of the NHS, but I am glad to say that, at least for my benefit, I have fully recovered.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, and he has expressed it in his usual forthright and eloquent way. He has raised two separate issues: the question of Downe hospital and the maternity unit.

As to the immediate threat, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Eastern board has issued a consultative document and it contains a wide range of possible options. As the hon. Member for South Down has said, this is not the first time that the matter has been discussed. The board will not take any decisions on the issue until there has been an opportunity for discussion. I appreciate that the time

[Mr. Richard Needham]

scale is fairly short. The end of the original time scale will not bring an end to the debate about what options the board is to adopt. The debate will have to continue.

Since the options are to be adopted by the board, I cannot go in any substantive way into the points that the hon. Gentleman has raised on the board's arguments or his own. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, it is the role of the board to make a determination and to judge the arguments. I cannot overrule that. I have listened very carefully to the hon. Gentleman because if the board comes forward with proposals the Department will have to consider them carefully.

The hon. Gentleman raised some points which gave me cause for concern. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can compare the proposals for Antrim with those of Down. The proposals must be considered on their merits. If the merits of the case are such that Down should have a rebuilt hospital, that will be considered, as the case for a new hospital at Antrim was considered. Nor dó I find it particularly persuasive for the hon. Gentleman to argue that, because there is a large influx of tourists into a most beautiful part of Northern Ireland, facilities should be built which would be used for only two or three months of the year. As he rightly pointed out, we must build facilities to serve the population.

I understand the force of the hon. Gentleman's criticism, but the board has to live within its budget for the next year. The budget that we have had to place upon the board, the 5·2 per cent. increase, means that it will need to make savings of 2 to 3 per cent., which, as the hon. Gentleman said, is approximately £7 million. That means that the board will have to make difficult decisions. Clearly some of those decisions will not be popular.

We have to consider a point of principle in maintaining the acute services for Downpatrick. I appreciate the force of the arguments that the hon. Gentleman put so eloquently about the numbers involved in the population of the eastern area and the distance that people would have to travel were there to be a significant change in the acute care, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that there are problems in keeping a high-quality hospital open to small, dispersed and mainly rural communities.

It is not a question only of capital funds being made available for a new hospital. Even if we were to make the capital investment — I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman strongly believes that that capital investment should be made available—that is not the only problem. We are talking not only about buildings, but about the scarcity of staff, equipment and skills. It is not possible simply to buy those skills.

An acute hospital with modern facilities must be large enough to sustain adequate levels of junior medical staff. Otherwise consultants must put up with a heavy on-call commitment, and that cannot be satisfactory to maintain a service. An acute hospital of that sort must be viable in terms of capital costs, staff—the Downpatrick hospital has good, immensely dedicated consultants who work extremely hard—and the future. One must consider its capacity to attract, keep and train junior medical staff and to give them a range of specialties. Clearly, regional centres of excellence are bound to be more attractive. I am not saying that the argument for an acute hospital at Downpatrick is not necessarily strong, but it must be seen in the round and remembered that this is not only a question of money.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that the figure 1,000 had been grabbed from the sky; it has not. To have a successful and efficient maternity unit there must be a certain level of throughput. There must be sufficient clients for good paediatric cover, proper facilities and intensive care, and to allow staff to exercise and develop their skills. If there is a reason for doubt about the future of the Downpatrick maternity unit, it is that only 60 per cent. of mums in South Down use it. The hon. Gentleman said that mothers were misdirected, but I am not clear who misdirected them, whether their GPs, consultant gynaecologists or themselves. The unit has a capacity for 300 more babies a year than are born there. Many mums are voting with their feet for whatever reason. If the hon. Gentleman and community leaders want to keep that unit open, it is crucial that those who would naturally use it do so. It is questionable whether hospitals such as Downpatrick acute hospital and the maternity unit are viable if they are not properly utilised.

This debate has raged for many years. The Eastern board, in its area strategic plan, stated clearly that services would be maintained during the current planning period to 1992. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern to reconcile that commitment with the problems of making the 2 or 3 per cent. savings to meet its 1988-89 budget. I can assure him that before any final decisions are made I shall want to explore this closely with the board chairman. If the board finally adopts a firm proposal which in any way affects Downpatrick, I shall make absolutely certain that it makes financial sense for the services involved.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that the Department will study closely any proposals from the board. This is not merely a question of funding; it concerns how the services are run on behalf of both the clients and staff so that the staff can give the quality of service that the people of Downpatrick deserve.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 25 February 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Imprisonment of Members

Mr. Speaker: I have been informed that Mr. William Ross, Mr. Clifford Forsythe, the Rev. Martin Smyth, and Mr. Harold McCusker were yesterday sentenced to terms of imprisonment of seven days. I shall cause the appropriate details of their offences to be published in the Votes and Proceedings and in the *Official Report*.

On Monday I notified the House that I had been informed that Mr. Peter Robinson, the hon. Member for Belfast, East, had been imprisoned for a period of 30 days. I am now informed that the sentence was one of seven days. I shall cause the corrected information to be published in the Votes and Proceedings and in the *Official Report*.

Following are the relevant letters from the Belfast magistrates' courts:

Dear Mr. Speaker

William Ross, Member of Parliament for Londonderry East, was convicted by me at Belfast Petty Sessions on 11 December 1987, of taking part in a public procession, contrary to Article 3 of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. I fined him £20·00, to be paid within 28 days.

As that fine has not been paid Mr. Ross was today committed to Prison for a period of 7 days.

Yours faithfully
C. P. McRandal
Resident Magistrate

Dear Mr. Speaker

John Clifford Forsythe, Member of Parliament for South Antrim, was convicted by me at Belfast Petty Sessions on 11 December 1987, of taking part in a public procession, contrary to Article 3 of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. I fined him £20.00, to be paid within 28 days.

As that fine has not been paid Mr. Forsythe was today committed to Prison for a period of 7 days.

Yours faithfully.
C.P. McRandal
Resident Magistrate.

Dear Mr. Speaker

Martin William Smyth, Member of Parliament for Belfast South, was convicted by me at Belfast Petty Sessions on 11 December 1987, of taking part in a public procession, contrary to Article 3 of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. I fined him £20.00, to be paid within 28 days.

As that fine has not been paid Mr. Smyth was today committed to Prison for a period of 7 days

Yours faithfully,
C. P. McRandal
Resident Magistrate.

Dear Mr. Speaker,

Harold McCusker, Member of Parliament for Upper Bann, was convicted by me at Belfast Petty Sessions on 11 December 1987, of taking part in a public procession, contrary to Article 3 of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. I fined him £20.00, to be paid within 28 days.

As that fine has not been paid Mr. McCusker was today committed to Prison for a period of 7 days.

Yours faithfully,
C. P. McRandal
Resident Magistrate.

Dear Mr Speaker

PETER ROBINSON, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR BELFAST EAST

On 17 February 1988, I sent you a letter signed by Mr F G Harty, Resident Magistrate, stating that Mr Robinson had been committed to Prison for a period of 30 days. I have now learned that he was in fact committed to Prison that day for a period of seven days only. I now enclose the appropriate letter signed by Mr M D McHugh, Resident Magistrate.

I regret very much this unfortunate error and apologise for any confusion it may have caused you. It occurred because Mr Robinson was apparently apprehended by the Police in respect of both unpaid fines at the same time. He paid one and was committed to Prison in respect of the other.

Yours faithfully

T V Patton
Clerk of Petty Sessions

Dear Mr. Speaker,

Peter Robinson, Member of Parliament for Belfast East, was convicted by me at Belfast Petty Sessions on 3 December 1987 of using on a road a mechanically propelled vehicle which was not exhibiting a licence in respect of that use contrary to section 12(4) of the Vehicles (Excise) Act (NI) 1972. I fined him £25, to be paid within 28 days.

As that fine has not been paid Mr. Robinson was today committed to Prison for a period of seven days.

Maurice D. McHugh
Resident Magistrate

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KEBLE COLLEGE OXFORD BILL *[Lords]*

SELWYN COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE BILL *[Lords]*

Read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT BILL *(By Order)*

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [10 December], That the Bill be now considered.

Debate further adjourned till Thursday 3 March.

TEIGNMOUTH QUAY COMPANY BILL *(By Order)*

YORK CITY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL *(By Order)*

CITY OF LONDON (SPITALFIELDS MARKET) BILL

(By Order)

FALMOUTH CONTAINER CARGO TERMINAL BILL

(By Order)

NORTH KILLINGHOLME CARGO TERMINAL BILL

(By Order)

ST. GEORGE'S HILL, WEYBRIDGE, ESTATE BILL

(By Order)

SOUTHERN WATER AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time upon Thursday 3 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Mr. Speaker: Question Number 1, Mr. Harold McCusker.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It was a mistake to have read that out, as I have just read an announcement that the hon. Gentleman is unable to be present.

Stalker/Sampson Report

2. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the disciplinary proceedings of the Royal Ulster Constabulary following events reported in the Stalker/Sampson report.

4. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has discussed with the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary relevant issues arising from the Stalker Sampson report.

9. **Mr. Mallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any discussions during the past three weeks with the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in relation to incidents which were investigated by Mr. Stalker and Mr. Sampson.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tom King): As the House will be aware, the first part of my statement on 17 February dealt with the aspect of possible disciplinary proceedings as a result of the investigations carried out by Mr. Stalker and Mr. Sampson. I undertook to inform the House of further developments.

As I also told the House on 17 February, I have discussed the relevant aspects of the Stalker-Sampson inquiry report with the Chief Constable. In particular, he has accepted in principle all the recommendations made by Mr. McLachlan.

Mr. Clay: How can the Secretary of State claim any credibility for the disciplinary proceedings when senior officers who have perverted the course of justice are still in command? John Stalker was suspended as soon as any accusation was made against him. Given that the E4A unit was responsible for murder — [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw"] — will the right hon. Gentleman suspend from duty the man described by Stalker as

"the senior police officer with the bulging briefcase,"

the man who set up the unit, Assistant Chief Constable Trevor Forbes, head of the Northern Ireland special branch?

Mr. King: What I could hear of the hon. Gentleman's supplementary question consisted partly of a farrago of stories gathered from various press sources, for which I am not sure how much authenticity he would claim.

Mr. Cryer: It is true.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Allow the Secretary of State to answer.

Mr. King: I do not accept the original premise of the hon. Gentleman's question. Matters concerning ranks of chief superintendent and below are the responsibility of the Chief Constable. Mr. Charles Kelly and his team have already started work and are in the Province now. The more senior ranks are a matter for the police authority. I can inform the House that Sir Philip Myers is already in touch with the authority.

Mr. Archer: May I ask the Secretary of State a question that I asked him on 17 February, which escaped him in the course of his answer? Since we all agree that the RUC cannot operate effectively without the confidence of the public, and since the right hon. Gentleman is now seeking to resolve that unhappy episode, would it not be wise to inject an independent element into the inquiries so that it cannot be said that this is merely police officers being investigated by yet more police officers?

Mr. King: With respect to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, the last thing that Northern Ireland and the police need are further inquiries of the length and scale that the right hon. and learned Gentleman might have in mind; there has already been an exhaustive inquiry. I made it clear to the House that there was no question of Mr. Stalker's work being suppressed. His work and that of the bulk of his team was available to Mr. Sampson, and that work was carried through. It is necessary to bring these disciplinary matters to an independent conclusion with the arrival of Mr. Kelly and with the appointment of a police authority to tackle its responsibilities.

Mr. Mallon: As the deputy chief constable of Greater Manchester, Mr. John Stalker, was suspended for the most spurious of reasons while investigating matters in the north of Ireland, does the Secretary of State not find it a curious contradiction that the Chief Constable of the RUC, who is under inquiry by the Northern Ireland Police Authority, remains on duty directing that force? Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that the expressions of absolute confidence in the Chief Constable of the RUC by the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister must inevitably prejudge the findings of the inquiry?

Mr. King: It is vital that the House remembers—it owes it to the RUC—that the events giving rise to these difficulties occurred in 1982. Before the reports and action of the Attorney-General, many hon. Members in all parts of the House paid tribute to the impartiality and determination of the RUC and to the courage that it showed in doing its work. I hope that hon. Members will not forget those words and that they will recognise that the credit for a substantial amount of the improvements that have taken place over the years must inevitably be given to the man who has led the force during that period.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is the right hon. Gentleman in a position to answer the question that was put to him last week by the representative of the police body in the House, namely that those police officers who were brought to court and charged with murder but who were found not guilty will not be tried or disciplined again under the present inquiry? Does he agree that it is wrong for hon. Members to pick out police officers and name them without substantiating the charge being made against them?

Mr. King: While I do not wish to imply that those officers will be affected, I must say that it is now Mr. Kelly's responsibility. Mr. Kelly and Mr. Jones, who is the Deputy Chief Constable, are working very actively with their team on this matter and it would be wrong for me to anticipate their findings. What I do know—I think that the hon. Gentleman also knows this—is that there is great feeling in Northern Ireland, after all the years that this matter has taken, that it is important to resolve it at the earliest possible date. With regard to this matter, I do not wish to comment on individual cases.

Mr. Kilfedder: The Secretary of State has paid tribute to the RUC. Is he aware that the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland, who for 20 years have been subjected to a brutal and callous terrorist campaign, have the utmost confidence in the RUC? They view it with the greatest pride and treasure the memories of those RUC officers who have been murdered violently by the Irish Republican Army.

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman may recall my closing remarks when I was announcing the disciplinary procedure. I said:

"This is a particular tragedy for a police force of the courage and professionalism of the RUC today, who have given ample recent evidence of their commitment to protecting the whole community from violence from whatever extreme it may come." — [*Official Report*, 17 February 1988; Vol. 127, c. 980.]

I stand by those words.

Mr. Soames: I warmly welcome the steps that my right hon. Friend announced a short time ago. However, will he accept that there was a degree of amazement at the response of the Republic of Ireland, which considers that the Government somehow preside over a banana republic in which the judiciary can be affected by a political decision? Will he at once lay to rest any such suggestion?

Mr. King: I am seeking to address some of the differences of view both on the Benches in this House and on the Benches in Dublin. The discussions that we had yesterday were most useful in that respect. These are very difficult issues and anyone who approaches them must honestly be conscious of the extraordinarily different—indeed, totally different—views on a number of issues. We are seeking a rather better common understanding.

Mr. Maginnis: Will the Secretary of State more firmly refute the allegation made by the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay), who suggested that the police were guilty of murder? Will he confirm that the police who were tried for murder were found not guilty, and will he also tell the House how he intends to deal with the situation where John Stalker, at a time when he was supposed to be carrying out an objective investigation into the RUC, was in fact communicating with the *Manchester Evening News*, conjecturing as to when Sir John Hermon might retire and suggesting that Mr. Anderton might like to succeed him? He later showed how subjective he was when he suggested that he, himself, was doing such a magnificent job that he might succeed Sir John Hermon as Chief Constable of the RUC. Is that not a disgraceful demonstration of unprofessional conduct by a man placed in a trusted position?

Mr. King: As I made clear to the House in my statement, much of the work done and various recommendations that I announced flowed from the inquiry carried out by Mr. Stalker and his team and all the recommendations were accepted in principle by the Chief Constable. I must add, however, that certain other aspects of the inquiry give cause for concern—not least what appeared in *The Guardian*, if it was correct—about the degree of confidentiality that was preserved. I am also concerned about the recent letter of a superintendent on Mr. Stalker's team and about the anxiety of a number of members of that team about the number of leaks during the inquiry.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the special branch in Ulster carries out its duties with great courage and at no small risk and that we should show our appreciation of that? Will he also confirm that those killed in the original incidents were given funerals with full military honours by the IRA?

Mr. King: On the latter point, that was certainly true in some cases. Undoubtedly, the special branch has performed outstanding service in Northern Ireland. It has saved very many lives in the security forces and among the general population. At the same time, as I made clear in my statement, it cannot be a force within a force. There were things that needed changing after 1982, and I believe that those changes have been understood. It is very important that, in the final analysis, whichever part of the police force a person may belong to, he is ultimately accountable.

Mr. McNamara: I am sure also that the whole House will agree with the last sentence of the Secretary of State. I am sure also that the right hon. Gentleman will recall the comment of Sir John Hermon that the family tree incident was "untrue and deeply offensive". If it was untrue, it was certainly deeply offensive. The Secretary of State will also recall that Mr. Stalker said:

"It is supportable by evidence".

Does the Secretary of State agree that this is no longer a private matter between two very senior and experienced police officers, but that the integrity of both of them is now at issue and that, in the interests of the police, it is essential that Mr. Stalker should now put his evidence into the public domain?

Mr. King: I should like to think a bit more about what the hon. Gentleman has said. I am not at all sure that I think that it is anything other than a private matter,. It is a most regrettable matter, and I do not want to enter into judgments upon it.

Security

5. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the security situation.

6. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what improvements have been made in cross-border co-operation, to deal with the terrorist threat, in the last 12 months.

Mr. Tom King: Since I last answered questions in the House on 28 January, three members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and one civilian have died. The House will be aware that, sadly, two of those were the members who were killed last night close to the centre of Belfast.

The threat remains high, but the courageous and determined efforts of the security forces are continuing to yield results. In particular, they have recovered a number of significant caches of arms and ammunition thought to have belonged to both Loyalist and Republican terrorist organisations.

So far this year 34 people have been charged with serious offences and 222 weapons, 63,000 rounds of ammunition and 392lb of explosives have been recovered in Northern Ireland. In addition, already this year the Garda Siochana has made a number of very significant finds of arms and ammunition. These include some 125 weapons, 80,000 rounds of ammunition and almost 600lb of commercial explosives.

Mr. Latham: Following yet another statement from my right hon. Friend about atrocities and murders, is he aware that some Conservative Members voted for the Anglo-Irish agreement, which we have always supported, and that we have looked to it to improve border security, but that if it does not continue to do so we shall have to think again?

Mr. King: I note what my hon. Friend said. Perhaps he could explain to me how we are likely to do better in border security if we do not co-operate closely with the Government of the Irish Republic, because that defeats me. We face a serious threat in Northern Ireland at the moment which is considerably enhanced because of the involvement of new weapons which it is believed, on good grounds, come from Libya. That threat is clearly not just to Northern Ireland, but to the whole island of Ireland. In those circumstances, the closest co-operation with the Government of the Irish Republic is absolutely essential.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Has my right hon. Friend's attention been drawn to the remarkable success of the French and Spanish authorities in dealing with the Basque separatist movement through close co-operation? Will he assure the House that the respective heads of police from the North and South will meet shortly to improve co-ordination? Is he aware that he will have nothing but the full support of Conservative Members if he can achieve co-ordination between North and South on a far more advanced and sophisticated basis than over the past decade?

Mr. King: As my hon. Friend will appreciate, one can look at some of the figures that I was able to announce to the House about the success of the Garda Siochana. I am afraid that part of that is due to the scale of arms and explosives that may be present in the island of Ireland, but it is also a clear indication of the substantial commitment that it has been making on this matter.

I hope that we shall have an early conference — I think that we shall have a full conference — and, as I have said, I want to include cross-border security matters and to see the closest co-operation between the Chief Constable and the Commissioner. I make no secret of that fact, because it is most important. Because the RUC and the Garda are in the lead, they must co-operate closely in this, which they do.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does the Secretary of State appreciate that complete confusion has arisen in Northern Ireland from the events of the past four weeks, and does he recognise that we do not know who to believe? Following the meeting in Dublin yesterday the Secretary of State announced that the Commissioner of the Garda Siochana would be meeting the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary at the next meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference, but the Dublin Government immediately contradicted that statement. Who are we to believe?

Mr. King: If there is any confusion, I am sure that I can rely on the right hon. Gentleman to try to help us to clear it up. I am sure that he will play a leading part in that.

I made it clear that we had an excellent meeting yesterday. I think that the Tánaiste, Mr. Lenihan, and I found it valuable to discuss a number of issues. On the right hon. Gentleman's particular point, it is agreed—he will see this if he reads the communiqué — that there should be a full meeting of the conference in the near future. I have made it clear that I should like that to involve cross-border security operation. There is clearly some misunderstanding on the question of participation, but I intend to see whether that can be resolved at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Alton: Following the shooting of Aidan McAnespie by a young 19-year-old British soldier, and the release after three years of Private Thain, who himself was a young man when he was involved in the killing of another person, does the Secretary of State agree that the policy of putting young military personnel into sensitive security positions should be looked at again? Will he also accept that we on these Benches strongly believe that the Anglo-Irish Agreement should be consolidated and strengthened, and is the best way to proceed in fighting terrorism?

Mr. King: The House will recognise the heavy obligations and responsibilities that are laid on the security forces, and that is particularly so for young new members of regiments. The mainly outstanding way in which they have discharged those responsibilities is a tribute to the training and calibre of the troops that have served in Northern Ireland over the years. If anyone should ask why that soldier was in that sangar at that time, I would only say that every road block, vehicle checkpoint and watchtower in Northern Ireland exists thanks to the IRA and the terrorist.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Following the brutal murder last night of two members of the Ulster Defence Regiment,

have the Government of the Irish Republic informed the Secretary of State whether they have any desire to hold an inquiry into those two deaths? Have the Government of the Irish Republic given any knowledge to the Secretary of State's office that they intend to hold an emergency debate in the Dail over those two deaths? Have the Government of the Irish Republic requested a special meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference as a result of those two deaths? If they have not, does the Secretary of State think that that is indicative of their political bias?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman makes the political point that he wishes to make in that contribution. I would merely add that the Irish Government have at no time suggested holding an inquiry into an affair in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hume: Given the recent decision to release Private Thain, which most reasonable people would believe strains the normal limits of compassion, will the Secretary of State accept from me, and many others who were politically involved in the early 1970s, that in that highly emotive period, when sectarian conflict was at its height and when 60,000 people changed homes in Belfast because of that sectarian conflict—the biggest movement in peacetime Europe—and with all the atrocities committed at that time, such as Bloody Sunday, and so on, it is understandable that young people from both sections of the community were sucked into the terrible violence, for which they are serving long sentences? In the light of the decision relating to Private Thain, would not normal compassion demand that we show the same compassion to all those young people? If the Secretary of State were to do that, it would have a powerful beneficial impact on the security and political situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. King: The only qualification that I would make is that it would be wrong to equate the position of a soldier serving his country in Northern Ireland in a particular position with that of a young person of the same age who may have been involved in a terrorist purpose. None the less, I am sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's point that young people who may easily be influenced by older people found themselves drawn into a situation which they now bitterly regret. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State looks at these cases carefully, bearing in mind the youth of the person involved. Of course, the very nature of "Secretary of State's pleasure" cases means that a person must have been under 18 when the crime was committed. We do look sympathetically at such cases, but we must obviously take into account the risk of reinvolvement.

Mr. Stanbrook: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, where there is terrorism on both sides of a common frontier, one might well expect the maximum degree of co-operation in dealing with that terrorism, whether or not there is in existence something called the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

Mr. King: I certainly believe that it is in the interests of both our countries. It is significant that, in spite of the recent difficulties and tensions over certain problems, the Taoiseach, Mr. Haughey, has made it clear that, although there may be an impasse on one or two particular issues, there is certainly no impasse on close cross-border security co-operation. That is in the interests of both our countries. Mr. Haughey has spelt that out in the Dail, and I never cease to spell it out in this House.

Mr. Flannery: Does the Secretary of State realise that when double standards are seen to prevail, as in the case of Private Thain—which he appears to dismiss rather too lightly in my opinion—that strengthens the hand of terrorism, because the terrorists see that what happens on one side does not happen on the other? Was not a group of people let out in that case, rather than just one person? Is it not a disgraceful situation, and will it not strengthen the IRA?

Mr. King: I have tried to explain the background in response to the question of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), and I cannot add much to that. I am sympathetic, as is the House, to very young people who find themselves caught up in the web of terrorism early in life, but the House must also have regard—and I should be failing in my responsibilities if I did not take account of this—to the risk of reinvolvement of people who are released. I must consider that carefully, as complaints would soon arise if we took the wrong decisions.

Mr. Mates: Does my right hon. Friend accept that Conservative Members note with great satisfaction the enormous improvement in security since the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed, particularly as reflected in the huge finds of arms and ammunitions on both sides of the border, and in the increase in the number of arrests on both sides of the border for terrorist offences? Does he agree with me that, if the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Conference had not been in place, the very difficult times through which we have been in the past three or four weeks would have been a great deal worse?

Mr. King: I certainly accept that. There have been difficulties in the history of the relationship of this country with the island of Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Mr. Lenihan and I recognised yesterday, at our meeting, the benefit that is now coming from the working relationship and the understanding that have developed. I repeat the phrase that I used—we do not speak the same language, but we are beginning to learn to translate. That is important if we are to have a happier future.

Mr. McNamara: Is the Secretary of State aware that the Minister in charge of day-to-day security in Northern Ireland is the Minister who has returned Private Thain to the Army? Is he further aware that that Minister was also responsible for refusing a request to furnish the Fair Employment Agency with a reference supplied by a Catholic seeking a job on HMS Caroline, so that the *Belfast Recorder* said that, in all probability, he had refused to disclose the reference because the man was a Roman Catholic, and found the Ministry of Defence guilty of unlawful discrimination? In those circumstances, does the Secretary of State agree with *The Daily Telegraph* that that casts most serious doubts about his judgment as a Minister, particularly in the Northern Ireland Office?

Mr. King: As the hon. Gentleman has made that personal attack, he owed it to the House to be better informed of his facts before he made it. It gives me the opportunity to tell the hon. Gentleman and the House that the matters contained in the second half of the editorial to which he referred are not true.

County Down (Hospitals)

8. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if, in view of the recent announcements

on cash limits, he will take steps to ensure that the residents of South Down served by the Down group of hospitals will not be deprived of any of the minimum medical facilities which are at present available to them.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): The Eastern health and social services board has recently issued a detailed consultative document on options for changes to the pattern of services in its area, including South Down. Since the board itself has not yet reached any conclusions, it would not be right for me to comment at this stage.

Mr. McGrady: Is the Minister aware of the statement in the House yesterday by the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, about the biggest ever capital investment programme in the National Health Service for Scotland? Will he compare that with the draconian cuts and severe budget restrictions imposed on national health in Northern Ireland? In those circumstances, will he reconsider his Budget proposals for 1988-89 for NHS provision in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Needham: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern on this question of the Down services. This is the second time that we have been able to discuss the matter today. I have told him that I will consider most carefully any proposals from the board. I must point out that, as he is well aware, the level of health provision in Northern Ireland is second to none in the whole of the United Kingdom.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the serious concern in Northern Ireland about the way that he is handling hospitals? Is he also aware that if he continues on this line hospitalisation will be very difficult? It is not one section but the entire community that is suffering. I have taken an interest in the case that is before the House. It is not good enough for the Minister to tell us that it is a matter for the board. When he takes money away from the board, how can it make any other decision?

Mr. Needham: Rather than damaging the Health Service in Northern Ireland, the hon. Gentleman should accept that the level of provision of health care is higher in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the United Kingdom, as it ought to be. While I accept that it creates problems for the Health Service, the provision of 5·2 per cent. additional funds this year is the absolute maximum that can be afforded because of the pressures of the law and order budget and unemployment.

Mr. John D. Taylor: In considering any changes in hospital provision within the Eastern board's area, will the Minister always bear in mind that the most rapidly increasing population is in the Bangor-Newtownards part of the area?

Mr. Needham: I am sure that the Eastern health board will take that into account when it considers the options.

Harland and Wolff (AOR1 Contract)

11. **Mr. Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has now made any public subsidy available in relation to the AOR1 contract at Harland and Wolff.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Viggers): No, Sir.

Mr. Brown: In view of the Minister's predictable answer, will he assure the House that the Government are not in breach of the EEC sixth directive on shipbuilding, which must apply to Harland and Wolff as it does to other merchant shipyards? In the light of press speculation in Monday's *Belfast Telegraph*, can he make a statement to the House on the future of Harland and Wolff?

Mr. Viggers: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that Harland and Wolff must comply with the EC sixth directive. I saw the speculative story to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The position has not changed in recent weeks. The future of the yard will depend upon its ability to win orders — this, too, has not changed in recent weeks — within the constraints of the EC sixth directive, which limits Government subsidy on merchant shipping orders to 28 per cent.

Mr. Maginnis: Does the Minister agree that there is a difference between orders for merchant ships and orders for ships for the Royal Navy, the first category being eligible for subsidy, whereas the second is not? Will he tell the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) that it is time he realised that if the AOR2 had been allocated on merit, perhaps Swan Hunter would not have received the contract and it would have gone properly to Harland and Wolff, as the AOR1 did?

Mr. Viggers: The hon. Gentleman has made his own point to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown). The hon. Gentleman is right about shipbuilding orders. The EC sixth directive relates to merchant shipbuilding orders. I am pleased that Harland and Wolff has now virtually completed the ATS vessel, which should be delivered shortly to the Ministry of Defence. Of course, the AOR1 is also under construction in the yard.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Will the Minister tell the House that it is the view of the Northern Ireland Office that Harland and Wolff has been making determined efforts to better its lot in the shipbuilding industry? What is his Department doing to ensure that the speculation in recent newspaper reports will not come about.

Mr. Viggers: We congratulate Harland and Wolff on the efforts that it has made to improve its performance, but its future will depend on its ability to win further shipbuilding orders within the constraints to which I have referred.

Mr. Jim Marshall: May I press the Minister further on the future of Harland and Wolff? He will be aware that in the *Belfast Telegraph* on Monday of this week there was an article which said that closure was an option being considered by the Government. Will the Minister take the opportunity to deny that closure is on the cards? As the Minister knows, the economic future of Belfast and of Northern Ireland will be disastrous if the shipyard is closed. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I ask hon. Members not to carry on private conversations?

Mr. Viggers: I have already said in my response to the initial question that the position has not changed in recent weeks. The future of the yard must depend on management's ability to win orders. That is not the Government's responsibility. It is the responsibility of management, and we support it in its search.

School Statistics

12. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of schools in Northern Ireland have a selective intake; and what percentage of school leavers in each sector achieve five or more higher grade O-levels or equivalent.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): In most areas of Northern Ireland pupils are selected for grammar or secondary intermediate school education on the basis of a transfer test undertaken at age 11. Twenty-nine per cent. of the secondary schools in Northern Ireland are grammar schools and 71 per cent. are secondary intermediate schools. The percentages with five or more higher grade O-levels are 83 and 14 respectively.

Mr. Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that the figures that he has given, in overall terms and indeed for pupils in non-selective schools, are significantly higher than for many authorities in England and Wales? Does he also agree that the more flexible, less ideological and more pragmatic attitude towards selective education in Northern Ireland contains important lessons for those who wish to raise standards in England and Wales?

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government are committed to raising standards in schools throughout the United Kingdom. I can confirm that in Northern Ireland 36 per cent. of school leavers have five or more good grade O-levels, as compared with 27 per cent. in England and Wales. I have to tell my hon. Friend, however, that in Northern Ireland those who leave school with no qualifications at all represent 22 per cent. of the pupils, whereas the figure in England and Wales is 10 per cent. That is obviously a matter of concern, and we must have responsibility for children's education and the raising of educational standards right across the education spectrum.

Ms. Short: Is the Minister not concerned that 71 per cent. of children in Northern Ireland go to secondary schools, where they have only a 14 per cent. chance of obtaining significant O-level passes? Does that not mean that the bulk of children are not receiving real opportunities in secondary education? Will he reconsider the position?

Dr. Mawhinney: I do not accept what the hon. Lady has said. We seek in Northern Ireland to run a school system that maximises children's potential. It is a mistake to assume that the only children worth educating are those who are intellectually bright. All children have the potential for development, and we try to run a school system that produces that development.

Mr. Kilfedder: The religious apartheid that exists in education in Northern Ireland—two systems supported by the taxpayer—cruelly divides young people during their formative years when they should be getting to know each other, and learning together. Will the Minister, who has already done considerable work in this regard, provide further money for the integrated schools in Northern Ireland, which provide a good academic education?

Dr. Mawhinney: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for the commitment that he has expressed over such a long period to seeking to educate the children of Northern Ireland together, or at least in closer association than in the past. He knows that we are trying to be as helpful as possible, in a variety of ways, to reduce the present divide between the children.

Sex Discrimination Order

14. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many replies he has received to his request for observations on the draft Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order.

Mr. Viggers: The answer is 27.

Ms. Mowlam: Will the Minister state his own commitment to equal opportunities for woman in Northern Ireland, and will he amend the draft order so that it is in line with European legislation?

Mr. Viggers: The Government are committed to equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland, as in the rest of the United Kingdom. We think it right, however, that promotion of equality of opportunity in relation to gender in Northern Ireland should be handled as it is in the rest of the United Kingdom.

As for our own commitment in Northern Ireland, I am pleased to inform the hon. Lady that funding compares very favourably with that of the Equal Opportunities Commission in Great Britain. It was increased by 11 per cent. in the year before last, and by 9 per cent. in the current year.

Kilroot Power Station

16. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what decision he has made regarding phase II of Kilroot power station.

Mr. Viggers: So many hon. Members are not here, for various reasons, that it has been quite difficult to keep pace with the questions.

Mr. Speaker: It is quite understandable.

Mr. Viggers: Revised bids for the provision of new generating capacity, including the completion of Kilroot phase II, were received from Northern Ireland Electricity and Antrim Power Company Ltd. at the end of January 1988. The revised proposals are currently being examined and until that process has been completed the Government will not be in a position to make a decision on future generating capacity.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful for that reply—eventually. I hope that the Minister will be rather more expeditious when considering the various options for Kilroot power station. I hope that he will bear in mind that Northern Ireland Electricity wants to convert phase II to coal and that that will also be very important for the coal industry in Ayrshire, particularly the area that I represent. I hope that, as a penance for his appalling delay in answering my question, he will agree that it ought to be converted to coal and give a long-term guarantee that that coal will come from Ayrshire.

Mr. Viggers: The hon. Gentleman is quite correct in saying that the availability of the completion of Kilroot power station with coal provides an attractive option for Northern Ireland. But there is a further attractive option for Northern Ireland, and that is the indigenous brown lignite resource. We are considering very carefully whether coal or lignite is the appropriate resource for future

generating capacity, and whether, if brown lignite is the choice, it should be through NIE or through the private bid which has been submitted to us.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Couchman: I recognise that my right hon. Friend, in her pre-eminent position as First Lord of the Treasury, will not share any Budget secrets with the House today. Nevertheless, will she confirm that she has impressed on her right hon. Friend the Chancellor that the experience of the last nine years shows that there is nothing contradictory or irreconcilable about raising tax thresholds, lowering tax rates and increasing public expenditure, notably on the National Health Service, in the sensible and prudent way that we have done and that we discussed last night? Is it not a fact that a low-tax economy increases incentive and productivity and ultimately leads to a higher tax yield for the services that we all desire?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. Lowering direct taxes is an essential part of getting the growth that we have seen over the last few years and therefore getting the resources to spend on such things as the National Health Service and increased nurses' pay. We also have to remember that nurses, too, pay income tax, and that when a nurse on £170 a week knows that she pays £46 a week in tax and national insurance contributions together she is not going to say that she wants taxes to be kept at that level. She would much prefer to have more net take-home pay through reduced taxation.

Mr. Kinnock: If the banning of organisations completely dedicated to securing peaceful change in South Africa does not make the Prime Minister stop her pathetic appeasement of apartheid, what will?

The Prime Minister: We do not appease apartheid in any way. As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, we spend considerable sums of money in helping black South Africans to get the education that some of them might otherwise not get, and on helping security in the front-line states. I wish to make it quite clear that I condemn the latest move by President Botha to suppress free argument and debate. It will be a great setback to the possibility of peaceful negotiations. However, the application of universal sanctions would not improve, but only make worse, a very difficult situation.

Mr. Kinnock: When the Prime Minister's words of condemnation are mocked by the Botha regime and held in contempt by the victims of that regime, is it not plain to everyone that those words deserve that contempt and encourage further repression by those in charge of apartheid? When Bishop Tutu says that South Africa is heading for war, and when her own Foreign Secretary says that he thinks that the latest bannings make violence more likely, why does she not convene the Security Council, press for comprehensive sanctions and make an effort that is really worth while?

The Prime Minister: We do not make a difficult situation any easier by adding to it starvation and poverty for those whom we wish to help.

Q2. **Mr. Neil Thorne:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thorne: Will my right hon. Friend condemn the actions of those head-in-the-sand trade union leaders in the National Health Service in Scotland who led the strike yesterday, against the interests of the patients who could benefit enormously from the extra funds that would become available if the Health Service in Scotland had the benefit of the privatisation of services that applies to the Health Service in England?

The Prime Minister: Yes. It was a political strike in Scotland yesterday on the part of the nurses. Competitive tendering in England has released some £100 million a year that will go direct to extra patient care. It is appalling that there are people in Scotland who would rather waste money than save it by competitive tendering, and thus have more money to spend on patient care. We utterly condemn that strike, which led to about 400 operations being postponed.

Mr. Steel: Will the Prime Minister explain to the House how the current cuts in the family planning provisions in the Health Service will save money in the long run, given that the likely result will be greater occupancy of maternity beds or more abortions?

The Prime Minister: I hope that those who need and want such advice will continue to take it. I do not believe that any changes would have the effect that the right hon. Gentleman says.

Q3. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hughes: Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning the murder last night of two members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the return of terror tactics to the centre of Belfast? Does she agree that if foreign Governments wish to look at the security forces in Northern Ireland, they also should look at the use of the bomb-to-kill policy of Republican terrorists?

The Prime Minister: It is a tragedy that two more members of the Ulster Defence Regiment were killed last night, bringing the number of the security forces killed in Northern Ireland this year to six, in addition to the 27 who were killed last year. I hope that those who seek to undermine or criticise the security forces will remember the merciless attacks to which they are subjected and be thankful for the work that they do.

Mr. Maginnis: Does the Prime Minister recall how, in the wake of the Enniskillen tragedy, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) urged her to agree

"that no one should use the terrible suffering of those people of Enniskillen for political reasons?"—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1987; Vol. 122, c. 558.]

Does she believe that the same restraint should now be shown in regard to the tragic shooting in Aughnacloy last Sunday? Does she agree that it is unjust, unhelpful and uncharitable for Cardinal O'Fiaich to preach in his pulpit that that incident was murder?

The Prime Minister: Northern Ireland has suffered a great deal of violence, and that violence is continuing. Some individual tragic incidents have come to the public notice more than others. Our task should be the same on both sides of the border—to do everything we can to increase security and reduce the violence, because it is aimed not only at Northern Ireland; it is fundamentally aimed at the future of democracy in the Republic of Ireland.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the right hon. Lady bear in mind what happened in Belfast last night? She will appreciate how I feel today, when I say that one of those young men was a member of my church, engaged to a young lady who is a member of my church, and the last time I spoke to them was to arrange their marriage. The other young man who was murdered last night was from the same district. I ask her to have a word with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about the circumstances of the killing. Is she aware that a hoarding erected by the Lang company obscured the vision of the patrol, preventing it from seeing what was happening in the Smithfield area? The patrol had made representations to its superior officers about this, and no action was taken. Will she see to it that the matter is thoroughly investigated and that young men who go on duty are listened to?

The Prime Minister: Yes, we understand how the hon. Gentleman feels. He may rest assured that we all feel the same way and express our sympathy to the families of those people, and to the families of those who were injured. I have heard what the hon. Gentleman said about the hoarding. The matter is being thoroughly investigated. I echo the sentiment, which I know he feels, that men of the Ulster Defence Regiment are particularly brave. We really are very fortunate that, whatever happens in Northern Ireland, and whatever the number of tragedies, people are still prepared to volunteer to come forward to protect democracy.

Mr. Eadie: Is the right hon. Lady aware that in Scotland since the general election her party has lost 2 per cent. support, and it was very poor before the general election? Can the right hon. Lady tell us whether it is part of her Government's strategy that we must lose 7,000 jobs in the mining industry as the price of privatisation? Why did she bring in aid the brief supplied by the SSEB, when she knew perfectly well that the matter was about to go to the courts?

The Prime Minister: If one is interested in jobs, and we are—although I note that the Opposition support many strikes aimed at the destruction of jobs and at moving jobs elsewhere—one is interested in each and every industry being highly competitive and able to supply its material to other industries at a world competitive price as delivered to the power stations. I understand that the latter matter has now been set down for a date for hearing and, therefore, I can say nothing further.

Q5. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Smith: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in August 1986—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have missed No. 4 I will go back to it after this question.

Mr. Smith: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in August 1986 the National Institute of Economic and Social Research forecast, for the calendar year 1987, growth of 1·8 per cent. and a PSBR of £11 billion? As it is now clear that growth in 1987 was 4·8 per cent. and there was no public sector borrowing requirement at all, will my right hon. Friend advise the Treasury to ignore the latest forecasts from the institute, except perhaps to advise it to buy a new computer?

The Prime Minister: Economic forecasting is, of course, notoriously difficult. I noticed an article in one of last Sunday's newspapers, which compared the actual forecasts with the outturn, and the forecasters did not come off very well. I have noticed the one to which my hon. Friend referred, but I think that it is now well understood and agreed that the most respected forecasts are those of the Treasury, and I am proud to be First Lord of it.

Mr. Speaker: I apologise to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth). Question No. 4.

Q4. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Howarth: Does the Prime Minister agree with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security that families should be urged to forgo a second holiday abroad to fund private health care, or does she join the Labour Benches in urging people to forgo a 1p reduction in tax to secure the health of the whole nation?

The Prime Minister: I am all for families being able to keep a bigger proportion of their own earnings, so that they can make their own choice.

Mr. Lord: Does the Prime Minister agree with me that the hospital matron was unique, in that she was able to deal with consultants and doctors, understood the needs of patients and nurses, and was at the same time able to keep a very careful eye on such basic items as bed linen and bandages? I ask the Prime Minister to look at the matter urgently and reintroduce this valuable post as quickly as possible.

The Prime Minister: Yes. I think that many members of the public regret that there is now no official post of hospital matron, because they believe that it kept up the standard of hospitals in a unique way. It is possible for the head nurse still to have that title in hospital, but that is not quite the same as a post. A number of people have the title. More local health authorities can have it if they so wish. It is a matter that we shall look at in our general review.

Q7. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Boyes: Is the Prime Minister aware that thousands of pensioners who live in houses with community alarms and similar apparatus, including up to 300 in Sunderland borough, have been waiting months for the NTVLRO to make a decision about whether they qualify for concessionary licences? Will she speed up this process and, further, when she instructs the Chancellor of the Exchequer what to put in his Budget, will she make sure that he leaves some money so that these folk get what they deserve, a 5p licence for their television?

The Prime Minister: I will of course call the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) has said. It is not our policy to have 5p television licences for all old-age pensioners, as he knows, although that is the case in certain homes. Such a licence would only put the burden on all other television licence payers.

Business of the House

3.33 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): May I ask the Leader of the House to state the business for next week.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 29 FEBRUARY—Opposition day (9th allotted day). Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate entitled "The Suppression of Majority Rights in South Africa and the Responsibility of the British Government". Afterwards there will be a debate entitled "The Urgent Need to Save British Science". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

Consideration of Lords amendments to the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Bill.

Motion relating to the Education (Publication and Consultation Etc.) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations.

TUESDAY 1 MARCH — Until about seven o'clock motions on a social security order and regulations. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motion on the Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order.

Motion on the annual report from the European Court of Auditors for 1986. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

WEDNESDAY 2 MARCH — There will be a debate on Welsh affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Motions on the Coal Industry (Restructuring Grants) and (Limit on Deficit Grants) Orders.

THURSDAY 3 MARCH—There will be a debate on the Royal Navy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 4 MARCH—Private members' motions.

MONDAY 7 MARCH — Debate on a Government motion on the privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

[Debate on Tuesday 1 March

Relevant Documents:

Unemployment Benefit (Disqualification Period) Order 1988

Social Security (Benefit) (Members of the Forces) Amendment Regulations 1988 (S.I. 1988, No 269)

Debate on Tuesday 1 March

Relevant European Documents:

Community Document for Debate

OJ C336 Annual Report of Court of Auditors for 1986

Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee

HC 43-xiv (1987-88) para 4

The following Documents and reports are also relevant:—

Community Documents

(a) 9392/87	*Fight against fraud*
(b) 9130/87	*Court of Auditors special report on the quota/additional levy system in the milk sector*
(c) Unnumbered	*Court of Auditors' report on wine distillation schemes*

Relevant Reports

(a) HC 43-xv (1987-88) para 5.

(b) HC 43-xi (1987-88) para 7.

(c) HC 43-x (1987-88) para 5.]

Mr. Dobson: I thank the Leader of the House for his statement. The Opposition welcome the fact that there will be an early opportunity in Government time to debate the Government's proposals to increase electricity prices and sell off the electricity supply industry, including nuclear power stations, to private owners.

Can the Leader of the House tell us why the debate on Welsh affairs next week is being held not on St. David's day but the day after?

Will the Leader of the House tell us when we can expect the Select Committee on televising proceedings of the House to get down to work?

Finally, perhaps in an effort to improve order in the House before it is televised, can the Leader of the House tell us whether he is taking steps on the Government side to end the deliberate barracking of Opposition speakers, such as that faced by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) yesterday, and end the concerted efforts of Conservative Members to take up time in debates so that Opposition Members with direct constituency interests in those debates are excluded from them?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman has asked me three questions. First, I am sorry that it has not proved possible to arrange the debate on Welsh affairs for St. David's day, but, all things considered, I do not believe that we have done too badly.

With regard to televising the House and the establishment of the Select Committee, there are active discussions taking place through the usual channels and with all parts of the House. I hope that we can get that Select Committee set up as soon as possible so that we can get on with things. The hon. Gentleman's criticisms in his third question sound a bit like whingeing and I believe that they are a matter for you, Mr. Speaker, rather than for me.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I wonder whether my right hon. Friend remembers that, last October, I had to go to court, at great expense to myself, to defend the confidentiality of correspondence between myself and a constituent who was involved as a witness in a murder case? Therefore, I wonder whether my right hon. Friend would agree to a debate on the confidentiality of correspondence between Members and their constituents especially given the fact that last week, during the rate-capping debate, at column 1240, the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell) quoted the contents of a letter sent to me by the director of finance of Ealing council, and evidently copied to the hon. Member without my knowledge, concerning one of my constituents. That letter was a private matter between myself, my constituent and the director of finance and I believe that an important principle was breached, let alone good manners.

Mr. Wakeham: I do remember my hon. Friend's involvement in that matter last October, but I do not believe that I can promise him a debate on that subject. I should have thought that such things were better dealt with by the conventions of the House, that confidential documents should be kept confidential. I should have thought that to proceed in that way was in the best interests of us all.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): May I thank the Leader of the House for agreeing to have the debate on the Scottish education order on the Floor of the House on Monday evening.

Given that a number of timetable motions have been tabled, when does the right hon. Gentleman expect that the House will have an opportunity to debate the reports of the Select Committee on Procedure about timetable motions as well as its recommendations about private Members' business, particularly those relating to the use of petitions?

There have been newspaper reports that the Scottish Select Committee is again being delayed because of the unwillingness of Conservative Members to volunteer to serve on it. Can the Leader of the House say when the House will be able to give instructions to the Committee of Selection to give the go-ahead for the Scottish Select Committee to be established?

Mr. Wakeham: The Procedure Committee has a number of reports outstanding and it is certainly my intention to provide time for a debate on them. At this stage I cannot give a specific undertaking about the timing of that debate, but I believe that it is extremely important that hon. Members on both sides of the House should study those reports before we proceed to a debate.

With regard to the Scottish Select Committee, I have had a helpful letter from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and I believe that that will enable us to make some further progress.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): Although I agree with my right hon. Friend about the importance of studying the reports of the Procedure Committee before they are debated, does my right hon. Friend also agree that it is extremely important that we have that Committee back in being because there are a number of matters to which it should turn its attention?

Mr. Wakeham: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend and, indeed, discussions are presently going on through the usual channels to try to get that Committee set up.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Clerks of the House have said that the Opren drug disaster is not sub judice under the rules of the House? Yet the Government have done nothing to help the 1,300 applicants who have, between them, received a total amount less than was given to one American citizen. Why cannot we debate that issue?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that the right hon. Gentleman and a number of other hon. Members are concerned about this matter, but I cannot promise him an early debate on it. I do not think I can add anything of substance to what I said about it two or three weeks ago.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, although the report produced yesterday by the Public Accounts Committee on charities says little that people in the charity world have not been saying for a number of years, its publication, coming on top of the recent decision not to prosecute the Moonies, and last year's efficiency review under Sir Philip Woodfield, will have added to the interest in a debate in the House in Government time on charities and the urgent need to tighten the regulations?

Mr. Wakeham: I appreciate that this is an important matter. As my hon. Friend said, the report has only just been published. The Government are considering it and their observations will be published in a Treasury minute in due course. That is the best thing to do first.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): When may we expect a statement on Scottish electricity privatisation, which is important not only in itself, but because it is clearly the cause of the impasse and breakdown in relationships between British Coal and the South of Scotland Electricity Board?

Mr. Wakeham: I can confirm that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will be making a statement in the near future.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): In view of the large number of our hon. Friends who have signed the early-day motion on the National Union of Students closed shop, will my right hon. Friend give an undertaking about an early debate on that important subject, as literally hundreds of thousands of people are affected by that petty tyranny?

[That this House welcomes the 1987 Employment Act which introduces legislation that will significantly reverse closed shop arrangements, but notes that hundreds of thousands of students will still have no choice over whether or not they join the National Union of Students; and hopes that the Secretary of State for Education and Science will take action to rectify this anomalous position as soon as possible.]

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that a number of our hon. Friends feel strongly about this. I cannot promise an early debate on the subject, but it seems to me that, with a little ingenuity, it might well be raised on the remaining stages of the Education Reform Bill.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Will the Leader of the House recall a matter that I have raised with him during business questions before? I refer to the prayer, tabled as early-day motion No. 499 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), on the subject of changes in regulations for planning inquiries relating to power stations and overhead power lines.

[That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Electricity Generating Stations and Overhead Lines (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1987 (S.I., 1987, No. 2182), dated 16th December 1987, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18th December, be annulled.]

Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that the praying days for the measure were exhausted on 19 February? Will he give us an assurance that the matter will be debated on the Floor of the House on revocation?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that the time has run out for praying but I do not think that that should necessarily stop us having a debate if one can be agreed through the usual channels. We are trying to work that out at the moment.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Is the Leader of the House aware that many hon. Members on both sides are concerned about certain parts of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, and in particular about the lack of provision in it for compensation for shooters who will have their weapons taken away? He will be aware that

the Minister announced a compensation buy-back scheme in Committee after a constructive debate. When will he lay the money resolution?

Mr. Wakeham: The Government are considering the matter. We hope to table a motion as soon as possible, but I can add nothing more to that.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Will the Leader of the House reconsider his decision about the Welsh day debate being called for Wednesday? As a foreigner, the Secretary of State may not appreciate the significance of St. David's day to Wales. We do not want our daffodils drooping on Wednesday. We demand a debate on St. David's day; we have been asking for that for years. It is time the Leader of the House appreciated the significance of that day to the people of Wales.

Mr. Wakeham: I am not too sure about all this foreigner nonsense. My father was born in Cardiff and I reckon that makes me more Welsh than some people who consider themselves Welsh. I thought I had done pretty well to hit 2 March; I am sorry if that upsets the hon. Gentleman. I suggest that he finds out how to look after his daffodil.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): My right hon. Friend will be aware that diplomatic moves are afoot to advance the peace process in the middle east. Will he, in the light of the considerable interest in the subject that has been shown among hon. Members, arrange for a wide-ranging foreign affairs debate before very long?

Mr. Wakeham: There will clearly be a need for a foreign affairs debate before too long, but I cannot promise one in the immediate future. There will be Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Questions next Wednesday, so perhaps my hon. Friend could try his luck then.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Will the Leader of the House accept that some of us regard it as an anachronism that there should have to be an annual Welsh day when Parliament should be dealing with our problems all the year round?

On a more substantive matter, will he tell the House of the fate of the Griffiths report? When can we expect a statement? Will he give an assurance that that important report will be published?

Mr. Wakeham: I can think of worse things to do than to debate Welsh affairs in the House all the time. I cannot make a promise on the matter, but I shall refer the hon. Gentleman's question about the Griffiths report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Will my right hon. Friend accept that many people agree with him that space research must take its place with other priorities? None the less, does he agree that the report of the Lord Shackleton illustrates that there are grounds for concern about the United Kingdom's space programme? Surely this subject must be worthy of a full debate in the House.

Mr. Wakeham: It is certainly worthy of debate. The Government would be happy to defend their record on space research, which we consider to be good given all the commitments involved. My hon. Friend might try his hand, subject to you, Mr. Speaker, during Monday's debate on British science when he could raise some of his points then.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): May I press the Leader of the House to expand slightly on the answer that he gave about the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs? It would ease frustration among Labour Members if we could know whether the right hon. Gentleman will be in a position to put forward Government names for the Committee in the near future.

Mr. Wakeham: To travel hopefully is not always to arrive, but I shall do my best. I had been waiting for a letter from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). I have now received a helpful and constructive letter from him, but I cannot add anything further.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): May I renew my call to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for a debate in Government time on the problems facing the civil aviation industry? Last Monday, we had a good run for our money on the subject of air safety, which highlighted the need for a debate on that topic. By 31 March, the Civil Aviation Authority will require comments on its review of air licensing policy. It seems quite wrong for decisions to be made on that subject until the House has had a proper opportunity to discuss all the issues involved.

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that my hon. Friend takes a great interest in these important matters. I wish that I could help him by promising a debate in the near future. Unfortunately, there are many conflicting calls on our time. The chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority is actively reviewing the procedure for investigating and reporting air misses. No doubt my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will be reporting to the House in the near future. That will be the next step.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on low pay? When the Prime Minister visits my constituency tomorrow we hope to draw attention to the growing problem of low pay, particularly in the Health Service, where the disastrous privatisation programme has meant that not even jobcentres will accept advertisements from Mediclean.

Mr. Wakeham: I wish that I could find time for the hon. Lady to have a debate on the subject. We are coming up to the season for an extended debate on the Budget resolutions. Some of the points that the hon. Lady wishes to make could be made in that debate.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): My right hon. Friend will know that for several weeks I have been pressing for a statement on meningitis. I am grateful to him for the courteous and detailed letter that he sent me following my request last week. This is a matter of national importance, not merely personal importance. I press the Government to make a statement on meningitis because many people who read snippets here and there in the newspapers do not know the full extent and nature of the problem. It is time that the Government cared and made a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks about the way in which I dealt with the matter last time. I shall refer the issue to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services to establish whether he thinks anything further should be done.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate or a statement on the current dispute at TV-am? Is he aware that for several months

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

there has been a dispute, with a lockout of members of the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians, because of the management's attitude? Does he know that, according to recent reports, in contravention of section 20 of the Broadcasting Act 1981, the Saudis now own almost a controlling share in that organisation? Will the right hon. Gentleman have a word with his hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken)—one of the directors of the company—who has issued a statement calling on Tory MPs to go to TV-am with fellow directors on Wednesday to break through the picket line? When he gets there, I shall be there, along with some of my friends, to ensure that those from other television companies who look to this dispute in the hope of maximising their profits do not turn it into another Wapping.

Mr. Wakeham: When the hon. Gentleman started his question, I was determined not to have another debate. Having listened to him and realised to what extent he has got the wrong end of the stick over most of the issues involved, I was tempted to change my mind. However, I thought better of it; there will be no debate.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that a large number of right hon. and hon. Members have signed early-day motion 6?

[That this House deplores the fact that, alone among public service pensioners, those whose service was overseas cannot count pre-appointment war service towards their pensions; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to remedy this injustice to a dwindling group of elderly people whose working lives were spent in adverse conditions while dedicated to the service of British interests overseas.]

It draws the attention of the Government to the anomaly whereby all public service pensioners get war service credit in their pensions unless that service was overseas. Will my right hon. Friend allow us a debate so that what is fast becoming a majority of hon. Members may impress upon the Government the need to do justice to this group of very deserving people?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that this is an important matter, and my hon. Friend has raised it on a number of occasions. However, I cannot promise an early debate and I cannot reasonably add much to what my hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development said earlier in the week.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff South, and Penarth): The Leader of the House has had opportunities to explain the reasons for not having a debate on Welsh affairs on St. David's day. He has not yet given us a reason. Will he take this further opportunity to do so? Will he reassure us that it is not simply because of the non-availability of the Secretary of State for Wales, who may prefer creating photo-opportunities in Wales to attending to serious business in this House? Will the arrival of the television cameras in this House attract the Secretary of State to be with us for a debate on St. David's day and will the Leader of the House assure us that next year we can have the debate on St. David's day?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot at this stage promise the date of the debate in 1989. On this year's debate, if the hon. Gentleman does not know already, he will shortly know how these matters are arranged. They are arranged through the usual channels for the best convenience of everybody in the House and we did our best to meet all the requirements in this case. It is usually not wise to speculate or make slightly mischievous statements about what one thinks the reasons are, because one is usually wrong.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend consider having a debate on Scottish affairs only on St. Andrew's day and a debate on English affairs on St. George's day?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend does not say what we should do for the rest of the time. His suggestion is very helpful, but I do not think that I can quite accommodate it.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): May I again ask the Leader of the House to consider a debate in Government time on the important subject of speech therapy provision in our schools? He will agree with me that many parents are very distressed at the shortage of qualified people to teach and help youngsters suffering speech defects.

Will he also reconsider his disappointing reply on the Welsh day debate and may I remind him that my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) will have no difficulty in looking after his daffodil?

Mr. Wakeham: I felt sure that the hon. Gentleman would have to get in on the act on the question of the Welsh day debate. I cannot be more helpful than I was before.

I imagine that the whole House recognises that the problems of children with speech defects are a serious matter. I should like to provide time for an early debate and I shall look into the matter, but I cannot promise that I shall succeed.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Will the Leader of the House please bear in mind that when the Criminal Justice Bill returns to the House of Commons there will doubtless be a well-supported clause for the reintroduction of capital punishment? As that is a matter of such public interest and has such public support, and as the state has a duty to protect its citizens, will my right hon. Friend please allow a full day of debate on that important matter?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that my hon. Friend is fast on his feet in such matters, but we should wait until the Bill returns to this House to see what amendments are tabled. We shall then work out how best to deal with them in the customary fashion.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May we have a debate on the growing misery of vandalism and theft that afflicts shops, homes, churches and schools, especially in my constituency, and on the Home Secretary's refusal to make available the extra police who are needed on the largest estates? May we ask the Home Secretary for a statement on when he proposes to reply to the request from the chief constable of Leicestershire for 91 additional policemen, which will not be enough to contain the menace that has increased during the past nine years?

Mr. Wakeham: I shall certainly refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I very much hope that in any reply my right hon. Friend may make he will point out to the hon. and learned Gentleman the

additional resources that are now available in the number of police as a result of this Conservative Government's policies in recent years.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): May I reinforce the plea of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) for a debate on civil aviation because there are not only the matters to which my hon. Friend referred? I ask my right hon. Friend to note other matters, such as airline competition policy, airport capacity and the licensing of certain foreign carriers coming to this country's regional airports, all of which are jostling for attention and would justify a useful debate.

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise the strength of what my hon. Friend says, but I do not think I can add to what I said earlier.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): From the questions asked the Leader of the House will realise the importance attached by Scottish Members to the Scottish Select Committee. What priority does the Leader of the House place on a Committee which is unique by the fact of its non-existence? In saying that a letter will lead to further progress, can he guarantee an announcement some time during the 20th century?

Mr. Wakeham: A Committee that does not exist is not unique. Many Committees that do not exist are unique. I cannot add anything more, but I am working quite hard on this matter, as the hon. Gentleman well knows.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate on local government in Derbyshire where, as the latest of its nonsensical ideas, the county council has now issued 100 guidelines, which no doubt took a lot of time, to staff in its schools to say that they should not refer in letters to "he" or "she" when talking about their pupils? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is yet another of the county council's nonsensical ideas, following that of printing on all school notepaper, "Derbyshire supports nuclear-free zones"? A debate would be a useful exercise to expose the abuse of local government that we are currently facing in Derbyshire.

Mr. Wakeham: I have to say to my hon. Friend that in all charity there are not enough hours in the day to expose all the nonsenses of that local authority. However, it seems to me that he might find an opportunity in the not too distant future to table an amendment to the Local Government Finance Bill when it comes back to the Floor of the House.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Does the Leader of the House remember the Prime Minister reluctantly admitting that about 170,000 pensioners have been robbed of £1 million in compensation as a result of the recent error in the calculation of the retail prices index? Does he also remember that several hon. Members of all parties have raised this matter with him? Can he give us some inkling of the outcome of his meeting with the Prime Minister on this subject? If he is not prepared to reconsider the matter to ensure that the Government meet their moral obligation to pay that money, will he at least ensure that that £1 million is given to pensioner organisations which are campaigning for a substantial increase in pensions and for a better deal for pensioners?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman, who is usually so careful about these things, should re-read the statement because he clearly did not take it on board. The Government have done something which they were under no legal obligation to do. They believe that they have got it right. On the previous occasion that the matter was raised in the House, one of the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends raised the case of an individual pensioner, which I did not believe was a sensible way of proceeding. The Government's statements on these matters have shown that, for all practical purposes, they have dealt with the matter in as fair and reasonable a way as possible.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): Will there be time for an early debate to consider the terms of early-day motion 652 relating to miscarriages of justice which so far today has the names of 157 right hon. and hon. Members?

[That this House, in view of the widespread disquiet at the recent judgment by the Court of Appeal in the case of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings, calls upon the Home Secretary to establish an independent review tribunal, along the lines recommended by the Home Affairs Select Committee Report on Miscarriages of Justice, in particular to examine the claim by the honourable Member for Sunderland South that he has traced and interviewed the four men responsible for the bombings and that they are all in Ireland.]

If not, may we have a substantial debate on the Floor of the House at Report stage of the Criminal Justice Bill?

Mr. Wakeham: What is discussed when the Criminal Justice Bill comes back to the House is not a matter for me. I do not see how I can reasonably arrange a debate on this issue at the present time, particularly in view of proceedings which I understand are shortly to take place in the courts.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have a statement on the EEC agreement with Turkey on the importing of acrylic yarns, which has a restrictive safeguard clause which, before it can be operated, involves the sacking of workers and the closure of mills? Is the Leader of the House aware that already that agreement with Turkey through the EEC has led to short-time working in Bradford and a statement is urgently needed to protect jobs? Is it not time that some attention was given to the way in which the Government are continually capitulating to the demands of the Common Market with a consequent adverse effect on jobs in constituencies such as mine?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not accept the substance of the hon. Gentleman's question, but I shall certainly refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): In response to the question put to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), does my right hon. Friend consider that perhaps we should shortly have a debate on broadcasting so that that hon. Gentleman can explain to his lower-paid constituents, with whose woes he never fails to regale us, how it is that next week he will be appearing on a potentially violent picket line in order to defend the rights of television technicians who earn in excess of £40,000 a year for less than 30 hours a week?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend puts his point well and I wish that I could arrange such a debate next week, but I am afraid that I do not see how I can fit it in.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is the Leader of the House aware that the non-political organisation, Hospital Alert, has arranged a national lobby of Parliament today and at least 5,000 people will be coming to the Palace of Westminster? Will he give an assurance that can be circulated to people throughout the country who make contact with that organisation that every Member of the House, apart from Ministers and Parliamentary Private Secretaries, are free to sign the early-day motion, which calls for additional resources for the National Health Service? Will he say that there is no need for any hon. Member to excuse his or her failure to sign because it can be amended to secure the necessary objective?

[That this House congratulates the Confederation of Health Service Employees on the publication of its Charter for the National Health Service entitled "2p for Health"; urges that when the Chancellor announces his Budget on 15th March he uses the money put aside for a 2p tax cut for the National Health Service instead; calls on National Health Service staff, those who use its services and those who care about its future to unite in calling for that money, which amounts to £2·5 billion, to be used to fund a way out of the crisis; calls for £2,000 million to go directly into patient services, taking National Health Service funding back to the real level it enjoyed in 1979 and £500 million to be spent immediately, to improve pay and conditions for staff; calls for funding to continue to be through the tax system so that care can be given free at the time of delivery; calls for a rise in health authority funding of at least 2·5 per cent. above the increase in gross domestic product over the next 12 years to bring health spending up to the average for West European countries so as to provide a stable financial framework and enable long-term planning; calls for the urgent talks on how to improve working conditions; calls for full funding for pay awards to relieve the pressure on hard-pressed health authorities in defence of patient services; calls for a guaranteed independent system of pay determination for all health staff; calls for a users' charter of rights setting out a legal right to treatment, calls for a duty on health authorities to look at the quality as well as the cost of services; and calls for the involvement of staff and users in ensuring that standards are met.

Mr. Wakeham: I am sorry to lecture the hon. Gentleman, but the first thing that one has to do before signing an early-day motion is to see whether its terms are reasonable and sensible and I hope that all will recognise that there has been a substantial increase in funding in the NHS under the Government which is likely to continue in future.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Did the Leader of the House hear that amazing interview given by the Rev. Pat Robertson, one of the Republican party's presidential candidates, in which he said that he had had a discussion with God who had told him that Europe and the middle east would be destroyed and the world taken over by the evangelists? Does the right hon. Gentleman share my concern that someone like the Rev. Pat Robertson might become President of the United States and, through the nuclear button, have the wherewithal to fulfil that prophecy?

Mr. Speaker: Order. This must bear some relation to our business here.

Mr. Banks: It relates to a request for a debate on broadcasting to enable the House to make its opinions clearly heard. We do not want those television evangelists polluting our airwaves with the disgusting spectacle of people such as Pat Robertson and Jimmy Swaggart pouring out their emotions. They are nothing more than Right-wing conspirators. Can we have a debate?

Mr. Wakeham: I had been wondering whether the hon. Gentleman had been overworking recently. I am bound to say that if he thinks that that is a sensible subject for a debate next week, he should go on holiday for a while.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Will the Leader of the House concede that a growing number of hon. Members on both sides of the House, and, indeed, people outside, feel that it is difficult for the Government and the Opposition to conduct their business effectively in the House after 10 pm? That may be even more evident with the televising of Parliament. Since there is no Procedure Committee, will the Leader of the House advise us how best this matter can be brought to the attention of the House for an early decision?

Mr. Wakeham: There is another hon. Member who seems to be falling by the wayside.

For many years the House has tried to conduct as much of its business as it can before 10 pm, but I do not see that, in the foreseeable future, we shall be able to finish our business before 10. I have a feeling that the hon. Gentleman would be the first to complain if some of the subjects that he wanted to debate could not be discussed.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the fact that members of the National and Local Government Officers Association have until 15 March to cast their vote in the political fund ballot? Is he also aware that NALGO is grossly misrepresenting the Trade Unions Act 1984? Will he arrange a debate so that the House can discuss NALGO's distorted campaign of misinformation in an attempt to mislead its members into voting yes?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that this is an important matter. I see the substance in what my hon. Friend says, but I cannot promise him an early debate. I suggest that he puts down a question to the Secretary of State for Employment for answer at Question Time next Tuesday.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Does the Leader of the House realise that the Scottish Grand Committee, which does still exist, has not met since daffodils last bloomed in all the lands of the United Kingdom? Has there ever been a time since the Union of Parliaments in 1707 when the Scottish Grand Committee has failed to meet for such a period of time, when the Welsh Grand Committee has met on three occasions since the general election? Is it because the Secretary of State for Scotland is fearful to come before the massed ranks of the Opposition to debate the crisis in the Health Service and in education in Scotland, not to mention the diversion of money from the important bypasses in my constituency to the A74, and many other issues?

Mr. Wakeham: If the hon. Gentleman likes to comfort himself with that view of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, whom I heard giving a good account of himself in the House earlier this week, he is welcome to do so. Whether the Scottish Grand

Committee meets in Edinburgh is not entirely a matter for me. Other parts of the House have a view on that. I can only say that I am glad that my ancestry was Welsh rather than Scots, as they seem to be a bit easier to control.

Electricity (Privatisation)

4.8 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Cecil Parkinson): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the future of the electricity supply industry in England and Wales.

In our manifesto, we promised to bring forward proposals to privatise the industry. Our purpose is to give the customer and the employees a better deal and a direct stake in the industry. I believe that the industry will achieve more if it is moved into the private sector, freed from Government interference, and made accountable to its customers and shareholders, including its employee shareholders.

In framing my proposals, I have adopted six principles. Decisions about the supply of electricity should be driven by the needs of customers. Competition is the best guarantee of the customers' interests. Regulation should be designed to promote competition, oversee prices and protect the customers' interests in areas where natural monopoly will remain. Security and safety of supply must be maintained. Customers should be given new rights, not just safeguards. All who work in the industry should be offered a direct stake in their future, new career opportunities and the freedom to manage their commercial affairs without interference from Government.

There is substantial room for competition in the electricity industry. The distribution and transmission of electricity are largely natural monopolies, in which it would not be economic to duplicate resources, but there is no natural monopoly in electricity generation, which accounts for some three quarters of the costs of electricity. Only if competition is introduced will there be real incentives for generators to build power stations efficiently, to have their stations available and to fuel and run them efficiently.

There are three conditions which must be met if competition in generation is to develop. First, the effective monopoly enjoyed by the Central Electricity Generating Board will have to be ended. It will not be sufficient to leave the CEGB in its dominant position and rely on the growth of competition from Scotland, France and private generators. Second, ownership and control of the national grid will have to be transferred to the distribution side of the industry. However well regulated, the CEGB would have little incentive to allow competing generators fair access to a grid that it owned and controlled. Private generating companies would have little incentive to enter the market and compete. Finally, the CEGB's obligation to provide bulk supplies of electricity will have to be ended, as it obliges the CEGB to take all the key decisions on power supply.

I therefore propose to introduce legislation at the earliest opportunity to provide powers to restructure and privatise the industry. Those powers will be used to reorganise the CEGB into three new companies. The first will be a new generating company, owning some 30 per cent. of the CEGB's existing capacity, all of it non-nuclear. The second will comprise the remainder of the CEGB's generating capacity, both fossil-fueled and nuclear. The third will be a national grid company, whose ownership will be transferred to the 12 existing area boards. The area boards will in turn be converted into 12 distribution

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companies, preserving their strong regional identity. The Government will consult the industry about the implications of privatisation for the employees and the continuing functions of the Electricity Council, but the council itself will be abolished when the new structure is put in place. When they have been established, the shares in the 12 distribution companies and two generating companies will be sold to the public and employees.

In future, the distribution companies will be able to look to private generators, Scotland, France, the two large generating companies or their own generation to meet demand. The new structure will introduce competition, which will be the best guarantee of the customer's interests, but the legislation will also provide safeguards and new rights. It will create new opportunities for employees.

First, it will establish regulatory arrangements to promote competition, to provide incentives for efficiency and to oversee electricity prices to the consumer.

Secondly, a number of measures will be taken to ensure the security of supply. Because there are not alternatives to electricity in many of its uses, security of supply is of great importance. The legislation will therefore place a clear obligation to supply on the 12 distribution companies, which will ensure that they contract for sufficient capacity, but security of supply is not simply a question of having sufficient capacity. Power has to be transmitted through the national grid and the grid controllers have a central role in planning and directing the use of power stations so as to prevent the failure of the system and to minimise cost. Our proposals will ensure that the national grid company, owned by the distribution companies, retains that central role. The integrity of the grid and the operation of power stations in merit order will be preserved.

The other principal condition for maintaining secure supply is to ensure that electricity is generated from the diversity of fuels. It would be irresponsible to rely on fossil fuels to meet all our electricity generating requirements. The legislation will therefore provide for a clear obligation to be placed on the distribution companies to contract for a specified proportion of non-fossil-fuelled generating capacity.

The legislation will also incorporate an electricity supply code, consolidating and updating the legislation that currently governs the supply of electricity, and dates back to the last century. Above all, we shall maintain present standards of safety throughout the industry.

Finally, the legislation will establish new rights for the consumer. Even after privatisation, the local distribution companies will remain natural monopolies. Although their prices will be regulated, I do not believe that this will be sufficient. The consumer will therefore be given the right to financial compensation, if the distribution companies fail to provide a guaranteed level of service. They will also be required to provide a range of performance indicators of standards of service, which will be published.

Competition and other measures that I have described will benefit the consumer, but the employees will also benefit and that is just as important. The new structure of the industry will provide wider career opportunities for employees and there will be attractive provisions to ensure that they can acquire shares. Existing pension obligations will be safeguarded. The legislation will make no changes to the industry's negotiating and consultation machinery.

Because of the importance of these proposals, I am today publishing them in the form of a White Paper and copies are now available in the Library and in the Vote Office.

The electricity industry has much to be proud of, but I believe that it can achieve more. My proposals will create a modern competitive industry, owned by the public and responsive to the needs of customers and employees.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): I think that the House will at last welcome a statement from the Government on the privatisation of electricity and the publication of the White Paper which we have been calling for. The Secretary of State has presented a highly technical matter to us and we shall need to give proper thought to it. A week on Monday, we shall have the opportunity to debate the issue and to make our points after consideration.

We have heard for a considerable time all the controversy about the Government's proposals. The Secretary of State has confirmed again today that consumers' interests and needs will be guaranteed by competition, but, at the same time, we have heard that he will protect monopolies. It is not a question of private competition; it is a question of monopolies, oligopolies and regulated control and has absolutely nothing to do with competition. Any close reading of the White Paper would certainly show that. If that is contested, the Secretary of State, in both his statement and the White Paper, talks of "natural monopolies". *[Interruption.]* If Conservative Members do not understand what that means for the exploitation of the consumer, they do not understand the theory of their own competition philosophy.

Does the Secretary of State accept that the White Paper takes the organisation of the electricity supply industry back 50 years? Does he accept th the integration of the system has produced its efficiency and cheaper prices? Does he accept that the dismantling of the electricity supply industry is against the world trend and represents a triumph of ideology over common sense? Why does he dismantle the electricity supply industry that has ensured adequate investment, a reliable, national grid and electricity prices that are presently among the lowest in the world and produced by a public utility?

Has the Secretary of State read the 1981 report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, established by this Government, on the generation of electricity and its 1987 report on bulk transmission of electricity? Is he aware that both reports concluded that, although criticisms could be made, the public utility had not operated against the public interest? That is the judgment of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission which was set up by the Government.

Does the Secretary of State accept the recent Electricity Council report, which shows that, on the latest figures for electricity prices, Britain is the sixth cheapest of the 20 major economies in the world—cheap to the consumer and cheap to industry? *[Interruption.]* That was produced by the Electricity Council, a fact which may cause some humour on the Government Benches. What guarantee can the Secretary of State give that privatisation will produce cheaper prices than those produced by the public utility?

Does the Secretary of State accept that the electricity price increases due in April have been rejected as unjustified by the CBI, the Electricity Consumers Council

and any other consumer body? Indeed, his own White Paper says nothing about electricity prices. Has he read the independent report by Oxford Economic Research Associates, commissioned by the CBI, which rejects the notion that a 15 per cent. increase over two years is necessary to finance his £40 billion investment programme? Will he accept that the increase amounts to nothing more than a privatisation tax designed to fatten the industry prior to privatisation, and to be paid by the consumer?

What steps will the Secretary of State take to prevent the newly privatised electricity supply industry proposed in the White Paper from colluding on prices and quality of service? Is not the Secretary of State attempting to construct a wholly inappropriate model of competition in an industry where competition has had no place and never had, publicly or privately here or abroad? Does he accept that even in the United States there is not a minuscule of competition? Will we not have a rerun of the British Airways-BCal scenario where in the end the larger company buys out the smaller company? Is it not just monopoly first by collusion and then takeover?

What steps does the Secretary of State intend to take to ensure that British generating capacity is not taken over by foreign owners? Will he consider having a golden share, for whatever that is worth after Britoil, to protect the British capacity to generate electricity? Can he assure us with total confidence that Lord Marshall is wrong to say that the separation of the grid from transmission will risk the security of supply, or will the Secretary of State be known as the first Minister for blackouts?

Will the Secretary of State also ensure that the principle of obligation to supply to which he referred, which is now to be placed on the distribution companies, will guarantee maximum co-operation from private companies in the generation of power under any circumstances, and particularly in emergencies?

In view of the Government's active intention to encourage coal imports in a newly privatised industry, can the Secretary of State tell us what effect that will have on the British industry? Will it not mean an estimated import of 30 million tonnes of coal and add £1 billion to the balance of trade deficit, which already stands at a record level of £14 billion? Will job losses be as high as the 75,000 estimated by the Coalfield Communities Campaign? [HON. MEMBERS: "Too long."] The Secretary of State took well over 10 minutes to read his statement on the White Paper. I must protest at the barracking of the yobboes on the Government side. I look to you, Mr. Speaker, to give me support.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman wants my support, he shall have it.

Mr. Prescott: If the Secretary of State believes in the power of the market, why does he intend to import nuclear generation into the newly privatised industry? The Secretary of State, who believes in market forces, intends to force private distribution companies to take a share of nuclear energy, yet when it comes to the coal industry he says that market forces will prevail and coal will be bought from the cheapest source of supply. Why is the rule different for nuclear energy when the Government believe so strongly in the market solution? This is intervention by the Government, which is totally inconsistent.

Why is privatisation going ahead when the Secretary of State has singularly failed to present the House with any evidence to counter the charge that it will lead to higher prices, job losses and poorer service to the consumer? Is this the price to be paid for future tax cuts?

In conclusion——

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a heavy day in front of us. The hon. Gentleman should now conclude.

Mr. Prescott: Has the Secretary of State read the report of the Gas Consumers Council which shows that, after the privatisation of gas, disconnections last year rose by 35 per cent.? Can he give the House a guarantee that a similar fate will not face consumers in a privatised electricity industry, with consequences for those who may suffer cold-related illnesses, including hypothermia, and who suffer fuel poverty? After all, 30,000 people die each year from cold-related illnesses. When will the Secretary of state produce a long-term energy policy which is capable of meeting the long-term needs of the nation and using the energy resources which are available in a sensible and coherent way?

The Secretary of State, who defends his policy in the name of the consumer, must note that only five paragraphs out of 65 in the White Paper say anything about the consumer. This is not a policy about energy. It is not a policy for the benefit of the consumer or even for the benefit of those employed in the industry. It is solely a policy to maximise the price of selling off Treasury and energy assets to finance tax cuts.

Mr. Parkinson: I am afraid that is not nearly as difficult as the hon. Gentleman would wish it to be. I accept that it is a long White Paper and that the hon. Gentleman has not had it long. When he reads it more carefully, he will find the answers to quite a few of his questions set out in clear detail.

I shall go through some of the points which he raised. He said that I say in the White Paper that distribution is a natural monopoly; that is true. But I also say that nearly 80 per cent. of the costs of electricity arise from generation, and that is not a natural monopoly. The object is to seek to introduce competition into generation and, at the same time, to make sure that the distributors do not abuse their monopoly power, that they are properly regulated and that customers have a choice and also have rights which are enshrined in law.

The hon. Gentleman also said that what is proposed is against the world trend. The plain fact is that there is no world model for electricity supply and generation. The model which we have put before the House, which we believe will work well, is now being widely discussed by far-sighted people in the American supply industry.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the industry will be efficient. We believe that it will be more efficient. We will build on the basis that is there. The main point of the White Paper, which he must recognise, is that at present the industry is totally producer-dominated. Electricity is produced by a single supplier and the customer has no choice but to accept whatever cost that supplier hands over. We are putting the customer in the driving seat. We are tilting the balance of the industry so that it will not in future be producer-dominated but will be dominated by the needs of the consumer. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Will it be cheaper?"] Yes, in due course it will be cheaper because competition will exert downward pressure on costs. It will

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not happen overnight. *[Interruption.]* In that case, we will do even better. All the signs are that competition will produce pressure on costs. At present, 80 per cent. of the costs are pushed over on a cost-plus basis to the customer. That will not be the case in future.

The hon. Gentleman asked about price increases. He quoted the CBI approvingly. I hope he reads that paper carefully. When he has, I cannot imagine that he will find a thing in it with which he will agree. Electricity represents 2 per cent. of industry's costs. For the first time since April 1985, we are proposing an increase of 8 per cent. That means an increase of less than one sixth of 1 per cent. over three-years.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Not for the big users.

Mr. Parkinson: There are some heavy users, and they are at a disadvantage. However, we have made arrangements to try to help them with their problems. One of the factors that hinder us is that we cannot offer undue preference to any one customer. Under our new structure, heavy users will be able to contract with generators and use the grid as a common carrier, and the problems that the hon. Gentleman and the CBI are moaning about will be dealt with.

The hon. Gentleman talks about collusion. Again, he says that there will be only two generators. There will not. Scotland already has the capacity to support more than 2 GW south of the border, and that capacity could grow. The inter-connector needs strengthening, but effectively we already have three generators. We have the cross-Channel link, and we have two or three private generators feeding into the system. There will be many more in the future. The area boards will have the right to generate, and most are already making plans either to purchase direct or to install capacity of their own.

The hon. Gentleman asked about a golden share. We shall make arrangements to ensure that the industries remain independent. *[Interruption.]* There are other ways which are very effective, and they will be adopted. [HON. MEMBERS: "Britoil?"] Yes, Britoil has shown that there are weaknesses in that arrangement, but there are other versions that can be put in place just as easily.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the obligation to supply being transferred to the distributors. I do not think that he understands the significance of that. I have already pointed out that at present the industry is completely dominated by the costs of one monopoly supplier, and the distributors have no choice but to accept that cost. In future, they will be able to shop around for capacity and to strike bargains.

The hon. Gentleman talked about coal imports. Coal imports are possible now. They do not take place, because of the long-term agreement between the CEGB and British Coal. If British Coal remains a reliable, competitive supplier, it will continue to supply the industry's substantial needs, but we shall not make it a supplier of obligation. We shall ensure that it remains the supplier of choice, on the basis of its performance. That is why the Government are making available £2 million a day of the taxpayers' money so that Britain has a modern, competitive coal industry.

If the hon. Gentleman really cares about the future of coal, I advise him to talk to the unions in the industry and explain to them the need for flexible, modern working to go with the flexible, modern investment. *[Interruption.]* I am just about to explain.

The hon. Gentleman asked about nuclear power. We believe that diversity of supply is essential for security of supply.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Why cannot the same apply to coal?

Mr. Parkinson: The hon. Gentleman asks why we cannot have coal use to produce electricity. But we shall: coal will remain a substantial supplier to the industry. It will still be overwhelmingly the biggest single source of power. That will be built into the system. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is no point in the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) asking questions from a sedentary position. If he is patient, he may have a chance to ask them on his feet.

Mr. Parkinson: We believe that it is in the national interest to have diversity, and nuclear power is part of that diversity. That was part of our election manifesto. It has been a declared policy of the Government, and remains so. One of the reasons for which we need diversity of supply is the abuse of monopoly power that certain elements of the coal industry have demonstrated that they enjoy using.

I was asked about disconnections. There is no reason why disconnections should increase under a privatised industry, and we shall make arrangements to ensure that the code of conduct remains in place and is observed.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am bound to have regard to the subsequent business for today, which is an important debate on Northern Ireland. I shall allow questions on the statement until 5.15 pm, and then we really must move on. I shall bear in mind that the hon. Members whom I call today will not stand quite such a good chance in the debate on Monday.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the additional competition that he proposes, and the creation of numerous new sources of electricity supply, is very welcome and will greatly assist the consumer — a point that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) seemed to ignore completely in his interminable harangue?

As the Government propose that the entire nuclear programme should now go into the private sector, and as the nuclear costs will be protected by the requirement of the distribution company to buy nuclear, and that will therefore be passed on to the consumer, will my right hon. Friend reassure us that the nuclear building programme will be rigorously overhauled, tightly controlled and made suitable for the needs of the 1990s—and, in particular, suitable for a world in which oil and coal prices will remain very low?

Mr. Parkinson: I know my right hon. Friend's views about nuclear generation. We believe that a generation of pressurised water reactors—the same technology, with a repeat build, six being built one after the other—will offer a sensible, secure way of meeting the nuclear obligation.

Of course, as a result of the customer's obligation to buy electricity from nuclear generation, the nuclear industry will be in a privileged position, and that aspect will have to be regulated very carefully.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): Why is the Secretary of State treating the nuclear industry differently from the coal industry? Why has he given a guarantee for nuclear power and British generation, but gives no guarantee that the British coal industry will be protected?

We see what is happening in Scotland. This could sound the death knell for the British coal industry unless there is a guarantee in the White Paper and in Government policy.

Mr. Parkinson: The right hon. Gentleman is being extremely defeatist. Since 1979, the Government have made an investment of nearly £6 billion in the coal industry: £2 million a day is being invested. The industry is responding. It is becoming more competitive. I believe that it is capable of facing up to the competition, and that it does not need the protection that the right hon. Gentleman demands.

It is a very negative approach to the industry to say that it has no future unless it is entirely protected. It must make good use of the investment. It must have modern working practices to go with the modern machinery, and its future will then be secure. That is in the hands of those who work in the industry.

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Select Committee on Energy has begun a major and comprehensive inquiry — belatedly, through no fault of its own. He will also be aware that the inquiry has already disclosed not only that this is a matter of immense complexity, but that there are profound disagreements on the structure, consequences and objectives of privatisation.

As the inquiry is unlikely to be completed until June, may I ask my right hon. Friend for an assurance that the proposals will not be regarded as having been set in concrete, but that the evidence and conclusions that the Select Committee may reach will be taken into careful consideration?

Mr. Parkinson: Of course we shall take the Select Committee's conclusions into consideration. However, these are Government proposals enshrined in a White Paper, and I have made it clear that we intend to bring forward legislation as soon as possible. Between now and the introduction of the Bill, an immense amount of detailed decision-making must be done. We believe that the Select Committee can make a real contribution to that decision-making, but the central structure is that which the Government have proposed to the House, and on which they intend to legislate.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Would the Secretary of State be entirely happy if his assessments of energy prices as a result of the impending increase were subject to the scathing and searching criticism that they seem to deserve? Does he accept that his statement seemed to contain a recognition of the impressive achievement of the publicly owned electricity supply industry throughout the post-war period, meeting national needs and growing demand? Does not his suggestion that there should be an element of compensation for failure to supply seem to illustrate that, despite the ebullience of the White Paper, the Government are now beginning to have some doubts and some feeling that caution is necessary?

Mr. Parkinson: No, Sir — quite the reverse. The proposals which we are making and which will be enshrined in the legislation have been developed in part by the East Midlands electricity board and are being tried in the area already. We think that the idea is a good one, should be enshrined in legislation and should be made available to all customers of the electricity supply industry, and that is what we are doing. So it is not any sign of lack of confidence; it is adopting a practical experience which the industry has just gone through.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement. Is he aware that it will be welcomed by Government Members, the vast majority of people in the electricity supply industry and, of course, consumers of electricity? Will he assure the House that the nuclear generation of electricity will continue to flourish, and that it will not be cosseted or allowed to benefit from cross-subsidisation, but rather will be exposed to the full rigours of competition, which will be to its long-term advantage?

Mr. Parkinson: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. It is a fact that the structure which I have proposed today is supported by all the area boards and by the Electricity Council. We have yet to hear the reaction of the CEGB. *[Interruption.]* Just in case the hon. Gentleman sneers, two thirds of the people in the industry work in the area boards.

The Government have committed themselves to a nuclear programme because they believe, as I said earlier, that nuclear power provides an essential component of the diversity of supply that is the basis of our security. I believe that it is possible and will be possible for it to be provided on an economic basis.

It is an extremely complex subject, because we are talking about the costs of power stations which will be built within the next 10 years and will still be operating 40 years from now. Nuclear power offers a certainty about cost and a certainty about supply, so it is very hard to have a debate based purely on the economics.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Since this is the first privatisation of a public monopoly that really does improve competition and provide customer choice and some sensible consumer rights, would it not be more logical for the Government not to impose any further electricity price rises but to wait until market forces operate on the industry? Similarly, would it not be more logical for the Government not to commission any further nuclear plants until the nuclear generating industry is subjected to objective through-costing under the same market principles?

Mr. Parkinson: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his recognition that we are creating a structure which will offer the prospects of competition and a better deal for the customer. He asked about prices. The level of return achieved by the industry at present is too low. It is about 2·45 per cent., which is less than one half of the rate of return that the Labour Government of which he was a member decided was necessary. We are proposing, over two years and after a period of no increases at all, to move the rate of return nearer to the rate of return that is acceptable. We need to do that to create an income base which will support the borrowing and the funding of the huge programme on which we are about to embark; £45 billion will need to be invested between now and the year 2000 either by private generators or by the successor

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companies to the CEGB if this country is to have a secure electricity supply. These price increases are necessary to build up an income base that will fund that investment.

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement is very welcome? Perhaps no part of it is more welcome than his announcement that in effect the old principle of no undue preference in supply will disappear——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Gissa job.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Tebbit. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman has as much right as anybody else.

Mr. Tebbit: —in order that proper bargaining can take place between major users and suppliers? Is he also aware that perhaps the most encouraging feature of the discussion following his statement today is the announcement from the Opposition Front Bench that the Labour party is now committed to consumerism and competition in the energy industry? Has my right hon. Friend heard whether that is going to apply to Labour policy on coal?

Mr. Parkinson: What we have heard from the Labour party today is a reaffirmation of its members' belief in competition and the customer and the demand that he should not be allowed to have any choice at all, which is typical of the Socialists that they are. I agree with my right hon. Friend that major users need access to power at competitive prices and that the present legislative structure makes that very difficult. In future, major users will have the right to enter into contracts, to use the grid as a common carrier and to make arrangements to meet their own special needs.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Is the Secretary of State aware that his announcement this afternoon is the death knell of the mining industry? It is fairly obvious that he has no intention of making any alternative arrangements regarding the understanding between British Coal and the CEGB and that, at present low world prices, British Coal will not be able to compete. That being the case, British Coal and many thousands more miners' jobs will go to the wall. This could well be deliberate Government policy.

Mr. Parkinson: It is not Government policy. Government policy is to make investments in the industry which will ensure that it is modern and competitive, and to encourage those who run it to adapt their working methods to match the modern machinery. There is no question of the CEGB being able to buy 70 million tonnes of coal at the marginal world price of coal, because the world market in coal is too small. So the hon. Gentleman is inventing a frightening spectre, which is unnecessary. If the miners in his constituency work hard with the modern machinery and use it well, they will be able to compete and they will have the opportunity to supply. There is no reason why a privatised industry should turn its back on a supplier on its doorstep that offers reliable supplies at competitive prices, but that means an end to strikes, working to rule, total waste of time and industrial conflict. Those are the things that are really posing a threat to the future of the coal industry.

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the broad thrust of his statement today will be greatly welcomed? But there is one area of considerable concern that reflects on heavy users of electricity. It is not adequate for my right hon. Friend to use phrases such as "try to help" or "leave it to local negotiation". The core of British industry, the heavy users, need special help and special deals. Will he ensure that, now that we have the opportunity of new legislation, they will be protected?

Mr. Parkinson: That is precisely the point that I was making. Because of our rules about undue preference, although we do make arrangements that help the heavy users, there is a limit to what can be done. In future, heavy users will have the opportunity to contract direct with suppliers and to use the grid as a common carrier. I believe that our proposals offer a real opportunity of dealing with that very difficult problem.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Why, before making his statement today, did the Secretary of State so studiedly refuse to offer any kind of meaningful consultation to the industry's management, the trade unions and the consumer councils on what he is proposing? Will it not look like rank hypocrisy to talk of his concern for the consumer when he refused even to consult the consumer councils?

Mr. Parkinson: Since last June, I have consulted extremely widely with all sides of the industry and have had discussions with academics, economists, unions, management and consumers—with all people who have an opinion about the structure of the industry. It is simply not true that there has been no consultation. However, I have not been able to accept the views of some of the people whom I have consulted. Their definition of consultation is that I should change all my opinions and accept theirs. There have been many discussions, but I cannot accommodate everyone. Some of those who have not been accommodated are now saying that they have not been consulted. That simply is not true.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his decision to retain the integrity of the national grid as a common carrier is welcome and realistic, as all our major power stations have been located on the basis of environmental and supply considerations, and not on the basis of where the greatest demand has been?

Mr. Parkinson: My hon. Friend is right in saying that the integrity and the operation of the grid are vital parts of our system. Our proposals make arrangements to maintain all the benefits of that. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for pointing out to the House the importance of the grid.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): How will the price of nuclear-generated electricity be fixed? Can I have an assurance that it will not necessarily follow the price of coal, because of the long-term implications of investment in nuclear plant? Secondly, can I have an assurance that today's announcement will not in any way influence the future of British Nuclear Fuels plc as a publicly owned company?

Mr. Parkinson: I am sorry, but I did not hear the second half of the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It was a request for an assurance on the future of British Nuclear Fuels plc as a publicly owned company.

Mr. Parkinson: My statement today contained a very strong reaffirmation of the Government's commitment to the nuclear supply industry. That must be the best possible news for BNFL. BNFL has made tremendous strides in recent years. I believe that its future is more secure as a result of today's announcement.

At present, we buy our electricity from the nuclear power stations on a cost-plus basis. It is simply fed through in the bulk supply tariff to the customers. In future, the costs will have to be regulated because, for diversity reasons, we are guaranteeing a market for the electricity. Therefore, that particular source of supply will need to be quite carefully regulated.

Mr. Alastair Goodlad (Eddisbury): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the imaginative and sensible proposals that he has announced, which combine the introduction of competition with the preservation of the merit order and the integrity and excellence of the nuclear industry, will be widely welcomed throughout the electricity supply industry, which will make the future arrangements work with the dedication and determination that it has shown in the past?

Mr. Parkinson: I thank my hon. Friend for the compliment that he pays to the people who work in the industry. We want to build on their achievements in future. I believe that the prospects for everyone working in the industry will be improved by my announcement today and not threatened in any way. I am sure that the people who work in the industry will work hard to implement the proposals and produce a modern, competitive electricity supply industry.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Does the Secretary of State accept that the proposals will mean more regulation and direction in the industry? The way in which the Secretary of State and the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) spoke about consumerism really is claptrap. The consumers will have only one electricity line to their homes, supplied by only one electricity board. They will have no real choice except that of the primary fuel.

The Secretary of State enunciated six principles on which he was drawing up proposals. No. 5 was that customers should be given new rights. What does he mean by new rights for customers? Will they have special rights if they are old-age pensioners or if they cannot pay their bills, or will it be the same as with British Gas, with an ever-increasing number of disconnections since privatisation?

Lastly, will the Secretary of State tell the House how research and development into potential new sources of energy is to be funded? Who will be responsible for developing such schemes as the fast breeder reactor or the Severn barrage schemes?

Mr. Parkinson: I made it clear in my statement that the distribution companies are regional monopolies and therefore will be subject to regulation in the private sector. That is necessary, and I believe that it will be acceptable to the House.

As for customer rights, I explained to the House—perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not here — that performance standards will be set. If those standards are not met, the customer will have the right to a rebate for any failure by the industry to perform. */Interruption./* I notice that one or two Opposition Members are smiling, but the system is working extremely well in the east midlands. It is a very useful management tool as it shows which areas are operating inefficiently and enables management to take action to improve performance.

Most renewable research at present is funded by my Department, and 30 per cent. of the costs of the fast reactors are being met by the CEGB. Obviously, that will have to be a matter for negotiation, but most of the research into renewables is funded by the taxpayer through the Department of Energy.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): The proposals are undoubtedly in the long-term interest of the employees of the CEGB and other new companies. In the short term, there will be confusion for many as to who is to be their future employer, including the 600 or 700 employees at Europa house in Stockport. How will these problems be resolved? Will my right hon. Friend put their fears at rest?

Mr. Parkinson: I know of my hon. Friend's interest in the subject. On numerous occasions he has told me about the problems and interests of his constituents. One of the reasons why we made the statement to the House and produced the White Paper was to reassure people in the industry and to end speculation about the future structure of the industry. We have made arrangements for every employee of the electricity supply industry—all 137,000 of them—to receive tomorrow copies of the statement and of the White Paper, which has been written specifically with the interests of the employees, among others, in mind.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): It seems from the Secretary of State's statement that there will be many technical arguments about the development of the White Paper in future debates on this issue. There is some suspicion about the technical advice that the Secretary of State has received. Who advised him about removing the control of the grid from the generating side of the industry? The logic of that is impossible to understand.

The Secretary of State did not mention safety in the industry. There is a very high standard of safety in the industry, although the nuclear side is suspect. There is a lack of public confidence in the nuclear side of the industry, but in general it has a good safety record. Obviously, when the industry is privatised there will be less enthusiasm to invest in its safety aspects.

The other area——

Hon. Members: Speech.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman put his question succinctly?

Mr. Thompson: May I ask the Secretary of State to comment on the effects on the environment when the industry is privatised?

Mr. Parkinson: On the first question, about the technical aspect, we have had the benefit of advice from outstanding consultants, but we have also consulted widely. It is now a matter of agreement between the CEGB and ourselves that there is no technical difficulty about the removal of the grid. It would argue that there are costs involved and we would argue that savings would flow from the increased competition that would result from the transfer of the grid.

The hon. Gentleman raised a favourite subject of Opposition Members: the suggestion that somehow or other the private sector is less interested in safety than the

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public sector. There is no evidence of any kind for that assertion; it is just a myth that Opposition Members persist in trying to push. There will be no change in the safety regulations, except that the regulations, which are enshrined in 24 statutes going back to the 1880s, will be put into a modern form. The standards will not be lowered; if anything, they will be improved.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): In view of my right hon. Friend's statement, and the transformation of British Coal's performance in the past three years—production is up by 60 per cent. and coal prices at the power stations are down by 22 per cent. — can he advise my constituents what they should do to secure the future?

Hon. Members: Vote Labour.

Mr. Parkinson: There is no reason to believe that voting Labour would do anything but put a great blight on their prospects, because the prospects for the coal industry depend upon the economy. The hallmark of Labour Governments is economic chaos and crisis. We will continue to promote a sound economy that grows, and that is good news for the miners. Secondly, as my hon. Friend pointed out, if productivity continues to improve, new machinery is well used and new investments are properly exploited, there is no reason at all why the British coal industry should not have a very good future.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): Will the Secretary of State guarantee that ministerial responsibility for all aspects of nuclear safety, and so public accountability, will be maintained? Will he say that there will be no minimum nuclear element, as opposed to non-fossil-fuel element, in the requirement for generating capacity and no extra cost put on the taxpayers by the proposals? When will the Minister state that consumers will benefit from this, as the only thing that has happened so far is that prices have increased, affecting the poor and the powerless?

Mr. Parkinson: The change in prices would have occurred whether or not the industry was privatised. I must ask the hon. Gentleman to accept that fact. It spoils most of his statements, but it happens to be true. Secondly, as for Ministers being responsible for nuclear safety, the nuclear installations inspectorate is responsible for nuclear safety. It is licensed as a wholly independent body and it is being strengthened. There is no question that its responsibilities will be changed in any way.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is not the truth of the matter that the statement is the next step in privatisation, after the fattening-up process of increasing prices in the electricity industry, which means that poor pensioners will have to pay the bill for the privatisation which will follow in order to line the pockets of Back-Bench Tory Members, many of whom will be anxious for directorships arising out of the legislation, including the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit)? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Time is getting on.

Mr. Skinner: Why should the nuclear industry be feather-bedded in the White Paper, while the coal industry is expected to compete with the slave labour conditions of the South African market and the nine-year-olds mining coal in Colombia? Is he aware that the proposals will provide the Left wing with the means to take us back into public ownership?

Mr. Parkinson: The hon. Gentleman had better have a word with his Front Bench. They are trying desperately to run away from the notion of renationalisation.

Mr. Skinner: I am not worried about that.

Mr. Parkinson: He is not worried about it, but they are worried by him. Perhaps he could have a word with his hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, because he has moved his position recently. He used to make those rather inane remarks about lining the pockets of the City. He now realises that, if a higher price is obtained for the industry, it will come to the Treasury and the taxpayers, so perhaps the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend could have a word and try to understand the problems.

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): If it is possible for a competent person to build a nuclear power station, under the plan who will undertake the necessary research for nuclear safety and pay compensation in the event of a nuclear accident? As my hon. Friend is conceding to the distribution companies the right to produce electricity, is he prepared to concede to the CEGB full marketing rights and the later opportunity, if need be, to take over some of the distribution enterprises?

Mr. Parkinson: We should like to see the distribution companies remain as independent bodies. One of the strengths of those companies is that their head offices are based in the regions they serve. As a result of the proposals, 12 very substantial regionally based companies will be created in which the workers and people of those regions will have shares and can take a stake. The local identity of the boards is a very important factor which we wish to preserve in the course of the privatisation of the industry.

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that many area boards are convinced that they can contract to the private sector for power, or generate their own power, more cheaply than they can buy it from the CEGB? Will he accept that, in the interim before privatisation, it is very important that the private sector should have the opportunity to compete fairly on tariffs and the construction of power stations?

Mr. Parkinson: My hon. Friend is right. One of the reasons why the legislation is necessary is that the Energy Act 1983 simply has not worked, because the monopoly generator has control of the grid. What I have announced today will mean that the private generators can look forward to having access to the grid, using it as a common carrier and striking contracts with people who wish to buy their electricity. The area boards welcome the opportunity finally to have some choice about the generator from which they buy their electricity.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): The Secretary of State will already know that the actuarial risk of any accident in a nuclear power station and the consequential costs must be underwritten by the taxpayers through the House. What provision does the Secretary of State intend to make for the burden of such a liability in the 70 per cent. that he intends to launch on the market? What provision does he intend to make in legislation for the cost incurred in decommissioning the Magnox stations that are already coming to the end of their lives? Who will bear that cost —the British taxpayer again?

Mr. Parkinson: Provisions have already been made and are being made continuously in the accounts of the CEGB for the cost of the decommissioning. At the moment, the provision stands at just under £470 million. That provision is being built up as the stations are being operated. Details of the kind the hon. Gentleman talks about will have to be settled in negotiations between the industry and ourselves. Until the structure was settled, many of the detailed arrangements simply could not be negotiated, but they will be and the full details will be presented in the legislation brought to the House at the beginning of the next Session.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will my right hon. Friend accept that his attempts to reconcile the needs of competition with guaranteed supply and having strategic non-fossil-fuel capacity have been highly successful? Does he agree that it is ironic that the great monopolists in the Opposition should accuse him of all people of not introducing enough competition in the White Paper? Does he accept that the White Paper will be warmly welcomed by Conservative Members?

Mr. Parkinson: I thank my hon. Friend for those remarks. I listened with amazement to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) criticising me for not introducing enough competition, when his proposal is to maintain a huge monopoly supplier.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): Is the Secretary of State aware that future generations will condemn him for the long-term damage he will do to the national interest? I listened intently to his speech and I did not hear of any provisions that would satisfy the nuclear nuts, except in their own nuclear waste. I listened to what he said about dumping; he does not have a clue about it. I suggest that when he switches on his electric lights, powered with coal from Colombia that has been brought to the surface by the blood of children, he should learn what dumping is about and the long-term damage it will do to the country.

Mr. Parkinson: The hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) and other hon. Gentlemen refer to Colombia. We consume about 100 million tonnes of coal in this country. The latest estimate is that approximately 200,000 tonnes of it comes from Colombia. May I break some news to the hon. Gentleman, which he would regard as good news, although some of my right hon. and hon. Friends might not? There are not the handling facilities to bring in more than about 15 million tonnes of coal, should that be desired, nor can facilities be developed. That is part of the price we paid for reassuring the miners that we wanted to sustain their monopoly. We now realise that that was a big mistake. The monopoly supply position of the British coal industry has been abused, and used as an economic and political weapon. The miners, by their activities, made the people suspicious of being over-dependent on coal.

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): May I assure my right hon. Friend of the great support he will have from all the alternative electricity generating industries, which will have at long last a chance to sell their wave, wind and solar energy or any other form of alternative power. We all welcome the White Paper from the viewpoints of the environment, choice and the consumer.

Mr. Parkinson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He has highlighted an important fact—that the commitment to non-fossil fuels includes renewable fuels. In certain areas of the world, such as California, there are substantial renewables generating power plants. If any of the alternative sources of energy prove to be economic, those will become part of the proportion of non-fossil-fuel-produced electricity available for purchase.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will preserve the list of those hon. Members who have not yet been called, and shall ensure that they will have some priority if they wish to speak in the subsequent debate.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that the Secretary of State said at the conclusion of his statement that the White Paper was available now in the Vote Office. It is a convention that a White Paper should be published here and that the Secretary of State should make a statement to the House first of all. Yet again, Mr. Speaker, the television news coverage at 1 pm today carried full details, as did today's early morning newspapers. Quite clearly, the Secretary of State has ignored his primary obligation to the House, which I believe that hon. Members wish to sustain, as well as you yourself, Mr. Speaker. We can have resort only to you to defend the rights of the House against an elective dictatorship that is intent on ignoring the rights of the House and their obligations to come here first. If it was otherwise, the first information about the project would have been given to the House rather than to television and the newspapers.

Mr. Parkinson: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I join the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), for once, in deploring this leak of the White Paper and of the details. We had nothing at all to gain from it and we sought very hard indeed to make sure that the House was the first body to hear of our decisions.

The decision was finally taken in the Cabinet this morning and was announced to the House as soon as possible after that.

Mr. Redmond: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have been listening to the Secretary of State's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) who deplored information being leaked prior to the Secretary of State's announcement to the House. Will the Secretary of State pursue an inquiry to find out the source of that leak, as I did not hear him mention that course? I should like to know, Mr. Speaker, whether the Secretary of State intends to hold an inquiry.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can we be assured that an inquiry will take place? If we do not have an inquiry into such a leak, that means in effect that we condone it by doing nothing, and further leaks will occur.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is worth recalling that the Secretary of State probably admitted that it is not usual for Secretaries of State to say that there had not been a leak, and that the matter had gone to the Cabinet for consideration this morning, so that he could not understand how the information had got out. But he never said that what did get out was wrong. Apparently, the information was correctly reported in some newspapers this morning and on the television news, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) said. The Secretary of State says now that he has no knowledge of how it happened

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and that it was not caused by him, and there must be a prima facie case for an inquiry. The Secretary of State ought to have the guts to get up and tell us now.

Mr. Cryer: He is just shrugging his shoulders.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not a matter for me whether there should be an inquiry. I repeat what I have so frequently said—that the House should always be the first to be told. I have heard what the Secretary of State says about this matter. I hope that the press will keep the embargoes placed against these statements.

Questions to Ministers

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I genuinely mean no criticism of you, but on the Order Paper today there were 47 questions to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland of which 24 were from Labour Back Benchers. You will note that in the course of Question Time, which lasted three quarters of an hour, you were able to call only two Labour Back Benchers.

I do not complain about that, and I appreciate that you are circumscribed, Sir, to some extent by the fact that you feel obliged to call Members from constituencies in Northern Ireland, as well as Conservative Members and other Opposition Members. In so far as Northern Ireland's affairs are of great interest to members of the Labour party, may I ask that Opposition Back Benchers are given more time during Question Time to raise these important matters, as otherwise the debates in Question Time will be completely distorted and, without the contributions of my right hon. and hon. Friends from the Front Bench, unreasonable and unfair?

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask hon. Members to allow me to deal with one question at a time. I will certainly bear in mind what the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) says. I hope that I deal fairly with all sides of the House, and if I have not done so, I shall review the position, as I do every day. However, whenever Front Bench Members rise, as the hon. Gentleman knows, that tends to reduce Opposition Back Benchers' opportunities.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the five motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered.

That the draft Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (Schedule 3 Amendment) Order 1988 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Social Security (Contributions, Re-rating) Order 1988 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Social Security (Treasury Supplement to and Allocation of Contributions) (Re-rating) Order 1988 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1988 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Public Lending Right (Increase of Limit) Order 1988 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Wakeham.]*

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions)

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the debate on Northern Ireland.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could you inform us about the incoming debate? I understand that at 7 o'clock, opposed private Members' business is coming before the House. What time will be given to this very important debate on Northern Ireland?

Mr. Speaker: I can tell the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) that this debate will be interrupted at 7 o'clock for opposed private business, and if it has not concluded at that time it may continue after 10 pm until 11.30 pm.

5.18 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tom King): I beg to move,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts 1978 and 1987 (Continuance) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 16 February, be approved.

The continuance order is the first to be made under the new 1987 Act. Previously, the House was asked to approve the orders every six months, and this is the first time that it comes forward for annual renewal. The advantage of this longer period is that it is possible to review developments rather more carefully in the period between renewal debates. It has provided for the first time for Lord Colville to report to the House on the operation of the Act, as I asked him to do.

I propose to discuss briefly the background to the Act, to describe the changes made to the emergency provisions under the 1987 Act, and something of their progress. I will deal with Lord Colville's comments in his first report and say a little about the wider issues and the present scene in Northern Ireland.

I am conscious that there are a number of hon. Members who wish to speak and I will try to condense my remarks to the essential areas of concern that I believe are proper to enable me to present the order to the House. I hope that that will not be thought a discourtesy.

The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 provides the security forces in Northern Ireland with extra powers to deal with the special problems of terrorism in Northern Ireland. They include powers to stop and question, arrest, enter, search and seize. It also provides powers to proscribe organisations and creates offences concerning the collection of information that might be useful to terrorists, training people in the manufacture or use of firearms or explosives for improper purposes and displaying public support for proscribed organisations. All of the provisions relating to those powers will lapse on 21 March unless continued in force by this order.

The 1978 Act also provides the legal authority for the operation of the so-called "Diplock courts" by which serious terrorist offences are tried by a single judge sitting without a jury. The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1987 incorporated into the emergency provisions certain recommendations of Sir George Baker. They included the provision that all emergency arrest powers now require "reasonable grounds for suspicion" and that searches of dwellings and searches of persons other than in a public place also require "reasonable grounds for suspicion" and that the maximum period for which the RUC can hold a suspected terrorist, on its own authority, is now 48 hours instead of 72 hours. The onus in bail applications in scheduled cases is now on the prosecution rather than the defence. Other recommendations were that the statutory guidance on the admissibility on confession evidence in scheduled cases should be rephrased to reflect the court's view that admissions obtained by the use or threat of violence should not be admissible, and that concerning the judge's discretion to exclude any admission in the interests of justice or out of fairness to the accused. Both Acts will lapse in 1992 and if similar provisions continue to be necessary they will have to be re-enacted by means of a Bill.

The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1987 also introduced a statutory right for persons arrested under section 12 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974 to have someone notified of their arrest and whereabouts and to have access to legal advice. Section 12 is the main arrest power used in connection with terrorism in Northern Ireland. The Act also gave the authority to impose statutory time limits on pre-trial stages of proceedings and introduced a statutory scheme for regulating security guard companies in Northern Ireland.

The 1987 Act was a major piece of legislation. Its purpose was, of course, further to refine the emergency powers and to try to improve, yet again, on that delicate balance between protecting the rights of individuals caught up in such situations and avoiding handicapping the security forces' fight against terrorism.

This is the first opportunity to review the progress of the 1987 Act and its new powers. One of those powers is for regulating security guard companies. It is now an offence to provide such security services without a certificate from my Department. If it is believed that proscribed organisations are likely to benefit from such security services a company is unable to receive a certificate. Such regulating is part of our continued campaign to tackle the problems of paramilitary racketeering as a means of fund-raising — vital to the continuance of terrorism — and which we intend to do everything we can to choke off.

It is interesting to note that in the first period of operation of the certification scheme a number of security guard operations have already chosen not to apply for certificates. Therefore, I believe that there is some evidence to suggest that that scheme is starting to have some effect.

I asked Lord Colville to report on the working of the Acts and this is the first year in which he has submitted his report. I thank Lord Colville for his careful and diligent study when carrying out that review. I believe that his report has been of benefit to hon. Members when considering the progress that has been made.

The first requirement that I made of Lord Colville was that he should consider and advise whether any temporary provisions might lapse and to report on the way in which the Acts have been applied. It is interesting to note Lord Colville's first and main conclusion:

"the overwhelming view is an insistence on, or acceptance of, the emergency powers remaining in force."

The Government agreed with his conclusion and that is why we are here today. We regret the need for the emergency powers, but faced with the current situation in Northern Ireland we believe that they are essential. Lord Colville also said:

[Mr. Tom King]

"I gained the impression that the Act is being used with due reflection, moderation and commonsense; that refinements of earlier activities have reduced the reaction, at least, to what are seen as oppressive powers; and that the courts are strict in their interpretation of police and military activities both in criminal and civil suits."

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Is it not the case that, somewhere, Lord Colville referred to the use of tape recordings in the interrogation of suspected persons? Should not a code of practice embrace the use of tape recordings in such matters?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am aware that Lord Colville made no reference to that matter in his report on the Emergency Provisions Acts, but I am advised that it is mentioned in his report on the Prevention of Terrorism Act. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his efficient prompting. There was no mention of that matter in connection with the order that we are discussing.

An important commendation from Lord Colville is that "the Northern Ireland courts are astute to interpret the Emergency Provisions Acts most strictly in favour of the liberty of the subject."

Lord Colville has made a number of recommendations. He asked for clearer statistics relating to the breakdown between offences certified out and we are considering whether something can be done about that. Anyone who studies the Colville report will note that a significant number of offences were certified out in the various years. Lord Colville asked whether we might change from the procedure of certifying out to certifying in. On balance, Lord Colville came down against that change. The House will be aware of the reasons he gave and we believe that that judgment was right.

Lord Colville suggested removing robbery and aggravated burglary from the scheduled list. We certainly want to see as many jury trials as we can and we shall consider those proposals.

Under the 1987 Act I have powers—I have not used those powers yet and we are observing the scheme that is currently operating in England and Wales—regarding the introduction of time limits. The House will see that, in the annex to Lord Colville's report, he notes the considerable improvement in the waiting time before trial. We certainly hope that that reduction is improved.

Lord Colville also referred to the need for the early introduction of a code of practice relating to the emergency powers. He asked whether that code would cover the section 12 arrest powers and I confirm that that is so.

Those are the main considerations to which I would wish to draw attention. If hon. Members wish to raise other matters my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office will seek to address them.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): What has happened to the Home Office inquiry that was set up a year and a half ago into kidnap insurance? That relates to one part of the Act. What has been resolved? Is the work still going on?

Mr. King: I shall have to take notice of that point. If we have the information, my right hon. Friend will try to respond to it.

The purpose of the order is to enable the powers that I have described to remain in force for a further 12 months. I have described the detailed outline of the 1978 Act and the 1987 Act, and Lord Colville's comments on them. Now I want to discuss the background against which this debate takes place.

The tragic outrage last night in the centre of Belfast is the latest confirmation, if any were needed, of the difficult and different problems that we face in Northern Ireland. The levels of violence in 1987 may have been below the worst levels of the 1970s, but there was a most unwelcome increase in violence, at least to the levels of the early 1980s. Last year there were 93 deaths in the Province and there have been 10 already this year. Amongst those were 11 members of the Army and the UDR, 16 members of the RUC and the RUC reserve, a large number of civilians, including Lord Justice Gibson and his wife, and 11 bystanders at the Remembrance Day parade at Enniskillen. I remember also the eight terrorists killed at Loughall, the four terrorists blown up by their own bombs and the seven members who were killed in the INLA feud. I mention them all because many of them were young men, and, whatever our attitude to their motivations, they were all people who lost their lives in the sadness and futility and pointlessness of the terrorist campaign in Northern Ireland, which achieves nothing.

No one in the House takes pleasure in any deaths, but that is the tragic record of the past year. All that the terrorist campaign produces is sorrow, grief, unemployment, the obstruction of normal life and extra problems for the community. Sometimes people ascribe blame for the road blocks, vehicle check-points and watchtowers, but, as I said at Question Time, those things are there because of the IRA and the other terrorist organisations that have introduced this obscene problem to Northern Ireland. The community must use every means at its disposal to protect itself against this evil violence.

The threat that we now face is maintained and, sadly, enhanced by the outside intervention of substantial arms resources on a scale hitherto unparalleled in the terrorist campaign in Northern Ireland. I refer to the involvement of the Libyan supplies. That intervention poses a dangerous and difficult problem and brings into even sharper focus the outstanding courage and dedication of everyone in the security forces. This is a dangerous time and everyone in Northern Ireland knows that, and I commend the courage of the RUC, the reserve, the UDR, the British Army, the judges, the judiciary, people working in the law courts and the prisons, and the whole community, who are trying to stand against the dangers, often at much personal risk.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): A moment ago my right hon. Friend referred to the Libyan connection. Are diplomatic relations between Dublin and Tripoli still maintained?

Mr. King: Yes, Sir. That is my understanding.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Does the Secretary of State agree that if the RUC is to have the full confidence and support of the minority community it is important that the ghost of the Stalker inquiry is finally laid to rest? In conjunction with that, does he accept that the shoot-to-kill policy that has been exposed, the events that took place in 1982 in the hayshed in Ballyneery road, Lurgan, and the subsequent destruction of the tape

recordings that were made, are still something that the House must face? On whose orders were those tape recordings destroyed in 1982?

Mr. King: Many misunderstandings and misrepresentations have bedevilled this affair. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman used the phrase "shoot to kill". Shoot to kill is the wrong phrase. Does it mean shoot on sight, or without proper warning, or without observing the correct procedures for the use of force? Whatever it means, no evidence was identified and the Attorney-General made that clear to the House. That is important. I notice that one of my predecessors, the noble Lord Prior, has confirmed that, as far as his Office was concerned, no such policy was pursued.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I thank the Secretary of State for trying to clarify the definition of shoot to kill. Is that not somewhat at variance with the view expressed by the deputy chief constable of the RUC, who said that the unit was trained to act with the maximum speed, firepower and aggression?

Mr. King: The suggestion that the unit was to do that outside the rules of engagement and correct practice is not true. That, too, is important. It is well known that that was a clear finding that was endorsed by Mr. Sampson, and it needs to be put clearly on the record.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) made a statement that it would be well into the 21st century before the nationalist people supported the RUC? Will he make it clear that that is what the people of Northern Ireland are up against?

Mr. King: I have often expressed my concern from the Dispatch Box for the fullest support for the security forces. I think that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) may have misunderstood my remarks, on an earlier occasion, which were in no sense a personal affront to him; they had to do only with the sort of issues that arise. I recall occasions when there were plans for marches in Ballynahinch and Limavady, when the RUC and the Army turned out, with young 18-year-old soldiers, perhaps experiencing such an event for the first time, to defend and protect the nationalist community. Given the sort of risks that the RUC undertakes on behalf of all the community, it is entitled to expect the open and avowed support of every elected politician and responsible representative.

I understand some of the difficulties and the background but if we are to rise above the problems of past years we must recognise that the RUC has made a determined effort to work for all the community in Northern Ireland and it is entitled to find a response from the nationalist community.

Mr. Mallon: I regret having to interrupt again, but I cannot allow that point to pass without clarifying it. Some definition of acceptance is needed. Is the Secretary of State making a distinction, as he should, between the acceptance of and support for the police carrying out their duties impartially, and saying—accurately—that we shall not arrive for a considerable period of time at a day when the police will be indigenous to the communities in which they — even now — do not live, and people in those communities will be able to join the police service and support it in that way? There is a world of difference between acceptance and the creation of a police service that is indigenous to every part of the community in the north of Ireland.

Mr. King: When we analyse the problems we want to be clear where the blame lies. We know that the blame lies with the people who are determined, as terrorists, to intimidate everybody out of supporting the police force.

We are aware of the problems experienced by Catholics joining the police force. I remember visiting the old Enniskillen training centre and being told about a lad who turned up from the Bogside to join the RUC. A message was given to him, quite quickly, that that was not a terribly good idea if his family wanted to continue living in the Bogside.

While everyone would like members of the police force to be drawn from the local indigenous community, at the present time other methods must be used. The police are doing their best for both communities and I hope that they will receive support in so doing.

A great debt is owed to the RUC, but the present position in Northern Ireland is under the spotlight. One is conscious of the fact that events of earlier years are influencing attitudes. I have expressed my regret that those factors should cut across the public's perception of a force that, in recent years, has given outstanding service. I hope that people throughout Northern Ireland will recognise the RUC as it is today and not dwell on the problems with which it has been faced in the past, which we have been seeking to tackle.

The RUC deserves public support because it has achieved major successes against the threat with which it has been faced. In the past five months alone there have been five major arms finds. Significantly, as the House knows, there have been two major finds in the Republic. There have been Republican and nationalist arms finds. The apprehension of the Eksund, which many initially thought had solved the problem, was perhaps merely a warning of the scale of the problem that we would face, and recent evidence has proved that to be the case.

In paying tribute to the security forces in Northern Ireland, I should like to express my appreciation of the achievements of the Garda in recent months. They have helped to prevent the possibility of appalling carnage and suffering in Northern Ireland. There has been co-operation with the Irish Government and the supply line of weaponry has been revealed. The search by 7,000 personnel — which was the biggest ever — that led to those weapons finds is evidence enough of the increasing commitment of the Republic. Their efforts, together with the security forces and the attraction of the greatest possible support of the community in Northern Ireland, are vital components of the effective response against terrorism.

I sense a growing anger and resentment in Northern Ireland at the pointlessness of the terrorist campaign. I understand very well the problems that traditionally the security forces may have faced in some parts of the nationalist community.

The 1978 and 1987 Acts, which the order seeks to renew, ensure that the security forces can effectively discharge their responsibilities to the community and provide the maximum protection against terrorism. They further seek to strike a delicate balance between that maximum protection and the rights of the individual. Against that balance, I commend the order to the House.

5.43 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I join the Secretary of State in expressing support for the security forces in Northern Ireland and the Republic and appreciation of the work that they do on our behalf and of the dangers that they run on behalf of all members of the community.

I trust that we can now return to the proper use of the Intergovernmental Conference for discussing many of these matters, so that we do not have what the Secretary of State called "megaphone diplomacy across the Irish sea." Had the Attorney-General had the benefit of the Intergovernmental Conference, some of the recent difficulties would not have arisen.

This is the first opportunity that the House has had to consider the emergency provisions Acts since the modest alterations that were made to the 1978 Act last year. We supported the 1987 legislation because, although it failed to include the major reforms that we should have liked, there were some minor improvements. Nevertheless, the Government did not accept any of the major amendments that were proposed by the Opposition. The legislation continues to provide for internment by Executive fiat without access to the due process of the law; it continues to provide for a too high proportion of jury-less trials in Northern Ireland; it contains no significant changes to the Diplock system; it continues to certify out cases to be tried with a jury rather than certifying them in; and it continues to allow extraordinary powers of search and detention by the Army.

When we look at the proposed reforms, which we relied on the Government to carry out, we find that the codes of practice have yet to materialise, that the RUC code of conduct has yet to be published and, more important, that the promised Government statement to limit the time that people spend on remand before trial has yet to be implemented.

Some of those criticisms have not arisen simply because of tardiness by the Government. In his letter to the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights about the publication of its latest report, the Secretary of State said that he had no intention of making the changes that had been urged on the Government by the Labour party and by right hon. and hon. Members in other parts of the House. That is because the Government are happy with the present extraordinary legislation. They are complacent about its effects on people in Northern Ireland and, apparently, they are unperturbed by the recent deterioration in Anglo-Irish relations. That was so when I was writing this speech, but since then we have seen certain signs of contrivance from the Secretary of State.

In that context, reluctantly, but because of the lack of progress by the Government in all the matters that we regard as important, we are concerned about the renewal of what remains a counter-productive and anti-civil libertarian piece of legislation.

In particular, the Government have refused to face the challenge of the definition of "lethal force"—a question that was very much to the forefront over the shooting of Mr. Aidan McAnespie last Sunday and the release of Private Thain. It may be shown that Mr. McAnespie was killed as the result of a tragic accident, but, whatever the cause, it has served to highlight the fact that between 1969 and 1987 the security forces have been responsible for the deaths of 304 people in Northern Ireland, of whom the majority—167—had no paramilitary connections; they were civilians.

Five years ago, the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights called on the Government to consider embodying strengthened rules on the use of lethal force in the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1987 — a recommendation to which the Labour party attempted to give effect. The Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights described the use of lethal force,

"as one of the most controversial aspects of the security situation in recent years."

The law has been criticised as being "too vague" and "out of date." The test of "reasonableness" in the use of such force was "too lax" and might contravene the European Convention on Human Rights. The commission stated that the circumstances pertaining in Northern Ireland required

"amendment to the law to embody more clearly the view of Parliament as to the general nature of the circumstances in which potentially lethal force might be used."

Again, this year, it noted that the 1987 Act had not amended the law, which remained "vague and unsatisfactory."

Viscount Colville, in his first review of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1987, noted that the failure to legislate on the issue in the 1987 Act meant that the options available to the court when deaths occurred as a result of action by the security forces was either complete acquittal, which, he said, the victim's family and the community tended to think outrageous, or conviction for murder "with mandatory life sentence", which many thought too harsh.

Ironically, Viscount Colville cited the case of Private Thain. I wonder whether, at the time of writing, he knew that he was out of prison and that he was back in the Army, having served less than three years of his life sentence.

Lord Colville pointed out that an amendment to allow for a verdict of manslaughter,

"would go some way to satisfying the community"

and,

"would also be just to members of the security forces."

I trust that we might see that coming into operation.

The question of the use of lethal force lies at the heart of the Stalker affair. Had clear legal guidelines on the use of lethal force existed in 1982 we might have been spared the past five years or so of controversy.

Earlier this month, I said that Labour wanted justice in Northern Ireland—not a quick execution in a field, not undercover death squads and no "dirty war." I used those words because it is in precisely those terms that some in the Province see British justice and others—often evil men—seek to represent it.

If the Government had set out to do their best to undermine and destroy all the good work of the past two and a half years in rebuilding confidence among Nationalists in the administration of justice and the rule of law—and confidence in the RUC—they could have done no better than they did over the Stalker affair and subsequent events. Mr. John Stalker, the then deputy chief constable of Greater Manchester, was asked to investigate the deaths of six people, five of whom, we now know, had paramilitary connections. One was an apolitical youth of 17.

Basically, the scenario was that a hayshed was under surveillance, the IRA put explosives in the hayshed, the RUC was aware of that fact and bugged the hayshed, but the bug failed. The IRA took out its explosives, which were used in a culvert bomb, which tragically exploded, killing three policemen at Kinnego.

Sir John Hermon knew of the bugging of the hayshed, according to RTE's "Today, Tonight" programme of 30 October 1986, and he asked an investigating officer at the scene of the Kinnego blast, "Were these the explosives the force was supposed to be watching?"

If that account is accurate, a number of questions arise with regard to the Chief Constable. They were broadcast on RTE's programme, but we still have no answers to them. Perhaps the Minister will answer them. Did Sir John know of the renewed surveillance even before Michael Tighe was shot? Did he know of the tape's existence, while the Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Barry Shaw, was ignorant of this crucial evidence? Did he know of the tape and its existence in secret, while Stalker was initially kept in the dark?

There is also the question whether the then Secretary of State, Mr. James Prior, or the other Minister then responsible for security, Lord Gowrie, was aware of the electronic surveillance in the hayshed. But there is more, because we now know that there was not only an original tape but a copy. As Lady Bracknell might have said, to lose one tape may be regarded as a misfortune, but to lose both looks like carelessness—or a deliberate attempt to suppress evidence of criminal negligence.

If the RUC destroyed its tape before Mr. Stalker discovered its existence, and merely had a transcript of it, how was it that the MI5 copy was "weeded" after a senior MI5 representative said that he had no objection to Stalker's hearing the tape? Was he aware that MI5 had its own tape which he could have let Mr. Stalker hear? Is it not strange that a tape was weeded that certainly had on it the sound of gunshots and either the shouting of warnings before the opening of fire or the reaction of people after shots had been fired? One way or another, the tape would have cleared up the conflict of evidence between MacCauley and the RUC. To say that this was routine weeding out of a tape with gunshots heard on it beggars the imagination. It appears that it may have been weeded after it was learnt that Mr. Stalker was seeking to get the tape—a fact certainly already known to MI5, if it had not already reached the news media.

It was the deaths and the apparent cover-up that led to the accusation that the British were operating a shoot-to-kill policy in Northern Ireland. Stalker said he found no evidence

"of a formal, officially endorsed policy".

Mr. Sampson found the same. The Government and the RUC, on the basis of that fact, claim that no such shoot-to-kill policy existed. Who are we, in the face of such assurances, to argue otherwise? Except that that is not quite what Mr. Stalker said. He said:

"the circumstances of those shootings pointed to a Police inclination, if not a policy, to shoot suspects dead without warning, rather than to arrest them"

and he believed that

"heavily armed, psyched-up officers were being sent out to meet terrorists head-on, and they felt justified in shooting on sight".

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It is being said in Northern Ireland that the Secretary of State has been told that it was Sir John Hermon who instructed other officers to destroy the tape. Can the Secretary of State now deny that he has been told that Sir John Hermon gave the instruction? Will he come to the Dispatch Box and say that now?

Mr. Alton *rose*—

Mr. McNamara: If the Secretary of State wishes to intervene, I shall give way. Otherwise, I give way to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton).

Mr. Alton: When I met Sir John Hermon a week ago and put that very question to him, I was given the clear understanding that the tape had been destroyed some time after the events had occurred. I was left in no doubt that that had nothing whatever to do with the RUC. That is why it is crucial that this matter should be cleared up. The RUC is being undermined, and the confidence of the minority part of the community is being undermined, because people are uncertain who was responsible for the events. That is why we cannot tell whether there was a clear policy or whether there was simply an implication, as the hon. Gentleman puts it.

Mr. McNamara: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will join the Labour party in demanding a judicial inquiry.

Of course, all this happened during a period of rampant terrorism, as Sir John Hermon says, and the figures bear it out. Are we so other-worldly that we cannot understand the attitude of mind that prevailed at that time—an attitude of mind that might lead responsible people to say to those given the job of combating rampant terrorism on the ground, "I don't want to know what you are doing, but I hope you enjoy doing it" — the Pontius Pilate syndrome?

We can understand such attitudes amongst senior officers and even politicians and it is my view that there was no formal shoot-to-kill policy. However, I believe that there was the wink, the nod, the turning of the blind eye. Emotion rather than reason prevailed, and that was a pity for the rule of law in Northern Ireland.

There is enough in what I have said so far to justify a judicial inquiry such as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has been calling for since the Attorney-General's statement on 25 January. There are other reasons, and we must look at them. There is the question of the role of the Prime Minister in this affair.

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): The hon. Gentleman has made a number of pretty serious allegations, some of which he has attributed to Stalker and some of which he has adopted himself. Where is his evidence to support the charge specifically that senior officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary sent others out with a nod and a wink to break the criminal law? How does he know that?

Mr. McNamara: In the trial for murder, Mr. Robinson stated that he was told to lie about the situation by his superior officers and that he was told to say that events happened in other places. We know from the Stalker report—this is yet to be corrected by the Government—that alterations were made to records of the movement of cars, the places where people were and the places where events happened.

Therefore, one is entitled to use another quotation, which I shall come to later and which will deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths.) However, I would say again that the hon.

[Mr. McNamara]

Gentleman should condemn the Government for not allowing us a public inquiry, which would enable us to know the facts. Those whom the hon. Gentleman represents in the House could only benefit from that.

Of course, much could have been avoided if the McDermot report of 1970 to the Northern Ireland Government, which recommended that the DPP in Northern Ireland should be independent and not responsible to the Attorney-General, had been accepted. We should not then have been in this mess. It might help if we re-examined the McDermot report and if the Government introduced legislation on those lines to prevent a recurrence of these events.

We start with the problem that the Prime Minister regards the police in the same way as she regards the security services—as her personal preserve and subject to the Government rather than to an independent body. She equates the national interest with that of the Tory Government of the day. Thus, in statements from Downing street, a member of the police force was referred to as "the Government's employee"—presumably that came from the Prime Minister's "familiar", the head of the press office. When we have the Prime Minister and her office starting off with that kind of attitude to the police, striking at the constitutional doctrine of their independence, is it any wonder that there is lack of confidence?

Then we have the Prime Minister's response to the whole of the tragedy in Northern Ireland. Her emotion rules her head, and we understand the personal reasons for some of her emotions and we have every sympathy with her. However, if she were not in such a hurry to score emotional points and to demonstrate on the media last Thursday night the depth of her emotional upset, the situation might be better. She accused of murder those of my constituents, and constituents of hon. and right hon. Members throughout the House, who took it upon themselves to combat terrorism while serving in Northern Ireland as members of Her Majesty's forces. She spoke of 2,600 people in Northern Ireland, since the start of the recent troubles, as having been murdered. Yet, if we look at the figures we find that of those 2,627 deaths—that is far too many and none of them can be justified in any way —by the end of 1987, 304 were killed by the security forces and 55 per cent. of them were civilians.

Everybody deplores any death, and condemns strongly the murders by paramilitaries on both sides, but I would hesitate to call 304 deaths at the hands of the security forces — 169 of them civilians with no known paramilitary connections — "murders". The Prime Minister must be careful in the way that she uses words because she can destroy a good case.

It could be, of course, that the Prime Minister, as head of the Secret Service, knows things that we do not in this regard, and to which we are not privy. I hope that that is not the case. Or perhaps, once again, it was an occasion when the Prime Minister allowed her emotion to overcome her reason, and used figures like confetti at a Moonie wedding. She was quick to say in her recent discussions with the Taoiseach, "This is an emotional problem and you don't defeat emotion with reason", but we will win only if we are rational in our approach.

Therefore, we have called for a judicial inquiry because we believe that the Attorney-General could not conceivably have reached his conclusion that the public interest and national security dictated that members of the RUC should not be prosecuted for conspiracy to pervert the course of justice, despite compelling evidence that they had so conspired, without consulting the Prime Minister. She gave her advice as head of the security forces, emotionally involved, blinkered in her reaction to what the result of that decision might be for the safety of our troops on the streets in Northern Ireland and the success of the campaign against the men of violence. She must have been consulted. She must have been aware of, or had the ultimate responsibility as head of the secret services for, their role in the Stalker affair—the role of MI5, the planting of the bugs.

Therefore, we understand the truculence that the Prime Minister displayed in her answer last Thursday to my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and to the demands made by the leaders of the Ulster Unionist party and the Democratic Unionist party that the buck should not stop with junior, or even senior, officers of the RUC. There is political and security force involvement.

We know also that there are senior politicians who adopted the attitude, "I don't want to know what you are doing, but are you enjoying it?" and knew of the existence of those special RUC units. In fact, in 1979, when first in her new job as Prime Minister, when the crescendo was building up, at the height of the IRA campaign, the Prime Minister herself visited the highly secret Bessbrook support unit. The account in *The Irish Times* refers to Mrs. Thatcher approaching to meet the men of that unit from a helicopter:

> "When it landed, Mrs. Thatcher strolled towards the BSU men with her characteristic purposefulness, pausing only to glare over her shoulder at Denis who had fallen down the helicopter steps.
>
> An ex-BSU man takes up the story: 'She came up to us and said "so you're the special unit we've heard about?" and then she started shaking hands and talking to each man. I remember her saying: "I don't know what you're doing, but are you enjoying it?" . . . She kept on congratulating our Inspector, calling him by his Christian name, saying what a good job the men were doing and "long may you continue."'"

The question to which we need to know the answer is "Did the attitude reflected in the phrase, 'I don't know what you're doing' permeate the whole of her Administration at that time and until the fatal shootings?" Was it, as Mr. Stalker later said:

> "What I did get was a feeling that an atmosphere was raised to such an extent and the adrenalin was flowing to such a level that the feeling was 'OK, dead or alive we'll be protected to some extent. We're soldiers really, in Police uniform, and we can probably justify deaths afterwards because we are in a war.', but I never found that there was any suggestion that there was a 'shoot-to-kill' policy. It was a feeling of 'Let's do it to them before they do it to us.'"

As those men were trained in speed and aggression of response, as members of the headquarters' mobile support units, that seems to be close to an unofficial shoot-to-kill policy that was at that time in operation in those very difficult situations in that part of Northern Ireland, where terrorism was rampant. That is why we believe that we should have a judicial inquiry — because there is evidence, innuendo and rumour, which will be referred to continually during the debate. When the Secretary of State calls on us for evidence, the answer is that that evidence, if it exists, is in the reports which none of us has yet been allowed to see and which the country has a right to know about. Because of the cover-up over the tapes and the concoctions of stories, we still do not know—perhaps the Minister will tell us when he replies to the debate—

whether the cover-up story that was sanctioned in the Robinson case was first telephoned through to headquarters at Knock in Belfast, as has been alleged.

Northern Ireland is a very dangerous and very unhappy place. The Prime Minister's decision, as head of the security forces, and the Attorney-General's decision, with regard to no prosecutions following the Stalker-Sampson inquiry, have undermined the rule of law, and confidence in the RUC. Secret disciplinary procedures behind closed doors are no substitute. It is a nasty story, a grubby tale, with the fingerprints of the Prime Minister all over it. The hayshed tape lies at the heart of this story — *[Interruption.]* Well, she is head of the security forces and was consulted by the Attorney-General.

The Government still have the opportunity to come clean, by having a judicial inquiry under the Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1971 to look at the Stalker affair, the shoot-to-kill policy—if there was one—the cover-up and the roles of the Prime Minister, the Attorney-General and the security forces.

We are not seeking to find scapegoats — the Government are doing that. We seek to find the truth—the first casualty in this tragic affair. If, out of all this sorry mess, we could at least have the truth, in the end it might have been worth it. At least we could face the future with some degree of confidence.

6.6 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I do not really believe that this House or the country on this side of the Irish sea really understands what is going on in Northern Ireland. As Members of Parliament, we discover that if there is an incident such as has been discussed at length by the spokesman for the Opposition, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), there will be a great hue and cry and a great parliamentary hubbub. However, when one looks at what is happening in Northern Ireland and sees how innocent people and those who are trying to do their duty in defending all sections of the community are being mown down and murdered, there seems a great silence. It is a thundering silence so far as the people of Northern Ireland are concerned.

The hon. Members for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross), for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe), for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) and for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) are in gaol tonight. I utterly and totally deplore the fact that we are having this debate tonight; all Members representing Northern Ireland should have had an opportunity to be present in the House on this occasion because this is the first opportunity that Northern Ireland Members, who represent the people of Northern Ireland through the ballot box, have had to discuss these events in a debate in this House.

Today is supposed to be devoted to Northern Ireland business, but we have had a long statement about the privatisation of electricity and we are told that at 7 o'clock this debate is to cease. That is a real outrage to the people of Northern Ireland. It is a crying shame that it is tonight that such issues are before us that should be debated in this House—it is better that they are debated in the House. I do not agree with what the spokesman for the Opposition said, but then he would not agree with many things that I say. It is better to discuss such matters in the House and it is better that the people of Northern Ireland should know that their representatives have an opportunity to say what has to be said in the House.

The Unionists of Northern Ireland can discuss their affairs in an Anglo-Irish Conference, of which we know nothing because it is all done in secret. It has been revealed that the understanding of both parties in the Anglo-Irish Conference is really a misunderstanding. Last night, we were informed by the Secretary of State that the next meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference would be attended by the two chiefs of the police forces in the North and the South. The Secretary of State had hardly left Dublin than a strong statement was made that that was not the case. In fact, Mr. Lenihan told us that they might discuss the fair employment position — or the unfair employment position, whichever way one looks at it — at the next meeting. The people of Northern Ireland are involved in that. We have to pay the price, but we are never told anything.

At 7 o'clock tonight, the axe will come down. If we want to wait until 10 o'clock, we can, by the grace and favour of the powers that be, have an hour and a half and, at 11.30, go home.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): For many years the hon. Gentleman and I have differed profoundly on Northern Ireland, but on this issue I completely agree with him. For us to have a debate split up in this way shows that somebody does not see the issue of Northern Ireland in its proper perspective. It is disgraceful that this situation has been thrust upon us.

Rev. Ian Paisley: All right-thinking people in Northern Ireland, and the right-thinking Members of the House who are interested in Northern Ireland debates — although not many are and I have been in the House long enough to know that not many people stay throughout any debate —know that the Secretary of State is only answerable to the House. He goes down to Dublin and answers the Ministers there, but he is not responsible to them. He does not need to answer to them; he is responsible to the House and to the people of Northern Ireland. However, we have been robbed of our rights.

When we did not come to the House, we were told that we should be at the House. Then, when we come to the House, we are not given enough time to debate. In fact, one fellow asked me what I was doing here and said that I should be away home. The situation has deteriorated into a farce for the people of Northern Ireland. The House should conduct its business in such a way that all the people of Northern Ireland will know that these matters are being treated with great seriousness, no matter what side of the fence one is on.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): In fact, we may not even resume the debate at 10 o'clock. There could be two Divisions, following the private business, which means that the debate might not resume until 10.30, which would mean that this crucial debate will have been reduced to about two and three quarter hours.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I think that we shall also have another one and a half hours, but what time of the night will that be? Moreover, the people of Northern Ireland are anxious to know what the House is doing, and at that late hour there will be no press coverage. The Secretary of State has it in his power to say that the debate will be adjourned at 7 o'clock and resumed on another day. That would help everyone. It would also mean that those Members who are in gaol could attend.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

Let me just say that the men in gaol tonight would not be there if they were Members of Parliament on this side of the water. The law on parades in Northern Ireland is different from the law on this side of the water. Here one must give six days' notice; there one must give seven days' notice. Those men would not be in prison at all if they had made their protests on this side of the water.

Why were the powers that be anxious that Unionists should not be in the House tonight? Were they afraid of what the Unionists would say? Were they afraid of the Ulster representatives taking part in the debate?

Mr. Mallon: I find myself in the unique situation of agreeing with the hon. Gentleman on this. Would it not be as well to have clarification now, because those of us who wish to speak want to leave time for everyone to make a contribution? If we had such clarification now we would be better able to facilitate other hon. Members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Let me try to help hon. Members. If the private business comes on at 7 o'clock before this debate is concluded, this debate will be resumed at the concluson of private business at 10 o'clock or before, as the case may be. If Divisions take us beyond 10 o'clock, the debate on Northern Ireland business can go on until 11.30.

Mr. McNamara: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm that the order that follows will have another hour and a half, and that will have some relevance to what we are debating now?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, that is the case. At the conclusion of the debate on this order, even though that may be after 10 o'clock, the subsequent order will then have up to one and a half hours.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you allow me to give notice that I shall not rise again to intervene in the debate, but I wish to protest, as I have often protested, at the handling of Northern Ireland business.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Let me make a plea to the Secretary of State. It is in his power at 7 o'clock to move that the debate be adjourned. If there is agreement with the other side, the debate could be resumed next week. This is my only opportunity to speak, and it is difficult for me not to say what I have to say. My constituents will ask why I did not say certain things and they will not understand if I say that I had only a few minutes and had to allow time for others to speak. People in Northern Ireland believe that we can talk for as long as we like, but that is not the way of the House. If English Members of Parliament were treated as we have been treated tonight, there would be one unholy row in the House. They would not tolerate it. I am making a plea to the Secretary of State to adjourn the debate at 7 o'clock.

Did the Secretary of State know that there would be a long statement today, or did he think that we would be able to start this debate earlier? That would have allowed at least some semblance of time to carry on this debate. The Secretary of State has it within his power to give this debate an airing in the way that I have suggested. I invite him to tell us whether he is prepared to do so.

Mr. Tom King: The hon. Gentleman knows that the business of the House is not a matter for me but I am sympathetic to the problem that hon. Members face. I shall look into the matter and see whether there is any possibility of his request being met, but there is still some uncertainty about the time that we have today. Unfortunately, many hon. Members wanted to question the Secretary of State for Energy on his statement today and there was bound to be a business statement, which obviously contributed to the problem. I shall look into the matter, but I do not know whether anything can be done.

Mr. McNamara: We should like to have a reply by 7 o'clock.

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you are now in the Chair, perhaps you will clarify the position. We are led to believe that, at 7 o'clock, there will be an interruption for opposed private business. If that lasts until 10 o'clock, an hour and a half will remain for this business. If there are two Divisions on the private business, it will probably finish at half past 10 and we shall have an hour and half after that for this business.

In your absence, Mr. Speaker, I have been making a protest, for which there has been support from both sides of the House, about the fact that we have no time to discuss a vital matter in respect of Northern Ireland. It is now 20 minutes past 6. The two official spokemen have had an opportunity to state their position, and it is now the turn of Back Benchers to do so.

Mr. Speaker: I can tell the hon. Gentleman, as I did earlier, that this debate will be interrupted at 7 o'clock and that we shall return to it after the conclusion of the opposed private business. If that is concluded before 10 o'clock, we shall return to this debate before 10 o'clock, but this debate can continue until 11.30 pm and the following debate can continue for a further hour and a half.

Mr. Gow: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As I understand it, if at 10 o'clock there were one, two or even three Divisions, a quarter of an hour, half an hour or three quarters of an hour would be denied to this debate. Is that right?

Mr. Speaker: The Question on this motion will be put at 11.30 pm, so this debate can go until 11.30 pm. The time taken up by the Division will not affect subsequent debates. I was not in the Chair when the matter was first raised, so I am not totally seized of the problem.

Mr. Gow: You, Mr. Speaker, have confirmed the worst fears of all hon. Members. If there are one, two or three Divisions on the opposed private business at 10 o'clock the time taken on those Divisions will be lost to this debate.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, that would be correct. Some time for this debate would be lost. The debate may continue only until 11.30 pm, so, if there were a number of Divisions at 10 o'clock, I fear that some time would be lost.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I believe that I am in somewhat of an impasse. I do not believe that I am being permitted to put my case. We want to put our case and we want to hear the answer from the Front Bench.

Certain charges have been made from the Opposition Front Bench tonight and other hon. Members will be asking questions. If the debate continues until 10 to 7, we shall have a hotch-potch of an answer. No one will have the opportunity to obtain a proper answer. We are now told that, if Divisions continue until 10.45 pm, we shall

have only three quarters of an hour to finish the debate. I support the comment of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), that it is not fair to ask people to debate the matter in this way. I hope that Ministers will tell us quickly whether they are prepared to do as I have suggested, and adjourn the debate.

I wish to bring a number of matters to the attention of the House. I speak under a considerable strain tonight because, as I said in an earlier question to the Prime Minister, a member of my own church was murdered last night in the city of Belfast. He was a young man to whom I recently spoke about his marriage. He was planning to marry a young lady from my church. His death hangs very heavily on me. I have not been able to be at home because I have been performing my duties in Brussels and I feel very sore about the matter.

Some buildings have been removed from Royal avenue in the centre of Belfast. Laing, the contractors, are busy on a development which takes in the old Smithfield market area. To protect that building site, they erected a large hoarding on the Royal avenue site. A patrol had to take up duty near that hoarding and, because of that hoarding, there was a blind side that the patrol could not keep properly under surveillance.

The members of the Ulster Defence Regiment on that patrol said to their commanding officer, "Look, we need to have something done so that we are not a sitting target for an assassination attempt." Evidently, the matter was examined and the officer concerned—no doubt his rank will be disclosed in the examination promised by the Prime Minister today—is reported to have said, "No, we can't do anything. If you don't like what you are asked to do, you can leave the regiment."

Those young men were not objecting to their duty, but they have been told over and over again to watch themselves. They were on the ground and they knew the type of attack that could be launched upon them. Such an attack was launched upon them and today two families are plunged into the depths of sorrow as a result of what has taken place.

I do not wish to comment further on that, but I look forward to a proper examination of the facts and an investigation of what has occurred. The men were trying to do their duty efficiently and effectively and to keep up the high standards in respect of safety measures in which they were trained. If an officer said to them, "If you don't like what you are asked to do, resign from the regiment," that officer will have to be dealt with and disciplined.

Those men give, after hours, their services to the Ulster Defence Regiment to defend every section of the community and they should be given due respect by their commanding officers. The matter of the hoarding also needs to be investigated.

I started this speech by saying that I did not think that people in this House and on this side of the water know what is happening in Northern Ireland. On 17 January, a constituent of mine, young Stephen Tweed, who lives between Ballymena and Ballymoney on the outskirts of a village known as Dunloy — he is a Government employee and a part-time soldier in the Ulster Defence Regiment—was driving, with his girl friend, down the lane to his father's farmhouse. Forty one bullets were pumped into his car by two Armalite rifles in the hands of two members of the Irish Republican Army. I have visited the scene and looked at the car. It is a miracle that anybody came out of that car alive. Both the boy and his girl friend escaped without a scratch.

Just after that event, there appeared on the sign of an old school wall, in large writing, the words:

"Tweed goes on, but not for long",

followed by the registration number of his car and signed by the IRA. That has been on the wall of the old school for days in an area which is strongly infiltrated by the IRA, inciting and inviting a further attack on the man and his home. If that had happened in England, the police would immediately have obliterated the sign because it is an incitement to murder. I have gone to the police in Ballymoney. I have told them that the sign should be erased. They agreed, but said that the owner of the property is not in sympathy with taking the sign off; he objects to anyone removing it.

These are some of the things which are happening in Northern Ireland. I am trying to show the House what we are up against. Before I came into the debate, I rang the police and was informed that the sign is still there, but that they were working on it. I said, "Superintendent, that is not good enough. The sign is inciting people to carry out a murder which has been attempted and has failed. If it was in any other part of the community, it would have been dealt with immediately."

Some hon. Members have applied strictures to the Royal Ulster Constabulary. It is all right when Royal Ulster Constabulary members are beating the heads of Protestants in Portadown: then there are cheers from the Opposition. In fact, a leading member of the same party as the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), Councillor Briege Rodgers, had something to say about Portadown. She said that Portadown was the capital of Protestantism and that if the Protestants were beaten there, they would be beaten everywhere. That was her attitude. I have heard hon. Members speak of the great work which the RUC did in beating up Protestants who wanted to walk through a certain area. It is important that the House gets to grips with the position and knows exactly what is happening.

What about Mr. Stephen Tweed? He was visited by a member of the security forces who handed him a ·22 pistol and told him that he could protect himself. Any hon. Member who thinks that a pea-shooter of that strength is any protection for a man——

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman should know.

Rev. Ian Paisley —who is under such tremendous threat should have his head examined. It is all right for the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) to comment. He has set up many UDR men.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Gentleman was complaining about the time available for hon. Members from Northern Ireland in the debate. He has spoken now for nearly half an hour and he will leave hardly enough time for other hon. Members. He is being totally unfair to the House.

Mr. Alton: On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) may wish to reflect on the comment he has just made about an hon. Member setting up a member of the UDR. I hope he will withdraw that remark.

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for what is said. However, the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) has been speaking for rather a long time.

Rev. Ian Paisley: There are four Members from Northern Ireland in the House. We are getting until 7 o'clock. The Government Front Bench spokesman — *[Interruption.]* We were told by the managers of the business that an arrangement had been made by the two Front Benches to get the business over by 7 o'clock. We were no party to that arrangement.

Mr. Speaker: Nor was I. I have already told the hon. Member that the debate may go on after 10 o'clock, or even before that if the opposed private business is over.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can we find out from the Secretary of State, through yourself, whether the Government have agreed to adjourn the debate at 7 o'clock to another occasion when we will have sufficient time to discuss this serious matter?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me. Let us wait until we get to 7 o'clock.

Rev. Ian Paisley: It would be better for the House if we knew before that. It is unfair to the House and to other hon. Members — *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may heckle me as much as they like. [AN HON. MEMBER: "The hon. Gentleman will still be speaking at 7 o'clock."] That is all right. It would not be the first time that I had talked out a debate. Opposition Members too have talked out debates. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that that came from the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, because we know that when a stone is thrown among a lot of dogs the one that is hit the hardest yelps the loudest. I am happy about his remark.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) does not seem to know much about Northern Ireland. He should read the records of the first Assembly, when he will find out that Unionists refused to sit with the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh because of the things which he had said about the UDR. If he would like more information about the UDR, perhaps he should remember that his friend Dick Spring and his friend Dr. FitzGerald said after the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed that it would be the end of the UDR. So there has been an attempt to discredit the UDR and to attack its members.

Mr. Alton: I think the hon. Gentleman will agree that there is a world of difference between saying that an hon. Member has discredited the UDR or disagrees with things which it has done and saying that an hon. Member tried to set up members of the UDR which gave the clear impression that the hon. Member had been involved in organising events which led to UDR men losing their lives.

Rev. Ian Paisley: It is very easy to set up people in Northern Ireland. Two police officers were named in the House by the Opposition Front Bench; the names were not even right, but those men were set up as soon as they were mentioned. Someone has only to say that the UDR is a pack of murderers and its members are set up in the same way as RUC officers have been.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Is it not the case that in 1975 and in 1987 the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) made statements attacking the integrity of UDR members and the partisanship of the organisation, and within days the IRA replied to his comments by killing members of the regiment?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I want to return to the young man who has been set up by the IRA for a further attack on his life. He has been offered a ·22 pistol to defend himself. There is not a police officer in London, a comparatively peaceful city, who is asked to carry out the protection of Government officers with only a ·22 pistol. Yet that is all the protection offered to a man who has had 41 bullets pumped into his car, who is in danger of being wiped out, and who has a sign 100 yards from the farmhouse inciting people to kill him. I would be failing in my duty as Member of Parliament for the area, no matter what hon. Members think of me and no matter what agitation goes on about parliamentary time, if I did not raise that matter in the House this evening. That is my duty, and I shall do my duty, whether it is popular or unpopular with this House.

It is scandalous for any two parties in this House to make an arrangement for 7 o'clock involving Northern Ireland business, and thinking that they can do it because they have five Unionist Members comfortably behind bars. That is something that the people of Northern Ireland will not tolerate, and something that I, as a Member of this House, will vigorously protest against.

Serious events are taking place in Northern Ireland at present. Everyone there knows that a large consignment of sophisticated and powerful weaponry has been brought into Northern Ireland, and into the Irish Republic. The Garda in the South are alarmed; Mr. Haughey himself is alarmed; the authorities here are alarmed.

I have heard it said that the search in the South came about because of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Let me disillusion the House. No search was made in the South as a result of any representations through the Anglo-Irish Conference. A message conveyed to the Gardai from the French police giving the facts about the shipment was what started the search. That is why Mr. Haughey asked for sophisticated search machinery, which he borrowed from the Northern Ireland authorities, to help his search.

Those of us who live in Northern Ireland keep our ears open, and we know what is happening. The search took place because Mr. Haughey saw that his Government could go down.

Is the House aware that in the hands of the IRA is a bomb which, if it alights on a Land Rover, can penetrate 6 in of steel and destroy it? *[Interruption.]* I am told that it is a grenade. On Monday night, I was at the bedside of a sergeant. The lower part of his body had been almost blown off in Coalisland. He needed 14 pints of blood, and was fighting for his life. I stood there with his wife and family.

What do hon. Members think is the morale of the policemen who now go out in Land Rovers knowing that in the hands of the terrorists is a bomb that can penetrate 6 in of steel and destroy them? These are facts that the House needs to know.

One of the Members of this House who are in prison tonight — the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker), whose outspokenness is well known — said this in the House:

> "Is the House aware that, in the previous 11 years, five of the six men who were shot"—

this is what all the investigation is about—

"and their associates—this is not intended to excuse any wrongdoing—had murdered 222 people in my constituency, 42 of whom were policemen, 35 of whom were UDR men, over 20 of whom were innocent Catholics and the rest were regular soldiers — constituents of hon. Members — and Protestants." — [*Official Report*, 17 February 1988; Vol. 127, c. 990.]

That is the background of what we are discussing tonight. We cannot discuss such a horrific background without keeping in mind the background of Northern Ireland.

I know that, if the campaign with these modern weapons is launched on the security forces, we shall be in the utmost difficulty. We only have to see helicopters shot out of the skies and aeroplanes brought down to see what will happen in Northern Ireland.

I see that the Secretary of State has returned to the Chamber. Perhaps he can tell us whether the debate will stop at 7 o'clock.

I now see that the Leader of the House has come in as well. I shall give way to him, if he wishes to make a statement. It seems that the Leader of the House is not going to make a statement. If he is intending to make one, however, it would be helpful to me if he made it now, so that I can judge the position.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way for a moment. I appreciate that the debate started rather late—that is just one of the things that happen here—and I understand that many hon. Members on both sides of the House wish to speak. Perhaps it would be for the convenience of the House if we adjourned the debate at 7 o'clock. I propose that it should be resumed at a convenient date, which I would discuss through the usual channels.

Mr. McNamara: We should be happy to accept that arrangement.

Mr. Gow: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Now that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is here, let me say that many hon. Members on both sides of the House would doubtless like to take the opportunity of telling him that many people consider the arrangements for today's debate most unsatisfactory.

Having made that point, I hope that we will all join in saying to my right hon. Friend that we greatly appreciate the sensitive way in which he has handled the matter.

Mr. Alton: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I join the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) in thanking the Leader of the House for coming to the Dispatch Box to make his statement. Let me also join him in saying that the procedures that we use for dealing with Northern Ireland business are clearly wholly unsatisfactory. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will examine the way in which Standing Orders operate and Orders in Council are brought, and also the way in which very short periods are allocated to deal with matters of great sensitivity and political importance.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I thank the Leader of the House for his announcement. I also thank him on behalf of the Official Unionists who are not present in the House tonight. I think that everyone knows why they are not present. They adopted the same attitude as the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) and said that they would not seek to be called in the debate.

What the right hon. Gentleman has said is gratifying, and will be welcomed in Northern Ireland. It will show the people there that the House is prepared to take time to discuss these vital matters.

Mr. Tom King: The hon. Gentleman may at the same time be able to bring great relief to some of his hon. Friends who are at present languishing elsewhere. He explained that they are there because they are being treated differently from hon. Members in other parts of the House in having to give seven days' notice, whereas in England and Wales six days' notice is required. I am amazed to hear that explanation, which is based entirely on a failure to understand parliamentary draftsmanship. The time requirement for Northern Ireland is identical to that in the rest of the United Kingdom. He may wish, therefore, to advise those hon. Members that they are languishing in vain.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am sorry that the Secretary of State has not read his own Order in Council. I am sorry that he does not know the difference between pieces of legislation that he sponsors in the House, and that he does not know the charges brought against those hon. Members. I was in court with them on the very same charges. How could they be brought to court for not giving seven days' notice if, as the Secretary of State has said, the law is the same as in the rest of the United Kingdom?

At another time I will speak in the House about the order on public order and I will show the Secretary of State in *Hansard* the provisions in that order that were not voted down by the House and are not applicable in England and Wales. When will the Secretary of State have sense and tell the truth to the House? To come to the House and tell us that the public order order is the same as that for the rest of the United Kingdom is absolute tommy rot. I would use a stronger expression, Mr. Speaker, only you would call me to order.

I trust that the Secretary of State will now read his own legislation. The public order order in Northern Ireland is entirely different from the legislation in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The Secretary of State was wearing a great smile. He seems to enjoy the fact that those hon. Members are languishing in prison. I have news for him. He could put the Unionist leaders into prison for years, but it would not destroy their credibility with the people. When they take part in an election, they will be returned with overwhelming votes.

Mr. Mallon: Does the hon. Gentleman not see any contradiction in the situation prevailing at the present time, in which other hon. Members are languishing, as he puts it, in prison because of their opposition to the public order order, while if they were here they would be voting for the renewal of this piece of legislation?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I never said that they were languishing in prison. It was the Secretary of State who said that—the man who rejoices when Members of the House are in that situation. He says that he understands, but he does not understand. If he understood, he would realise that it would be better to keep elected leaders out of prison and have them here in the House. For the day will come, if he keeps on doing what he is doing, when he will be faced with people of a different type, who will not bother with the constitutional way of doing things.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

In this dangerous situation, when there are arms in the country from Libya and the position is constantly deteriorating, it ill becomes the Secretary of State to treat us with the contempt with which he has treated us tonight. I am sure that when the hon. Members come out of their short imprisonment, they will not have the same privilege as was given to my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), who was locked in with a Republican rebel, especially chosen, no doubt, on the orders of the Secretary of State, thinking perhaps that he would be able to proselytise and convert the hon. Member. It was very interesting that the next day they removed the Republican quickly from the Protestant influence of that prison cell because they thought that he would be converted to proper convictions. *[Laughter.]* Hon. Members may laugh, and I can laugh, although I have been in prison many times and according to the public order order I shall be going again. But I shall stand up in court and read what the Secretary of State said—that I should not be there, that I have committed no crime—and we shall see what the DPP says in court about the Secretary of State.

We hear all this talk about Sinn Fein being isolated by the SDLP, that the SDLP is pushing Sinn Fein away. I want to tell the House what happened in the Magherafelt council the other night. The Sinn Fein members got up, after a vicious attack led by the godfather of terrorism, a man called Davey, who has set up many good men to be killed. He moved that Queen Elizabeth II——

Mr. McNamara: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but earlier he accused the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) of setting up UDR men. He has now accused somebody outside of setting up men to be killed. The implication of the use of that phrase is that he was saying the same about the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh. I think that the hon. Gentleman should be made to withdraw that, as happened with my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone).

Mr. Speaker: I hope that the hon. Member will withdraw, if that was what he was saying.

Rev. Ian Paisley: You can read *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker, and you will see exactly what I said. I am afraid that I cannot withdraw until you have done that, because this is not a correct statement.

The man I am talking about, Davey, is well known as an IRA godfather. If I am not allowed in the House——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not talking about the gentleman outside the House whom the hon. Member mentioned; I am talking about an hon. Member inside the House.

Rev. Ian Paisley: All I am saying, Sir, is that you can read *Hansard*. I will bow to your ruling. If you read *Hansard*, no doubt you will get in touch with me and if you want me to do something no doubt you will tell me what it is. I am not promising that I will do it, but I will listen to what you have to say. That is all I can do.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): Is it not strange that the spokesman for Her Majesty's Opposition, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), should call on the hon. Member to withdraw in connection with the names that he has mentioned, when the hon. Gentleman himself named the members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary? It is all right naming an RUC member, but one cannot name an IRA man. It seems that the hon. Gentleman is more concerned to defend IRA men than to defend members of the RUC and the security forces.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Let us get back to Magherafelt council.

Mr. Mallon: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your direction in relation to this. I want it to be clearly understood that whether the hon. Gentleman withdraws or does not withdraw the remarks he made about me is of no interest and little relevance to me. But would it be your instruction that, if the hon. Gentleman were to accuse someone else of having set someone up for murder, that would be very unparliamentary indeed and you would require it to be clarified?

Mr. Speaker: As I understand it, the term "setting up" has a special relevance in Northern Ireland. It has not, I think, been considered an unparliamentary phrase previously in the Chamber. I am sure that the whole House will agree that all of us recognise the danger in which, sadly, hon. Members in Ulster live. I hope that nothing that is said here will inflame the situation or put their lives in danger.

Rev. Ian Paisley: No doubt, Mr. Speaker, you will read carefully what has been said and will be in touch with me about it. I have already made my position clear.

Mr. Gow: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way.

Rev Ian Paisley: I hope that the hon. Gentleman knows that, if he keeps speaking until 7 o'clock and I am still on my feet, I shall be called first the next time.

Mr. Gow: I wanted to raise a difference point when I asked the hon. Gentleman to give way to me. Since it was the hon. Gentleman who, with the assent of the whole House, wanted the debate to take place on another day, does he realise that he must sit down just before 7 o'clock? If he would like to sit down now, that might be of help to him, and indeed to the House.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am sitting down at the moment.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It might be helpful to the hon. Gentleman if I underline what the hon. Member for Eastbourne has just said. If the hon. Gentleman is on his feet at 7 o'clock, he will put in jeopardy the adjournment of the debate.

Rev. Ian Paisley: It is 6.57, Sir, and I think that I can finish what I have to say before the dread hour. I must tell the House that there was a move by Sinn Fein IRA gunmen, in that council, to remove Queen Elizabeth's name from the parks, and that they were backed unanimously by the SDLP. Every one of them voted in favour, including a justice of the peace. That is what is happening in Northern Ireland and that is what I wanted to say before 7 o'clock. I understand that if I sit down at 7 o'clock I shall be called first next time. [SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Then I will sit down, Mr. Speaker.

Debate adjourned.—*[Mr. Wakeham.]*

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Orders of the Day

Hampshire (Lyndhurst Bypass) Bill
[Lords] (By Order)

Order for Second Reading read.

6.59 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson)——

Mr. Speaker: If I may interrupt the hon. Gentleman for one moment, I failed to say that I have not selected the Instruction on the Order Paper, but he may make reference to it in his speech.

Mr. Mans: I am indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest for raising no objection to this private Bill. I am also delighted that my hon. Friend will be taking part in the debate as his knowledge of the New Forest is much greater than my own. We both welcome the debate in the interests of all concerned, and as a way of bringing a long drawn-out saga of a bypass through the village of Lyndhurst nearer a conclusion.

I hope that my past involvement in the matter over a number of years as a New Forest district councillor will be of assistance to hon. Members in deciding their views. The discussion about a bypass for the village of Lyndhurst is not new. There are references to a bypass being proposed as long ago as 1914. In that year it was suggested as a way of reducing unemployment in the village. The estimated cost was £320, and at least part of the route was similar to the route proposed today. It was estimated that the road would be completed in four weeks and that it would take 27 men to do the task.

Things have changed a lot since then. Indeed, 50 years ago work actually started on a bypass, along a similar route to the one now proposed. The road was mentioned in the Baker report of 1949 which led to the New Forest Act 1949 which gave the verderers, the guardians of the New Forest, their present powers.

Since then, a number of routes have been proposed. There have been two public inquiries and numerous public consultations. However, before explaining those routes, and more specifically the new route proposed by the county council and why it decided to puruse that route by way of a private Bill, I should like to explain why a bypass for the village of Lyndhurst is needed.

Lyndhurst is a small village with a population of below 3,000. However, for many years it has been considered to be the capital of the New Forest, largely because it is a route centre—six roads converge upon Lyndhurst. A bypass is needed because of the traffic going into the New Forest which recently has progressively become a very important recreational area. I understand that last year 11 million people visited the New Forest, and forest traffic has increased each year. At the last census 61,000 vehicles passed in or out of the village during August, and 46,000 vehicles in or out of the village during October. Traffic congestion is enormous. For many summer weekends queues of four miles are not uncommon and the noise is horrifying.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Can the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) tell us whether those who were going in or out of the village were asked whether their destination was Lyndhurst and features within the village such as Bolton's Bench? How many were trying to get through the village? My evidence is that a large amount of the traffic comprised people trying to get to the village, not trying to get through it. Those people would not be using the bypass.

Mr. Mans: My evidence shows that a great many people would be using the bypass, as they wish to pass Lyndhurst and get to the New Forest. It is clear from those figures that almost everyone wants a bypass. My hon. Friend the Member for the New Forest is one of those people. The verderers, the guardians of the New Forest, want a bypass. To my knowledge, no environmental group has publicly come out against the principle of a bypass.

However, it is one thing to agree a principle, it is quite another to find a route. Over the years two routes have been canvassed, at least initially. The outer route has the support of the county council, the New Forest district council, the parish council of Lyndhurst and indeed the residents' association. That is a good route for traffic, but it intrudes into the forest. For that reason the verderers have opposed it. That route was tested by public inquiry in the 1970s. It is not surprising that the verderers should oppose such a route as they have a statutory duty to protect the forest. Although verderers protect the forest, they do not protect the whole environment and there are plenty of beauty spots and open areas outside the statutory duty of the verderers but within the geographical area of the New Forest.

I shall call the other route the village route because it is a relief road and not a proper bypass. That has the support of the verderers because it intrudes on the New Forest to only a small degree. Latterly, it has had the support of other environmental groups. However, the councils have opposed that route as have the people of Lyndhurst. That is not surprising because it cuts off part of the village. It cuts off the village green called Bolton's Bench, the cricket ground and 15 per cent. of the housing of the village from the remainder of the village and passes through a preservation area. Indeed, it will not get rid of much of the noise and air pollution which the villagers already suffer because of the lack of a proper bypass. In addition, it passes through paddock land and areas of ecological importance.

Both routes are equally damaging to the environment, but in different ways. That is why there has been no agreement about which route should be selected, and why in the mid-1980s the county council decided upon a compromise and proposed a new route which this Bill seeks to promote. This route is closer to the village, it keeps the village intact, it does not pass through the preservation area or cut off the village green. It is less intrusive into the New Forest. It is not an ideal route for the villagers of Lyndhurst but they have agreed to it to the extent that more than half the population have signed a petition agreeing to that route. It has the support of the county council, the parish council and the residents' association. Indeed, it has the unanimous support of the Conservative and the Labour groups on the county council. That shows, if nothing else, that this is not a partisan matter and it has the support of different parties locally in Hampshire.

[Mr. Mans]

That route and other routes were the subject of a second public inquiry, which was part of the more general inquiry on the forecast endowments village plan. That inquiry said that the village route was not the best, for the reasons I have given. It said that of the two outer routes, the compromise route was just better and that a further variation on the village route should be examined using the same criteria as were used for the village route. That was done by the county council. Unfortunately, the verderers were not prepared to go along with the compromise route.

Planning permission was then obtained for the compromise route. The decision on planning permission was not called in by the Minister, so the planning processes have been exhausted. There is no doubt that the Bill does not intend to bypass those processes; it is in addition to those processes and is necessary because of the special nature of the New Forest.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I am advised that there has been no public inquiry under the town and country planning legislation within a reasonable period. If that is the case, it would seem to qualify the point made by the hon. Gentleman about public consultation.

Mr. Mans: There was a public inquiry into the forest and village towns local plan which started in 1983, because of the importance of the bypass around Lyndhurst. The inquiry was in two parts. The first related to the forest and the second related to the various routes which were considered for the bypass, so the planning procedures have been exhausted.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mans: I have made the point, and I must go on as I have quite a lot to say.

What was the council to do next? Our suggestion was that it should go to the verderers and ask them again whether they would be prepared to go along with the compromise route.

Section 17 of the New Forest Act 1949 relates to unfenced roads. The council took legal advice and was told that the section related only to unfenced roads. That view was supported by Lord Denning in another place, when he made it perfectly clear that the section could not be used by the county council or any other authority to ask permission for a road of the sort necessary to be built, because a bypass around Lyndhurst would have to be fenced in the same way as the roads to which it would join in the north and the south are fenced. The best legal advice was that the council could not proceed in that direction.

It could well be argued that if the council had gone to the verderers and the arbitration procedures had been used, the verderers, even if they gave permission, could have been considered to have been acting outside their authority. If they had done that, the plan may have had to be tested in the courts. Notwithstanding that, it would have been necessary for a private Bill to provide for the road to be fenced.

There are other good reasons for a private Bill. The decision taken on the bypass would be in the public domain and it would be open for all parties — environmental groups, residents' associations and others — to put their point of view. A private arrangement under section 17 of the New Forest Act between the county council and the verderers would not have allowed for the public consultation which has taken place. We have already had a Select Committee report from the other place, where the various route options have been considered in detail.

The New Forest Act 1949 allows for financial compensation only if land is used for roads. It makes no allowance for compensation for an exchange of land. The verderers have said on many occasions that they would prefer an exchange of land to financial compensation. If the road is built, it will take 10·6 acres of forest land, but the county council has already purchased 18·8 acres to give back to the forest, so if the Bill goes through and the council is allowed to build a road, the New Forest will become bigger, not smaller.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us where the compensation land is and whether he is satisfied that the general public will have access to the compensation land and animals will be able to get to the compensation land as freely as they can to some of the land that will be lost?

Mr. Mans: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying. The compensation land is at Minstead and is in two portions. Part of the land is already owned by the council and the other land will be purchased from the manor of Minstead. The cattle and other animals will have access to that land.

There are other reasons why a private Bill is a good procedure. It will allow people who will have to give up land for compulsory purchase to be dealt with in the same way as owners of forest land are dealt with by the Ministry of Agriculture. It is fair to all land owners, compared with the procedure under the New Forest Act 1949, where the owners of private land would not have had the same rights.

For many reasons it is not surprising that the legal advice given to the county council was to proceed by way of a private Bill, not by way of the New Forest Act. As the matter has come out into the public domain, it has been considered closely. I cannot see how anybody could suggest that the planning procedures are being circumvented, as the issue has been dealt with at great length. The bypass is only 1·7 miles long. There cannot be many other roads of that size that have been the subject of such detailed scrutiny as that road.

Another argument put forward against the Bill is that it would create a precedent. I am not clear what the precedent is. Organisations have been bringing private Bills before the House and the other place for decades, if not centuries. The county council is not a commercial organisation that wants to do something for profit; it is an elected body. Support for the measure runs right across party lines at county and district levels.

Mr. W. Benyon (Milton Keynes): It worries many of us that the House may create a precedent in laying down the law on the New Forest. My hon. Friend is trying to change the law with a private Bill, which is what we find difficult to take. He has to face this matter carefully. For me, and I believe for many of my hon. Friends, the New Forest is in exactly the same position as a national park, but under different legislation.

Mr. Mans: My hon. Friend is right to say that the New Forest is a very special place. I acknowledge that, as I did

when I was a district councillor. Indeed, the district and county councils have a tremendous record in protecting the forest.

It is significant that very recently the Council for the Protection of Rural England wrote a letter congratulating the county council on the way it was dealing with the roads policy in relation to all the other roads in the forest. That shows that the county council would never have taken this line if it thought that the route would damage the interests of the forest; indeed, quite the reverse.

On the specific point about the private Bill, I do not see how it can be used as a precedent. The county council has made it quite clear that the Bill should not be regarded as a precedent for other interests to promote private Bills, such as commercial interests that might damage the New Forest.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): Would I not be correct in saying that there has been a complete impasse on this issue for over 12 years, with the verderers and Hampshire county council unable to agree on any route? Six routes have been proposed. If this particular log jam had been allowed to continue, it was fairly obvious that, after 50 years of discussion, Lyndhurst district council would still not have come to an agreement with the verderers and Hampshire county council on the route. The only course left for Hampshire county council was to bring forward a private Bill.

Mr. Mans: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. He is absolutely right. Indeed, I can answer the point about precedent that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon). I have here a statement by the county council, which says:

"If this Bill becomes an Act, it would not be regarded by the County Council as a precedent whereby private legislation was used to construct bypasses elsewhere in the Forest without the consent of the verderers."

This is a very special case. The road is needed, and has been needed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) says, for more than 50 years. I cannot think of another case in the forest that comes anywhere near it. Everybody, including the verderers, understands the need for some sort of relief road.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. He will know that I and many of my hon. Friends are concerned about over development in the south of England. With the provision of bypasses around towns, especially historic and pleasant ones like Lyndhurst, we have seen that where a bypass goes very wide of a town that is an invitation, if not a demand, that the land between the bypass and the town shall be developed. It is very difficult in practice, however resolute one may be at the beginning, to resist the demand of developers. Can my hon. Friend comment on that?

Mr. Mans: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention, as I had missed out that point. Those of us who know about the forest and downlands village plan will understand how detailed it is. Indeed, only 26 more homes will be built in the four villages within the New Forest — Lyndhurst, Bramshaw, Brockenhurst and Burley — between now and 1997. I have here a letter dated 23 February from the principal planning officer of New Forest district council. He refers to several matters, and in the context of the matter I have just raised, he says:

"The idea of any development taking place between the proposed bypass and the village has little credibility."

We are talking about single plots of land, not a development encompassing the area between the proposed bypass route and the existing settlement.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry) *rose*—

Mr. Mans: I will give way in a moment.

If one looks closely at the map one sees that there is a far greater chance of more infill if the proposed verderers' route is adopted. In that case, a small amount of land would lie between the relief road and the settlement. This bypass will protect the land, if anything, between the road and the settlement.

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. He has anticipated what I was about to say. There is a real danger, as I have seen for myself, that there will be infilling if a narrow slit is left, but where a wider sweep is taken there is less chance of infilling over the whole area.

Mr. Mans: Yes. I would add that my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) took the trouble to come down and see for himself the problems associated with the village route and the proposed bypass, and how the latter route is better. Indeed, that invitation was open to every hon. Member. The county council is convinced that those who go to see for themselves what is at stake, without exception so far as I know, have all seen the sense of the county route and the problems associated with the verderers' preferred relief road through the village.

The need for a bypass is manifest to everyone. The route proposed in the Bill is designed to minimise damage to the environment while bringing relief from traffic congestion in Lyndhurst, and at the same time keeping the village intact. A private Bill procedure would have been necessary for any route. I emphasise that it does not matter which route is selected, even the route selected by the verderers. Sooner or later, if the principle of a bypass is accepted, private legislation will be needed to achieve it.

The arbitration procedure in section 17 of the New Forest Act could not be used simply because it relates only to unfenced roads. I ask that the Bill should be allowed to proceed to a Select Committee. I ask that those opposing the Bill allow their reasons for so doing to be examined by that Select Committee, as that is the fairest way of proceeding. Indeed, if there is an opportunity between this debate and the first Select Committee sitting, I hope that those in favour of the county council's route will get together with those groups who are worried about the route. I sincerely hope that will happen.

In addition, to allay the fears of some hon. Members, the Select Committee will be able to analyse whether the method chosen by the county council in promoting the Bill is right. The Committee will be able to scrutinise the routes once again, as did the Select Committee in the other place, to assess whether the county council has the answer.

I hope that the verderers and the county council will get together once again during the Select Committee proceedings to look for a further compromise, if that is possible within the terms of the Bill. Hon. Members should be in no doubt that if a bypass, relief road or any other scheme for getting traffic around Lyndhurst is to be built, the House must agree it by the method of a private Bill. Therefore, I urge all hon. Members to allow the measure to go forward to a Select Committee.

7.28 pm

Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): I have taken careful note of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans). The House will not have failed to notice that the Bill has not been sponsored by an hon. Member representing a Hampshire constituency, and is being brought forward for a Second Reading against the stated advice of the chief executive of the promoting authority with supporting advice of parliamentary agents and counsel. I shall give details of that later.

However persuasive the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre, he does not have the unique responsibility that I have as the Member of Parliament representing the New Forest. Road schemes are, of course, very important to all of us, but the New Forest is unique and has been afforded special protection over many years by public Acts which have enabled us to beat off challenges of many sorts. My hon. Friends the Members for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon) and for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) have already pointed out that developers are currently looking for new territory, and to strip away such protection at this time would be a fatal mistake.

It has been argued that the Bill represents the only way in which the road can be built. I hope to demonstrate that that is complete nonsense and that all the powers that are required exist in the New Forest Act 1949. It is clear from the outset that this is no ordinary works Bill. It raises matters of the most important principle that are relevant to every hon. Member. Those principles are important in deciding not merely where the road should go, but the route that should be taken by those who build it to ensure that, as near as possible, we stick to the agreed procedures that exist.

The origins of the Bill do not lie in success, but in failure. There has been a failure to consult. As Member of Parliament for the area I was never consulted, but merely told that the Bill was to be published. There has been a failure to negotiate and a failure to agree. However, what is more worrying is that the county council has failed to recognise that it has a duty, as the responsible local authority, to protect the New Forest rather than tear that protection away by the Bill.

People from the oil and gas industries are already looking enviously at the forest land. Indeed, in 1983 I had the opportunity to draw the Government's attention to the provisions of the New Forest Act 1877 which prevented Shell International Petroleum from drilling for oil in the Denny Inclosure. There was a public inquiry. I should mention, with great respect to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary who was not in office at that time, that the Government refused to recognise the validity of that Act. Of course, in the end, they had to, but a strange solution was reached—Shell's application was declared invalid after the inquiry had sat for nearly six months.

The Bill represents a clumsy, ham-fisted, maladroit way in which to attempt to sweep away legislation that benefits us all, especially those who know and love the forest.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre has said that the county council has claimed that there is no alternative way in which the necessary powers can be granted. Shortly, I shall take him through some parts of the 1949 Act with which he may not be familiar. Indeed, should any Select Committee be formed, I doubt whether it would be altogether familiar with those parts of the Act.

I wish to draw attention to the advice that was given to the county council as recently as 25 January at a special meeting of the policy and resources committee held at the castle in Winchester. That committee had been asked, specifically, to look at the future of the Lyndhurst bypass Bill. I shall quote from the minutes of that meeting, which illustrate the views of the chief executive of the county council and others. The chief executive said:

"We therefore feel that the Bill has no chance if it is submitted to decision at the present time — a view supported by all the local Members. Withdrawal of the Bill is in our opinion a much preferred alternative to submitting it to the test of debate on Second Reading in the House of Commons, unless the present forlorn prospects of its being passed by the House are altered. This is because withdrawal preserves at least the untarnished record of the Bill in Parliament, which its rejection on Second Reading in the Commons would undermine . . . We feel that the County Council should preserve untarnished the possible option of early introduction of the Bill if in the next say, two years those procedural doubts could be set at rest and Member support in the House of Commons established."

That was first-class advice from the chief executive. Indeed, that advice was supported by both the parliamentary agents and the parliamentary counsel. Yet here we are today discussing the Bill on Second Reading.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): The debate involves a discussion of the merits of democracy in the decision-making process. Will my hon. Friend confirm that, when that advice was given to the policy and resources committee and the motion was proposed, the motion, on being put to the vote, was lost? The democratically elected councillors rejected that advice.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: I would not cavil about that—the vote was 16-11. I was seeking to illustrate the advice given by the chief executive on that occasion rather than what the members felt.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) is my next door neighbour in our part of Hampshire. On 29 December 1987 he wrote a letter to the *Southern Evening Echo*:

"I have been asked to sponsor the Hampshire Lyndhurst Bypass Bill in the House of Commons by the Hampshire County Council, but have declined to do so for the following reasons.

Firstly I believe that the Private Bill procedure being adopted by the County Council would establish an unwelcome precedent that would endanger the New Forest . . . I may not be brilliant at picking winners but I do know a loser when I see one, and this Bill is it."

My hon. Friend seized on the point that I wish to establish, which is that the Bill could be of material danger to the New Forest and other parts of the country.

Last month, at the annual meeting of the parish council of Brockenhurst, a nearby village, the chief executive of the New Forest district council—my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre has already said that that council is in favour of the Bill—was asked to comment on the Bill. The *Lymington Times* of Saturday 6 February 1988, reported:

"'We are now pressing on with the Second Reading in the Commons. How far we get remains to be seen,' said Mr. Bassett, saying that if it received insufficient support, the Bill would be talked out by filibustering."

Clearly the chief executive does not realise that filibustering is not a parliamentary term. The report went on:

"'We will take it head on' adding that there was always the fall-back of arbitration."

That fall back is set out in clause 17. Therefore, we are to go through the expenditure of ratepayers' money—this unhappy charade today—against the professional advice of those who told the county council what they believe to be the interests of that council and presumably the interests of the ratepayers of the county and the residents of Lyndhurst.

Mr. Mans: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct that there are people who believe that the advice given to the county council is correct. However, I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that a county council must take the legal advice given to it and then assess it. Although I have the greatest respect for the chief executive of the New Forest district council, the fact is that other, more learned people such as Lord Denning think differently. Other legal information suggests that the course adopted by the county council is the correct one. Lord Denning is just one person who believes that to be the case.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: The noble Lord has been referred to a number of times and I shall come to his remarks later. My hon. Friend is not correct in thinking that the chief executive of an important district council—one of the largest in the country—does not understand the legal niceties of the matter. He ended:

"We have got to test ourselves about the future of the New Forest, and how we hand it on to the next generation".

That is precisely the issue we are discussing—whether to allow the New Forest's protective powers to be bulldozed out of the way in Westminster, and to allow the private Bill procedure to be used instead of a public, general Act of Parliament. That lies at the heart of much of the dispute.

The New Forest is central to our discussion. As hon. Members know, it is as old as the Palace of Westminster. It was laid down by William the Conqueror in 1079, and those of us who know the Palace well will recall that Westminster hall was built by William the Conqueror's son, who subsequently met his end in the New Forest when a stray arrow killed him. He was buried at Winchester. The New Forest is the largest area of natural vegetation in lowland Britain and one of the largest in Europe. It is a place of enormous ecological significance, and it is under increasing pressure from the various bodies that I mentioned earlier. At one stage the Army cast its eye lovingly over it. It clearly requires careful management.

I want to establish my credentials for discussing the Bill. I explained at the outset that I represent the New Forest, and I am no stranger to it. My family have lived in and around Lyndhurst for many years; my father is buried in its cemetery. I learnt to ride in Lyndhurst in 1937, which dates me a bit. I know the village well. At one time or another we have lived on three of the four roads that are likely to be linked by the road scheme. I live on one of them now—the Lyndhurst to Beaulieu road. So I have some detailed knowledge of the traffic problems that occur in the village. If hon. Members went to Lyndhurst tomorrow they would find no traffic problem and would wonder what all the fuss is about. However, it is in the summer months when large numbers of visitors come—8 million in 1985—that the problem increases. I want to make it crystal clear that I have never opposed the idea of a bypass for Lyndhurst. Neither, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre pointed out, have the court of verderers or any of the other bodies concerned. The issue is how to go about it.

Lyndhurst is not only a pretty village; it is also the administrative centre of the New Forest. It contains the headquarters of the Forestry Commission, the Verderers hall, where the court does its business, the headquarters of the New Forest district council and the Nature Conservancy Council—a statutory body—and it is where the parish council and the residents operate. It is therefore a village of real local significance.

For simplicity's sake I shall say that the Forestry Commission looks after the trees and the verderers look after the common land. I am describing the management system in shorthand and obviously there are overlapping areas. Hon. Members can see that the administration and management of the forest are thus divided neatly into two separate sections.

The management structure is supported by legislation. The Forestry Commission, being a statutory body, has a great deal of legislation to enable it to carry out its functions. The verderers rely on public Acts of Parliament which have, over the years, given them considerable power and authority. I mentioned the 1877 Act, but the idea of the protection for common land goes back to the 17th century. All the legislation charged the verderers with the responsibility for protecting this unique part of Britain. That unique shield against bricks and concrete has not sprung up without careful consideration. It has been built, brick on brick, to produce the legal basis on which the forest has been able to rely over the years, and on which I hope that it will be able to continue to rely in the future.

It is interesting to note that the private Bill procedure was praised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre as being the ideal one to deal with the problem. However, I draw his attention to the evidence given to the Joint Select Committee on Private Bill Procedure, of which I have the honour to be chairman, by my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Aberdare, who is the Lord Chairman of Committees. In his evidence on 2 November 1987, he said about Lyndhurst:

"An example is provided by the Hampshire (Lyndhurst Bypass) Bill at present before Parliament. That is a Bill which authorises the making of a bypass around Lyndhurst by the local highway authority."

This is the important point to which I draw the House's attention:

"In general, the necessary powers already exist for that purpose"

—that contradicts what my hon. Friend said. My right hon. and noble Friend went on to say—this is material to what I shall say later—

"but certain aspects of the scheme (fencing the road and the acquisition and exchange of certain land) could not be achieved without specific legislation."

I shall challenge that point in a moment and explain—with the greatest respect—that my right hon. and noble Friend has misunderstood one of the clauses of the 1949 Act. He added:

"A Bill was accordingly necessary and the opportunity has been taken to seek authority by Bill for the whole scheme.

It can, of course, be argued that the practice that has developed in this regard is wrong in principle and that in cases of this kind it should only be permissible to seek authority by Bill for what cannot be effected without a Bill, leaving the rest of the scheme to be effected through the ordinary Public General Act procedures."

—that is precisely my point.

"To the argument of principle there may be added the point that the effect of the practice can be to allow a small tail to wag a large dog and there may even be a temptation . . . for a Promoter to search for a tail for this purpose, if he is keen to avoid the Public General Act procedures."

[Mr. McNair-Wilson]

I hope that hon. Members will note those words—they are directly relevant.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend accept that, although the noble Lord said that the Select Committee of the House of Lords, in coming to its decision to allow the Bill to go through to Third Reading in another place, took another view and accepted that the county council was correct in bringing the fencing and the road together in one Bill?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. I shall return to that matter in a moment.

At present, there is legislation in place, which should be tested against the requirements of the scheme that the county council is so anxious to pursue. I draw the attention of the House to an important letter that was written by my noble Friend, the Official Verderer, Lord Manners, in *The Times* on 28 November 1987. He said:

"Since 1877 Parliament has been concerned to protect the beauty of the New Forest. The New Forest Act 1949 made provision for roads to be built over the open forest, but only with the consent of the verderers, with a provision that the matter be referred to arbitration in the event of the verderers withholding their consent unreasonably."

The important point is:

"If Parliament considers that the protection of the open forest is no longer of importance, then it should declare this as its policy by way of public Act, amending the existing legislation affecting the New Forest, and not let the matter be dealt with on a piecemeal basis by private Acts."

I cannot quarrel with that; it is a first-class statement of the position.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): If that happened, it would make matters much worse for places such as national parks and for the New Forest, which is being taken as a national park. By the private Bill method, one has an opportunity to examine each specific proposal in detail rather than give a general right in law. Therefore, surely that gives greater protection to the rights that I understand my hon. Friend wishes to protect.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: I would entirely accept what my hon. Friend has said were it not for the fact that—as I hope to show—the powers necessary for the scheme are already available. My hon. Friend makes a valid point, but the powers are already available.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre mentioned the Select Committee report from the House of Lords after the Select Committee hearing of the Bill. That was not a complete departure from normal practice, but it showed that the other place considered that the Bill warranted serious consideration. I have looked at that report, but it is sadly deficient in a number of matters. It talks about —this point has been made on a number of occasions— one of the paragraphs in "Erskine May", which, as hon. Members will know, is a good guide to parliamentary procedure. Paragraph 22 says that the Committee noted "however, that Erskine May states at page 907 that 'No rule has been established which precludes the promoters of a private bill from seeking the repeal or amendment of public Acts.'"

That is quite true and absolutely right. That is the point that my noble Friend, Lord Manners, made in his letter to *The Times*.

Were we being asked to consider amendment or repeal of the 1944 Act, Parliament would be in a position to express a view; but it is not being so asked. If hon. Members look at the Bill to see how many times the Act is mentioned, they will discover that it is mentioned only once in order to point out a relevant clause, which says: "'the New Forest' means lands within the Forest as defined . . . under section 12 of the New Forest Act 1949."

This is not a Bill to amend or repeal the New Forest Act 1949. It is a Bill to get round, to circumvent, to push to one side and to carry on as if the 1949 Act did not exist.

I explained earlier that verderers are part of a delicately balanced management structure. They are a democratically elected body, the powers of which are enshrined in public Acts. They are responsible for common rights and their powers have been amended over the years. The 1877 Act was particularly important in that regard.

Mr. Hill: My hon. Friend obviously has great local knowledge. Will he describe how those democratic verderers are elected, for what period of time, how many of them there are, what qualifications they must have and where their end responsibility lies?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: There are five elected verderers and four appointed verderers. They are appointed, in one case, by the Ministry of Agriculture, and that will become significant later in my remarks. They are elected by those who hold common rights. Common rights in the forest go with the land. The commoner—the person whom they are protecting—is responsible for their election. It is a fair and reasonable method of election.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has often talked of the problems of the small farmer. I do not want to discuss the considerable problems of the commoner, but I should tell hon. Members that the verderers are elected by those whom they must serve and protect. That is why it is so important that we leave them with the necessary power to carry out that protection.

Mr. Key: I have already mentioned the matter of democracy. Is it not the case that the verderers, split 50-50 between appointees and those who are elected, will always come down in favour of the non-elected because of the casting vote of the chairman? That is precisely how they were defined and described during the debates on the 1949 Act. Furthermore, will my hon. Friend agree that there is now only one family who, technically, are commoners and that all the beasts in the New Forest, apart from 10 who graze under commoners' rights, are grazing under licence and do not belong to those who, technically, have the 1 acre of land necessary to make them a commoner, which gives them the right to vote for the verderers?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: I do not want to upset my hon. Friend, but I must tell him that I am a commoner and that I have run animals on the forest. I know of many people who are far without the description that my hon. Friend has given. Commoning is still a lively way in which some individuals with small farming interests continue to live. It is not becoming any easier, but commoning is not, as my hon. Friend tried to suggest, some sort of business enterprise done on licence. If he were to visit the forest I should be only too happy to introduce him to some commoners. He would then have an opportunity to discuss the matter with them.

Mr. Key: I live only 300 yd from the forest.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: Perhaps my hon. Friend will be kind enough to ask me to visit his house.

I want to consider how the 1949 Act came into being. It has already been referred to in great detail and it is the cornerstone of the protection that the forest enjoys. As the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) knows, the Act flows from the decision of the post-war Labour Government of 1946 to set up a committee of inquiry under Mr. Baker to look, with others, at the conditions of the New Forest and,

"having due regard to the existing rights and interests, to recommend such measures as are necessary for adjusting to modern requirements."

I do not often pay lavish tribute to the Labour party, but on that occasion it was right. That body reported in 1947 and its report has become known in shorthand as the Baker report. It went into great detail about the problems that would be likely to face the forest in the post-war years and ensured that the verderers' powers were modernised and brought up to date. The court was reconstituted as I described and the Official Verderer, the chairman of the court, is appointed by Her Majesty — by the Government of the day—and is the person ultimately responsible to the Crown.

The court sits in open session every other month and allows any member of the community, be he commoner or otherwise, to make presentments that can be listened to and acted upon. That open court, which I regard as very democratic, is of great importance and significance to the area. The Lord Chancellor can indicate four members of the court to sit on an extension of the court—the court of Swainmote—which is a disciplinary court that has powers with which I shall not worry the House.

The 1949 Act, which sprang out of the Baker report of 1947, is very specific, as is all legislation governing the New Forest, including, as I said, the 1877 Act. Let me draw the attention of the House to the two sections central to our debate. Section 17 has been referred to. I note from the Order Paper that my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre has tabled an Instruction to the Committee to pay particular regard to the 1949 Act. I am only sorry that it has been such a long time coming. Why was an Instruction not tabled on Second Reading in another place? The 1949 Act had not been mentioned before; it had been brushed aside as being of no significance. The Instruction has been put here to keep this stuttering flame alive. If one is prepared to table an Instruction to the Committee to look at the 1949 Act, one might as well use the arbitration procedures under that Act.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Instruction was rejected because it was felt to be superfluous as it was already in the instructions of the Select Committee of both Houses to look at this point?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: I thank my hon. Friend.

Section 17 is lengthy, and I shall not read the whole of it to the House, but a number of its provisions are material to our debate. Subsection (1) says:

"Where a highway authority, other than the Secretary of State for Transport, require any land in the Forest for the purposes of any of their functions as a highway authority, they may apply to the verderers for their agreement to the transfer of the land to the highway authority."

The clause then describes that process. Clause 17(8) says:

"The verderers shall not unreasonably withhold their agreement on any application under this section by a highway authority; and if any dispute arises as to whether their agreement has been unreasonably withheld the matter shall be referred to a single arbitrator agreed between the verderers and the authority or, failing agreement, appointed by the President of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors on an application made either by the verderers or by the authority after giving notice in writing to the other of them."

Here we have a clear-cut arbitration machinery already established in a public Act. Why have we not used it? We have heard something of the promoters' case tonight. Apparently, they feel that the Act does not cover all the requirements. I shall come to fencing and the exchange of land in a moment. What the promoters hear is the word "reasonableness". If my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre is correct that the route being promoted by the county council is environmentally superior to that proposed by the verderers' court, why are the promoters not prepared to test that reasonableness? Do the promoters believe that because of the verderers' special responsibilities they would not win at arbitration, even though, as I pointed out, the chief executive to the New Forest district council suggested that

"there was always the fallback of arbitration"?

The machinery is there. It should have been used.

Mr. Mans: I fully agree with my hon. Friend that this goes to the heart of the matter. It really comes down to what one means by "reasonable". Does my hon. Friend not agree that the verderers are responsible for the forest and the forest alone and therefore cannot possibly be considered to be acting unreasonably if they are trying to protect the forest and not the whole environment? Does he agree that the routes are environmentally equally good and, if anything, the inner route may be slightly better? However, the fact remains that the verderers are not responsible for the environment along which the inner—the village—route would go.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: I understand what my hon. Friend says. He now questions what it would be considered reasonable for the verderers to concede. He will, of course, know that the building of the A31 across the north of the forest used a vast amount of forest land and yet the verderers did not withhold their permission. They were reasonable. I assure my hon. Friend that my noble Friend the Official Verderer is a reasonable man, as are the other members of his court. Therefore, why will the county council not allow the matter to be tested under what my hon. Friend acknowledges is arbitration machinery?

My hon. Friend questioned whether other powers were available under the 1949 Act to cover fencing and land exchange. Much has been said about that. We have been told repeatedly that without a private Bill fencing and land exchange cannot be completed. I believe that that is complete fiction.

Mr. Benyon: Am I not right in thinking that Hampshire county council has a representative on the court of verderers and is it not a fact that he opposes this way of proceeding?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: He does, indeed. As my hon. Friend pointed out, the elected member of Hampshire county council appointed to the court of verderers was kept away from the meeting to which hon. Members were invited to be shown the route. Hon. Members were only allowed to hear one point of view, and the Hampshire county council representative who was a verderer was prevented from attending. [HON. MEMBERS: "Disgraceful."] It is absolutely true.

I shall return to the Select Committee report, published after the Committee stage in the other place. Some hon.

[Mr. McNair-Wilson]

Members may not be familiar with that report. Under the heading "Exchange of Land" in paragraphs 24 and 25, it says:

"Under the provisions of the Bill the Promoters will transfer lands to the Verderers in exchange for the land taken from the open forest for the construction of a bypass."

The report discusses the criticism of the quality of the land and so on. What it does not do is to make any mention or take any note of section 19 of the New Forest Act 1949. We have heard much about section 17, but section 19 has never caught the public imagination. I shall bring it out of hiding so that hon. Members can see for themselves that it contains precisely the power that we are told can be provided only by private Act of Parliament.

Section 19 is headed,

"Exchanges of land in the Forest."

and states:

"The Minister may with the agreement of the verderers direct that any unenclosed land in the Forest which is vested in the Minister shall be held by him on behalf of the Crown in severalty and free from all rights of the commoners, and that in exchange for that land any land invested in the Minister and surrounded by or abutting on the Forest, but not forming part thereof, shall become part of the Forest and subject to the like rights of common."

Therefore, one can extinguish those rights, change the land and give it to somebody else. My noble Friend, the Official Verderer, wrote to me on 15 February this year referring specifically to section 19, stating:

"Once the Minister has acquired land, receiving land in exchange, he can transfer it to the highway authority who would then be entitled to fence it."

There is the provision of land exchange and fencing. He went on to state:

"As the County Council are offering exchange land I can see no difficulty."

Mr. Key *rose*——

Mr. McNair-Wilson: My hon. Friend seems unhappy, so before he intervenes, let me say that the Official Verderer also stated:

"Incidentally the provisions of Section 19 are used fairly extensively when Forest land is required for various purposes."

Therefore, that route is already well trodden. However, if one reads the Select Committee report, one will not find a mention anywhere of section 19.

Mr. Boswell: Will my hon. Friend tell the House whether the arbitration procedures that are applied in section 17 and bear on matters of fencing are also available in the event of a dispute between a potential or an actual highway authority and the verderers in respect of section 19 and the exchange of lands to which he has just referred?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: My hon. Friend makes an important point, but section 17 deals with all land that would be affected by a plan by a highway authority to build a road, other than the Minister of Transport, who has special powers. Therefore, in this case, the two are separate issues.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend anticipated that I would rise on this point. I apologise for interrupting him yet again, but my constituency is contiguous with my hon. Friend's. The question of fencing is crucial because, as my hon. Friend will agree, a large and growing number of animals are killed on the roads each year in that area. The matter of fencing is not in dispute in relation to enclosed land. However, we must be absolutely clear on the question of fencing because it seems to me that section 17 is not accurate when it comes to the fencing of roads. Indeed, in the Second Reading debate of the New Forest Bill on 18 October 1949, the then Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, a certain Mr. George Brown, stated:

"Clause 17 relates to other public roads in the Forest for which the highway authority is not the Ministry but the Southampton County Council. They may need to be improved or widened from time to time, although the intention is, as I have said, that the main flow of through traffic should use the trunk road. This Clause contains no provision for fencing.—[*Official Report*, 18 October 1949; Vol. 468, c. 497.]

Mr. McNair-Wilson: That is quite true—section 17 does not contain such provisions and I never suggested that it did. All that I am saying is that, when the land is exchanged and no longer has upon it common rights, it is without the responsibility of the verderers and can be fenced by the body which then has it in its possession.

Mr. Mans: On the point of specific exchange of land, I think that my hon. Friend will agree that section 17 is a specific section dealing with land exchange for roads. Section 19, to which he has referred, is a general section. It is a well-known legal precedent that one cannot override a specific section which does not mention a specific thing by a general section of an Act that does so. Therefore, despite the fact that section 19 mentions exchange of land, it cannot be used in the case of section 17.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: It is, of course, a question of the test of the reasonableness of the case. I have made that clear; inevitably, that is what it is about. In fact, arbitration machinery exists to test whether the case is reasonable. It is that test to which I very much hope that the county council will eventually agree.

I do not want to go on too much about the Select Committee report from the other place, save to draw the House's attention to its last paragraph, on page 9, section 47, which states:

"The Committee conclude by drawing attention to the fact that in allowing the Bill to proceed, they have done so in the knowledge that the County Council, in promoting a private bill, have adopted an unusual procedure for the construction of a highway and one which avoids the veto of the Verderers which Parliament in 1949 regarded as an important safeguard for the New Forest."

I repeat that the Select Committee said that it was "an unusual procedure".

I want to deal briefly with whether this is the best procedure, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre suggested. Much reference has been made by him and by others in the past to wanting the Bill to be referred to a Select Committee, as if some mysterious coven of Members of Parliament would be able to make sense of nonsense. That is totally far-fetched. I call in aid the evidence given to the Joint Select Committee on Private Bill Procedure, to which I have already referred, by the Parliamentary Bar in evidence dated 23 April 1987 which states in general about Committee procedure:

"The procedures under which the private bill committees operates are in some respects old fashioned, ill defined and unsophisticated. There is abundant scope for reforms".

We are not dealing with some carefully honed body of people who can bring a sensitive eye to these problems because, as hon. Members who know Standing Orders will

appreciate, one can serve on one of those Select Committees only if one does not have an interest in the matter that is being discussed.

Indeed, the evidence goes further. Section (ii) states:

"It has become apparent in recent years that Members of the House of Commons find it increasingly difficult to take part continuously in the quasi-judicial work of the Committees; and thus there is a widening gulf in the quality of the decision making process between the two Houses."

Those who now suggest that the Bill—*[Interruption.]* This is serious criticism. The Bill is now to be committed to such a Committee. I shall question in a moment whether that is the best body to consider a matter that is so important to this part of England.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the promoters, and those who are petitioning against, have been looking at fitting in the time for such Committee proceedings? There is some discussion that three weeks might be needed in Committee. How many hon. Members now present in the Chamber could cross out of their diary at least three days a week for three weeks to sit in Committee to listen to the arguments? It is a major imposition on hon. Members if they are expected to find that sort of time.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: The hon. Gentleman makes an important and valid point. A similar point was raised during the discussions on the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill. Indeed, when the Select Committee was constituted, at least one hon. Member, who was not aware of the length of the proceedings, had to absent herself from the Committee. When that happened, the Committee was without a quorum and therefore had to cease its proceedings. Corridors in this building were full of silks, counsel, petitioners and people who had travelled a long way, wasting money, but who were unable to get the satisfaction which my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre seems to feel can be derived only through the private Bill procedure. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The Committee on Private Bill procedure is concerned about being able to keep those quasi-judicial bodies in being because of the inconvenience, the cost and the time involved if they are without a quorum. It is an important matter. They are like a jury in a court. However, the difference between a jury in a court and a Select Committee is that the jury has the benefit of guidance from the judge, whereas the Select Committee, with the greatest respect to all those who chair them, may not have the same expert knowledge of some of the controversial matters being discussed.

I referred earlier to remarks in the public evidence given by Lord Aberdare. In conclusion he said:

"Indeed, where works are at all extensive or controversial I can see force in the argument that Parliament is *not* the most suitable forum for determining whether they should be carried out. If, therefore, there is one area more than another in the Private Bill field where an alternative to Private Bill procedure could usually be explored it seems to me to be that covered by works provisions."

He is absolutely right.

The idea that somehow here in Parliament we shall satisfactorily resolve the problems of Lyndhurst's roads is fanciful. With great respect to all hon. Members, they cannot have the detailed knowledge that is necessary. In the end, the only way in which the matter will be resolved is by a joint committee of the verderers court and the highway authority. That is the way that we have to proceed if we want to protect the New Forest. Those who do not want to do that can come here and bring in amending legislation, but they should not attempt to get round the existing Act in the way that the Bill attempts to do.

None of us can tell what will happen to the Bill, but we must ask ourselves — what of the future? One must recognise that, as the chief executive of the county council pointed out in the advice to which I referred earlier, if it is possible to overcome the procedural problems that lie at the heart of our debate, it will be far better than being saddled with this type of Act which may in time lead to the establishment of a dangerous precedent.

I heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre said about the assurances given by the Hampshire county council about road building. But he did not read out a letter from the chairman of Shell, Esso, Clyde Petroleum or British Gas. The chief executive of Hampshire county council cannot tie his successors hand and foot by any assurance. Therefore, one must treat that with the reservation that is expected.

We know that Lyndhurst has a road problem. We know that the bodies concerned have no objection to the bypass. We also know that, even if the Bill were to go through all its stages as quickly as possible, the bypass would not be built this year, next year or the year after. The works described in the Bill are for the 1990s programme of Hampshire county council. What will happen to the villagers of Lyndhurst this summer?

The Hampshire county council has an important statutory responsibility as a highway authority to look seriously at the alternative signposting of the routes that avoid Lyndhurst, and there are plenty. I know them, because I drive on them. I spend my working life at weekends travelling on those roads. I have a home on the Lyndhurst-Beaulieu road and a constituency office at Cadnam. It could be said that one has to go through Lyndhurst to get there, but I do not. Four roads lead to Beaulieu, Brockenhurst and Lymington but they are not signposted as alternatives. Therefore, I appeal to Hampshire county council to produce sensible alternative signposting. The Totton west bypass, which my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) knows so well, is almost complete and has already altered the area's traffic flow, relieving much of the pressure.

I object to the Bill, but I would be happy to act as an honest broker to bring the various bodies together. If it is impossible for the court of verderers and the highway authority to sit down together, I shall be happy to find some way of bringing them together and help in the establishment of what I hope will be much better relations. Indeed, my noble Friend Lord Manners has already begun that job himself.

Therefore, I give this admonition to the court of verderers. Whatever happens to the Bill tonight is not the end of the story. Lyndhurst still has problems which must be resolved, but they need to be resolved in their interests while recognising the importance of the forest.

Recently, the Forestry Commission established the important New Forest review body, whose report has been published. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have had letters about model aeroplane flying on Beaulieu aerodrome, so some are already aware that such a body exists. That review body included representatives of the Forestry Commission, Hampshire county council, the Countryside Commission, the New Forest district council, verderers, the Nature Conservancy Council, and so on.

[Mr. McNair-Wilson]

The review body said in the concluding recommendations of its report published on 6 October 1987:

"During the course of the Review we have come increasingly to realise that more than ever before the authorities responsible in their various ways for the New Forest, the authorities indeed who we represent, are the trustees for the nation."

That is the spirit in which we should go forward.

I have had many letters from local authorities complaining about the Department of the Environment inspectors overriding local planning decisions and allowing development where the planning authority has objected. The county council is at the moment preparing a great case against the establishment of a coal-fired power station at the mouth of Southampton water, Fawley B, and the establishment of a coal importing terminal. However, we shall not go into that. More ratepayers' money is to be spent on all that. I do not object, but surely it is bewildering, confused and confusing thinking for the county council to act in one way about the power station while in the same breath stripping away the protection from the New Forest. The county council must have a clear strategy on its desire to protect the environment.

There is no problem here that cannot be resolved. If we work together we can genuinely recognise the changes that are necessary—as was hinted at in the Baker report in 1947—to take account of the requirements of a modern and different world. Provided we work together, we can make those changes our friends and allies rather than what we have here—a hostile and unwelcome intruder. I do not like the Bill.

8.28 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): In defending the New Forest, about which the hon. Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) spoke with such feeling, he made a powerful case based on his deep personal knowledge of the New Forest and the area surrounding Lyndhurst. I cannot pretend to have anything like his knowledge of the area or his qualifications for intervening in the debate, but, as he knows, I am a regular visitor to the New Forest and I have spent summer or Easter in each of the last eight years in the northern part of the forest.

I owe a deeply personal debt to the New Forest because I have spent periods of great happiness and peace there. Anyone who is caught on the heath in the rain knows that it can be a rugged and bleak place, but those changing moods and scenery make the forest a living thing and give it its fascination. Nowhere else in lowland Britain can one find such an extensive tract of public land and, perhaps with the exception of Dartmoor, nowhere else does one find such an extensive tract where there is open access. It is one of the last places left to us where we can walk at will across a natural landscape. The sense of wonder that it inspires is due to the fact that it has remained largely unchanged. One can walk across a landscape that has remained since mediaeval times and still shares the same type of livestock and wildlife that roamed there in those times.

The New Forest is one of the treasures of Britain. It is every bit as much our heritage as the mediaeval cathedral in the constituency of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), through which he would not dream of driving even a modest two-track bypass.

I concede that I do not live in the New Forest and I must qualify my right to express a view. I neither reside nor work in the forest, and I can fully understand the impatience of those who live in the forest, particularly the residents of Lyndhurst who support the bypass, about the fact that the decision on the bypass should be taken by people who neither live nor work in their village.

Mr. Hill: The hon. Gentleman has got quite the wrong impression about what I am trying to say. No doubt he travels to the New Forest several times a year with his family and perhaps a caravan. However, he should be talking on behalf of the visitors who wish to go to the forest, to caravan parks and car parks, and then walk into the forest to see all its beauty.

Mr. Cook: I travel to the New Forest by car and I will comment on the traffic congestion in Lyndhurst, which I have seen as I have driven through the town.

I wish to make a couple of points in defence of my right, as a visitor, to intervene in the debate. First, I do not seek to become involved in the decision. It was the decision of the county council to submit the matter to Parliament and to resolve the matter by private Bill. If the county council takes the view that this is the proper way of proceeding, it can hardly object to Members of Parliament exercising their judgment on the matter over which they are asked to preside.

Secondly, those people who visit the forest are not entitled to have the same weight attached to their views as those who reside there. Nevertheless, our views are entitled to some weight. After all, there are 8 million of us, which is a population equivalent to that of Greater London. Moreover, we make an important contribution to the economy of the forest. Lyndhurst shows some ambivalence towards us. That is revealed in the comments on local plans, where Lyndhurst is described as the capital of the forest, and its tourist centre. That is a fair description of Lyndhurst. It has nine tea rooms and restaurants in the main street alone and it is studded with and ringed by hotels.

There is a certain tension between the promotion of Lyndhurst as a tourist centre and the description of Lyndhurst as the capital of the forest and a tourist centre. It becomes even worse if that traffic problem is resolved at the expense of the very forest which attracts tourists to Lyndhurst in the first place.

I wish to refer to a comment made by Lord Montagu of Beaulieu in the other place, when this matter was debated. He described the ground over which the bypass will travel as unexceptional forest scrub, yet he makes a tidy sum out of the tourist industry there and out of that unexceptional forest scrub. In purely commercial terms, it would be wise for him to place a higher value on that scrub.

As someone who is not a local Member of Parliament or resident, I do not apologise for expressing a view on this Bill. I do not criticise the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) for promoting this Bill, although he represents a constituency in Lancashire, as I am well aware of his strong local connections. The hon. Gentleman is not present at the moment, but I was surprised and sorry to see, in the *Blackpool Gazette* of 10 February, that the hon. Gentleman was quoted as saying:

"the main reason for supporting the bill was to learn the parliamentary ropes in preparing to press the case for the Fylde Coast Easterly Bypass."

I have no objection to the Fylde coast easterly bypass. It may be a perfectly acceptable proposal—I see that the hon. Gentleman has returned to the Chamber—but the New Forest deserves something better than being used as a dummy run for a bypass at the far end of England. If that comment is accurate, it casts a rather jaundiced light on the hon. Gentleman's comment that he does not regard the bypass as any sort of precedent, when plainly he does.

Mr. Mans: I was trying to explain that, as a new Member of the House, this would be a good opportunity to learn a little more about roads in general. The hon. Gentleman no doubt realises that one should not believe all that one reads in the newspapers.

Mr. Cook: I am happy that the hon. Gentleman has placed that correction on the record. All hon. Members are welcome to learn the ropes as best they can. Regrettably, I require no more learning processes on how to oppose business, as I have been doing that for the past eight years and will continue to do so for another three years. I oppose the Bill because I do not like it, not because of a learning curve.

In considering the Bill, we must address three questions. First, is a bypass necessary? Secondly, does it have to be this bypass? Thirdly, is this the correct procedure by which to obtain authority for it? The first point need not detain us long. I have sat in a stationary car, marooned in a tail-back, five miles outside Lyndhurst, often enough to appreciate the case for road works there. The case has changed over the years. Originally, the case was for a bypass for east-west traffic, which was removed by the M27 and the A31. The case is now transferred to the need for a north-south bypass. Over the years, some of the pressure may again be changed by the creation of the Totton bypass.

It is also possible to question the figures quoted by the hon. Member for Wyre when he presented the case. In its survey, the council discovered that 80 per cent. of the traffic approaching Lyndhurst was through traffic, but that 80 per cent. was defined by asking them their starting point and their destination, thus elminating those who were stopping in Lyndhurst for a meal, to purchase a postcard, or to visit the verderers court. Many of those 80 per cent. would wish to stop for that purpose and would not wish to be carried around the town by a bypass. Presumably, that is also the reason why some traders oppose the bypass. It would discourage people passing through the town from stopping and making their contribution to the local economy.

Nevertheless, I accept that there is a case for a bypass, but that does not oblige us to accept this bypass. There are alternatives. The county council's presentation to hon. Members freely admitted that seven different routes have been examined over the past 10 years. Those seven routes fall broadly into two categories—the outer routes and the inner routes. In the outer routes, the southern section swings out into the forest over the passage between the Southampton road and the Beaulieu road. The hon. Member for Wyre described that proposal as a compromise, with the outer route originally proposed as route No. 1.

Route No. 2 differs from route No. 1 in the northern section. It does not differ at all from route No. 1 in the southern section where it goes out into the forest to precisely the same extent as the original route. In that section, there is no compromise.

Mr. Mans: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the only reason it does not differ from the original route is that it is so close to the settlement pattern of Lyndhurst in the first place?

Mr. Cook: I shall come to the gap which will remain between it and the settlement pattern of Lyndhurst in a moment. In the meantime I point out to the hon. Gentleman that there are 85 acres between it and the settlement of Lyndhurst. If he says that those 85 acres bring the road so close to the settlement pattern of Lyndhurst, I am afraid that he will underline the fear of many petitioners. If we enclose the 85 acres which are considered as being so close to the settlement pattern of Lyndhurst, those 85 acres may become settled upon.

The other five routes are all variants of the inner route which travels to the west of Bolton's Bench. They go through the gap between the historic village and the modern suburb of Queen's Crescent. In his opening address, the hon. Member for Wyre attempted to pray in aid the report of the local inquiry into the forest and downlands villages local plan. What the inspector said in his report was:

"This sector of routes 1 and 5A"—

that is, the southern sector to which I have just referred—

"in summary involves a fragmentation of open forest which should be avoided if a cost-effective route having an acceptable impact on the built up area can be devised on the west of Bolton's Bench."

It is plain that, having considered all the different routes available to it at the time and having considered the debate on the outer and inner routes, the preference of the inspector was for an inner route. It is not possible for the promoters of the Bill to pray in aid the outcome of that planning inquiry, the only planning inquiry at which the route was ever presented.

It is hardly surprising that those who identify their interests with the forest want to see as little intrusion as possible into the forest. Nor is it surprising that those who identify their interest with the village wish to shove the bypass as far out of the forest as they can get away with. The weight of representations against the outer route from those who are concerned with the forest is impressive.

That opposition falls into three categories. First, there are those who are concerned with the management of the forest. It is interesting that every body charged with the management of the forest is opposed to this route. It includes the verderers, the commoners and the New Forest Association. It also includes the Forestry Commission which, as a public body, has not felt it right to petition against the Bill and did not do so in the other place.

However, when the matter was debated on Second Reading, the then Minister stated fairly the objections of the Forestry Commission to the route. I hope that when the Minister intervenes in the debate he will repeat to this House the same objections of the Forestry Commission on the grounds of noise and intrusion which such a route would bring to the forest. Those of us who are not locals can take heart from the fact that there is strong local opposition to the proposal.

The second category of those who object covers the statutory bodies which are there to advise the Government on the environment. There are two, the Countryside Commission, which advises the Government on recreational and leisure use of the countryside, and the Nature Conservancy Council, which advises the Government on

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the scientific importance of the environment and threat to the environment. Both bodies are appointed by the Government to advise the Government and Parliament on how we should treat proposals for the countryside. This is the first time that those two bodies have petitioned against a private Bill. The fact that they have chosen this Bill to make their own precedent of petitioning against a private Bill demonstrates their strength of feeling and their concern about the unique character of the New Forest.

The last category of those opposed to the Bill is composed of the voluntary bodies whom one might describe as representing the consumer interest, the people who use and appreciate the countryside, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the Ramblers Association and the Open Spaces Society. It is, in short, striking that the Bill has united against it the whole countryside lobby. One need not look far for the reason why it has achieved that unanimity of view among groups concerned with the countryside and the environment. It is because of the special character of the New Forest.

Here I want to return to the description by Lord Montagu of this tract of land as unexceptional forest scrub. I take his point openly. The stretch of land is no more and no less unexceptional than much of the rest of the New Forest. The strength of the New Forest and its unique character is precisely because it is an extensive tract of heath, very much similar throughout its area. I should like to quote to the House the evidence submitted by the Nature Conservancy Council in another place. This is the only lengthy quotation which I propose to read to the House; I hope the House will bear with me.

The Nature Conservancy Council brought out the importance of the extensive nature of the heath very well:

"It is the scale and totality of The Forest which is so important, rather than the value which may be placed on individual localities within it. We do not know the precise requirements, e.g. of most insects, which inhabit The Forest, but the evidence strongly suggests that The Forest's rich insect fauna is associated with its scale, continuity and diversity. To dismember it or fragment it, in however limited a fashion, is to diminish its total value to science and to people."

Mr. Key: Does not the hon. Member agree that the weakness of the petition of the Nature Conservancy Council to the House is that alone among the petitioners it makes no acknowledgement, unlike himself, of the need for a bypass? It takes no notice of the views of local people and it does not even mention the problem.

Mr. Cook: The Nature Conservancy Council very properly confined itself to those matters for which it has statutory responsibility, which is to advise on the scientific importance of the site and the threat to the environment of a proposal.

Mr. Key: What about the Countryside Commission?

Mr. Cook: The Countryside Commission has a wider remit. Its remit is to advise on the use of the countryside by people. That naturally involves it in commenting on traffic movements as well. I invite the hon. Gentleman to read not simply the petition submitted to the House by the Nature Conservancy Council but the full text of its evidence in the other place. He will find that it conceded that there was a demand for a bypass at Lyndhurst, although it did not take a view on whether there was a need for a bypass.

The hon. Gentleman has raised an important issue. I think it is also fair to say that the Nature Conservancy Council, as with the other petitioners, has made it clear that it would not petition against an inner route. I shall return to that point later. It is interesting that the promoters submit to the House a route which has united all the countryside interests, all of whom have said clearly that they would not oppose an inner route, were it chosen.

Mr. Hill: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have left a bare hour and 12 minutes. I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) will take a few minutes. Will it be possible for local Members to participate in the debate? The debate seems to be widening to include every hon. Member.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing attention to the fact that time is getting short. Many hon. Members still wish to speak.

Mr. Cook: I am much obliged, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall try to restrain myself from giving way again.

My concern is not merely with the 10 acres which are to be tarmacked for the road but with the 85 acres which are to be enclosed between the bypass and the town. There is an odd dichotomy in the representations of the supporters of the Bill. When the road swings out into the forest it is represented as a simple, two-track road which is not intrusive and will not fragment the forest. Indeed, the county surveyor in his evidence in the other place said:

"People will barely notice the bypass as they walk over it."

Yet when an identical road of identical dimensions is shifted to the inner route, we suddenly discover that it will split the village and will deny access from residents on one side over this immense barrier to the recreational facilities at Bolton's Bench.

The supporters of the route cannot have it both ways. If a road of such dimensions would split the village as an inner route, it will undeniably fragment the forest if it is an outer route. I have considerable sympathy with the petitioners' fears that, over a period, the 85 acres that will effectively be enclosed by the outer route would cease to have the character of open heath, and would become an urban park.

There are two considerations. The first is that the animals are likely to graze less frequently on the inside of the bypass, because their only access to that tract of land will be by a single underpass. The commoners maintain that the animals are unlikely to use the underpass to the same extent as they would wander over an open heath. That is why the commoners oppose the Bill. If the animals do not graze those 85 acres, there will be a substantial effect on the vegetation and plant life of that tract.

However, there is a more important reason for anxiety about the future of those 85 acres. If they were enclosed by the bypass, they would become regarded as part of the village and its amenities, rather than as a continuous tract of open forest with a division formed by a busy road fenced along its length with only two crossing points.

I find the attitude of the promoters to Bolton's Bench constructive. They object to the inner route on the grounds that it would be visually intrusive from Bolton's Bench. It is undeniable that all inner routes would be in proximity to Bolton's Bench; equally, however, all inner routes would be on the town side of Bolton's Bench.

Civic pride is a great thing, but I find it a curious assumption that all the townspeople who climb Bolton's

Bench, and, more particularly, all the visitors, do so to look back at Lyndhurst. The most obvious thing that they will see, in the immediate future, will be the fire station.

Some people who go up Bolton's Bench, particularly visitors, go not to see Lyndhurst and the fire station, but to look out on the forest. An outer route, if constructed along the lines suggested in the Bill, would be clearly visible. Across this section, half a mile of it will be an embankment, and one of the two crossings which are to be supplied will be an overhead bridge.

It is plain that, psychologically, the villagers regard Bolton's Bench as part of their village, rather than as part of the forest. My anxiety is that, if the outer route is chosen, all those 85 acres will come to be regarded as part of the purlieu of the village rather than the forest, and there will be pressure to prettify and develop it.

If the proposed route is objectionable, are the alternatives feasible? Certainly, an inner route is feasible, although I am not suggesting that it is necessarily ideal: it is difficult to find a proposed new road to which there are no objections. The promoters do not attempt to deny that, which is hardly surprising, as their own county bypass panel in 1983 concluded that the inner route would be more cost-effective and better value for money. This is what the panel said about the route that we are considering in the Bill:

"The panel here therefore looked at the possible alternate route put forward by the local members. It does however suffer from the same traffic and economic disadvantage as route 1"—

the original outer route—

"and is unlikely to be good value for money."

The reason that the panel concluded that an inner route would be better value for money is that it would be much shorter. The outer route is not only longer than the inner route, but much longer than the present route through the town, which would continue to be used by much through traffic unless measures were taken to close the high street. That would be inconvenient to residents and probably unpopular with traders.

The objections to the inner route, as advanced by the promoters, effectively come down to the view that the inner route is not acceptable to residents of Lyndhurst. Let me refer to the report of the Select Committee in the other place, which concluded:

"If route 5A is not proceeded with"—

that is the route in the Bill—

"it is likely that the opposition of the residents of Lyndhurst to a route such as 6A as an inner route would mean that Lyndhurst would have no bypass for the foreseeable future."

With the greatest respect to the noble Lords, I am bound to say that there is a strong element of tautology in that statement. If the residents of Lyndhurst want a bypass, they can have an inner route. Such a Bill would pass through the House almost on the nod, without any petitioners objecting. If they choose not to accept an inner route, they have a perfect right to do so: the choice is theirs. It is wholly unreasonable, however, for the promoters to produce local opposition to the inner route as though it were an obstacle to progress which those of us who oppose the outer route had somehow dreamt up.

The third consideration is whether this is the correct way to seek authority for the construction of the road. Is it a prudent use of county council funds? I understand that the total cost of promoting this private Bill will be some £300,000, which, if we put it into perspective, is three times the entire footpaths budget of Hampshire county council.

The promoters have said that it is necessary to have a private Bill because it is necessary to secure permission to fence the road. There is a reference in clause 4(2) to fencing the road. The remaining 24 clauses have nothing to do with fencing. In truth, no one seriously imagines that the Bill is presented in this form because of the requirement to fence the road. The real reason is to get around the opposition of the court of verderers. I find it surprising that the county should choose to resort to such a device without even going to the arbitration provided for in the 1949 Act.

In fairness to the county, I will say that it is engagingly frank about why it has not proceeded to arbitration. As was stated candidly and with refreshing honesty by the hon. Member for Wyre, the reason is that the county admits that it is likely to lose if it goes to arbitration, and that any arbitrator is likely to uphold the opposition of the verderers as entirely reasonable.

It is possible to criticise the constitution of the verderers, as did the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) in an earlier intervention. Some of the criticism is overstated. The verderers are not a feudal organisation; their current constitution dates from 1949. They are, if anything, rather more representative and diverse in their origins than most quangos, in that they are appointed not by one body but by several bodies representing the various interests in the New Forest. However, their constitution is certainly idiosyncratic, and one could argue for a change.

An obvious change would be to make the New Forest a national park, and that was considered at the time that the national parks were designated. At that time, it was resolved not to designate the New Forest as a national park precisely because of the unique character of the verderers' court and the protection that they provided for the New Forest.

Possibly, that decision was wrong. Possibly, the verderers should have been swept aside, and a national parks authority put in their place. I understand that at least one member of the Countryside Commission at that time now takes the view that an error was made. But Parliament chose not to designate the New Forest a national park because it was going to rely on the verderers. Parliament, therefore, cannot now readily lend itself to brushing aside the objections of the people that it charged with the task of protecting the New Forest. It has to give the full weight to the opinion of the verderers that it would attach to the view of a national parks authority if it was resisting a road going through its area.

Mr. David Martin: The duties of the verderers are quite specific, and they are much narrower than the kinds of considerations now before Parliament. The duties that were given to them were essentially to protect the interests of the commoners. Nobody is suggesting that they would not be acting reasonably in rejecting this bypass, but the whole point is whether that should be the end of the matter.

Let us suppose that they had gone to arbitration and, as they no doubt expected, had lost, and had spent a lot of money doing that, what would they then do? Would the hon. Gentleman then back their coming to the House and saying, "The county council has wider considerations; let us have the bypass"?

Mr. Cook: I find it rather curious that the hon. Gentleman should suggest that, if the county council had

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proceeded to arbitration and then lost, that should somehow commend this proposal to the House. The point that I was making is that arbitration has not even been advanced, and it has made it quite clear that it has not advanced arbitration, because it does not have any confidence that it would win.

The hon. Gentleman did make a very important point about the narrow nature of the interest and the remit of the verderers. That in a sense goes to the heart of the point that I was developing, that possibly the remit of the verderers is too narrowly drawn. Perhaps they are not adequate as guardians of the full development and the full protection of the New Forest. Perhaps some other kind of constitutional mechanism — a national parks authority readily suggests itself as an obvious substitute — is required.

The fact is that hitherto we have not chosen that course. Hitherto we have chosen to rely on the verderers for the protection of the New Forest. We cannot now breach those powers without taking on board the need to take the 1949 Act, dust it down and consider what we are going to replace it with. There is no point in pretending that, once we pass this Bill, if we choose to do so tonight, the powers of the verderers will somehow remain intact; that tonight we shall suspend them for the purposes of this Bill, but tomorrow we shall replace them for any future development.

We cannot pretend that in passing this Bill we are not creating a precedent. One may wish to defend the precedent, but one cannot duck the fact that this would be a precedent. There are, as the hon. Member for New Forest said, other organisations, some of them commercial, which are watching the progress of this Bill and might be quite likely to attempt to follow this precedent. I made this point to the representative of Dyson Bell, who kindly called for a civilised exchange about this Bill last week. He demurred, and I then asked him if this meant that Dyson Bell would decline to act for any other promoter who chose to come before us to take advantage of this precedent. This was greeted with a very eloquent silence. The truth, of course, as we all know, is that if we create this precedent other people will choose to take advantage of it. They will find people who are willing to put forward their Bill and they will certainly find a willing parliamentary agent.

In conclusion, my attitude to the Bill turns on the primacy I attach to preserving the integrity of the forest. I believe that that consideration should also be the most important consideration for the House.

Here I have to say that I found the report of the Lords Select Committee most disappointing — indeed, even disturbing. The report admitted that the outer route would inevitably affect the open forest. It then went on to say that the Committee had reached its decision on the basis of what it regarded as being the most important evidence — namely, the immediate environmental benefits of route 5A to the village of Lyndhurst.

That observation and conclusion is perfectly clear. The Lords Committee chose, quite deliberately and openly, to subordinate the interests of the forest to the environmental advantage of the village. That is the complete reverse of the conclusion of the inquiry into the local plan, which concluded that the environmental advantage to the village of the bypass was incidental, and that the first consideration should be the protection of the forest. That, of course, was a bald line inspector; it was a bald line, but I believe that it was the right line.

The New Forest is a unique asset. If we chip away at it, we shall never be able to recreate it, any more than we would be capable of rebuilding those mediaeval cathedrals that date from the same time. The mass use of the motor car dates from only the last half-century. That is a small interval in the history of the New Forest, which was there centuries before the motor car.

Our first duty should be to make sure that the New Forest is still there when the era of the internal combustion engine has faded, and that when that time comes the heath, the woodlands, the forest, will survive to give future generations the same joy in the open freedom of the forest, the same wonder at the beauty and the balance of the natural landscape. I believe that we would be failing in that duty if we allowed this Bill a Second Reading tonight.

9.4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Peter Bottomley): It may be helpful if, at this point, I intervene briefly to restate the Government's view on the Bill. I am repeating what was said in another place.

It is traditional on a private Bill that the Government take a neutral stance. It is for the promoters to persuade Parliament that the powers they are seeking are necessary and justified. The Government do not wish to take sides on this issue.

Controversy has reigned for more than 50 years on the construction of a bypass for Lyndhurst. The need for a bypass is generally accepted. The route it should take has been the subject of considerable argument over many years. Alternative bypass routes have been canvassed. There have been two public inquiries and several other local consultations.

The route now adopted, known as route 5A for which parliamentary authority is sought by Hampshire council in the Bill, is a compromise. It is the subject of controversy.

It is right that any encroachment on the forest of the kind being debated this evening should be carefully considered. The Select Committee in the other place considered all the issues and allowed the Bill, endorsing route 5A, to proceed. In passing the Bill, that House accepted its Select Committee's view.

The Government appreciate the strong feelings held by the promoters, the residents of Lyndhurst and those hon. Members who petitioned against the Bill about the proposed route 5A. There is detailed argument to be heard.

9.5 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): I shall follow the Minister by making it quite clear from the Front Bench where the Opposition stand. The Opposition are not constrained to remain neutral.

I should like to congratulate the hon. Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) on two things. Last week, for the first time since I was too young to remember, I had the pleasure of being in the New Forest. I thought that it was important to see Lyndhurst, and indeed the New Forest. The hon. Gentleman's constituency is among the most beautiful in the country. I also congratulate him on his powerful speech this evening, which went a considerable way towards resolving some of my doubts about the Bill.

The issue is not simple. Inevitably there are competing and conflicting demands between the different interest groups. My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) asked whether it was appropriate for hon. Members who do not live in the New Forest to take part in the debate. The debate has come to Parliament and it would be irresponsible for hon. Members who do not live in the New Forest to remain silent. However, I must point out that a relatively select and limited number of hon. Members are listening and taking part in the debate tonight. I shall embellish that point later. It is a problem of parliamentary procedure.

The Bill is of general and national interest. It is a question of how the national interest is to remain secure. While hon. Members are entitled to talk about the needs of local communities in 1988, 1992, or 1995, there is a need to maintain the New Forest and to keep it intact, not only for five or 10 years, but for generations that lie ahead. Tonight we are entrusted with a difficult balance.

My natural reaction would be that the New Forest should be maintained as intact as possible. That is a basic reflex response, but I recognise that the community of Lyndhurst has specific traffic problems. The difficulty of the debate centres around how to resolve those problems and, if it is possible, to satisfy all interest groups. It is impossible to find a definitive solution that would resolve all those issues. It would be churlish to say that the question is who should be disadvantaged in the most convenient way. The whole process of bringing a private Bill to Parliament inevitably creates a precedent.

It would be foolish for anyone to argue that no precedent would be created. The New Forest Act 1949 dictates the future of the New Forest. If the private Bill were to deviate from that legislation, it would create a precedent and allow potential developers to look with considerable interest at the area. For those reasons, I am encouraged in my initial reaction.

Mr. Mans: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that private Bills have sought to fence roads under the auspices of the New Forest Act 1949, so precedents are occurring all the time? This precedent should not concern hon. Members, because it does not relate to commercial interests.

Mr. Lloyd: I cannot accept that as a logical position, because the former Bills were confined to fencing roads. In this case we are talking about a different operation. We are talking not simply about fencing existing land but about the creation of an entirely new road on land which is part of the forest. To that extent it is qualitatively different.

The argument, from which hon. Members may draw different conclusions, can be put that breaching forest land would create a precedent for developers, as it is recognised that a greedy eye has been cast on the New Forest by would-be developers of oil and gas deposits. No doubt Parliament would consider whether such a Bill should be accepted, but if we are to set a precedent we must consider whether the matter is sufficiently special to warrant it.

I was interested in the view of the hon. Member for New Forest on how the process could have worked. There is a fundamental breach in the argument put forward in favour of the Bill. If an alternative exists—I have heard nothing to persuade me that that is not the case—that damages that argument, because, if we create a precedent in the New Forest, it must be under special circumstances, and those must include there being no other possibility of achieving the same objective. If the hon. Member for New Forest is accurate in his contention, I find it difficult to accept the Bill for those reasons.

This week, another private Bill was before the House, the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill, which had been before a Select Committee. I do not invite the Minister to re-run the difficulties of three nights ago. When the Select Committee had sat for a considerable period, it came to certain conclusions which were not matters of party political disagreement. There was considerable agreement on those conclusions, because there is a principle that it is not up to Select Committees to reject arguments outright, but to examine the locus standi of the petitioners. The principle gives Select Committees a limited role, and it is then up to the promoters of the Bill to accept or reject the recommendations of the Committee. On Report on the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill, the recommendations of the Select Committee could have been given no significance. That is equally likely in relation to this Bill.

The argument that the most thorough examination of petitioners' cases will be in a Select Committee is at best minimal. Hon. Members are becoming increasingly suspicious of the Select Committee process. Not long ago the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill was considered by a Select Committee, a procedure which caused much consternation on both sides of the House, although there might have been some different views. Certainly the Minister thought that it was a worthwhile exercise; but he would have to feel that was the case.

The only time when I have enjoyed hearing about the spectacle of the private Bill process was when the hon. Member for New Forest described learned QCs lining the corridors of the House looking for something to do. That brought some satisfaction, as it would be perhaps the first time that members of the public struck back against the lawyers.

The private Bill procedure is not satisfactory, as it does not command the full attention of the House. Debates are not well attended and we do not see real interest from all hon. Members. At the time of the debate on the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill, the Government put pressure on Conservative Back Benchers, rightly or wrongly, to support a closure motion. The truth is that hon. Members were present that night not because they felt passionately about Felixstowe but because they felt passionately about the interests of their political party and their own role in Government, and supported the Government in forcing through the Bill.

Mr. Key: That is nonsense.

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) says that is nonsense, but for all I know he may have been one of those hon. Members who were drinking champagne that night.

Mr. Key: I am not interested in the hon. Gentleman going on for 10 minutes about the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill when many hon. Members and members of the public outside the Chamber are more interested in the Hampshire (Lyndhurst Bypass) Bill.

Mr. Lloyd: In saying that, the hon. Gentleman misses the point at issue, which is whether a Select Committee is the right way to discuss the matter. It is not a trivial point, or a matter to be cast aside. If the hon. Member for

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Salisbury cared about his own region he would do it far more service by making sure that matters concerning the New Forest are adequately discussed and that cases are taken on their merits, rather than leave them to be discussed in the House, where private Bills are handled very badly. The hon. Gentleman may debate that point, but I do not think that he can deny its validity in relation to the Bill.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The point that is regularly and properly made is that here is an opportunity, if the verderers' route was considered, to hold a public inquiry to which the people of Hampshire can contribute, and it is primarily their concern. The alternative procedure is for Parliament to amend the primary legislation, which allows the House to debate the future of the New Forest as one of this country's natural assets.

Consideration of those two alternatives would be far more satisfactory than looking at just part of an issue here, where many of the people who are affected by the issue cannot take part, and when many who do participate do not understand and appreciate the full effects of the issues in any event.

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has anticipated my thoughts. It will cause some satisfaction to the hon. Member for Salisbury that I intend to leave the private Bill process, although I insist that those remarks are relevant to whether the issue is best dealt with through a private Bill because of the way in which objections are taken.

I have listened carefully to the submission of Hampshire county council and submissions put to me by other interested parties. One of the matters that weighed heavily with me was the contention of the county council that the matter had been adequately dealt with through a public inquiry process locally. The hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) referred to the public inquiry into the local plan and said that at least part of that was devoted specifically to a roads inquiry. I think that the hon. Gentleman would accept that the inquiry was not properly constituted to consider the line of route of the Lyndhurst bypass. From documents made available to me I understand that, at the time of the inquiry, the inspector considering the forest and downlands villages local plan said of the present proposed route:

"I consider Route 5A to be marginally less damaging overall than the route rejected in 1976".

Therefore, the limited inquiry that has taken place has cast a considerble doubt upon the proposed route rather than justified it. I believe that a local public inquiry is the appropriate way to proceed.

Mr. Mans: Following the inquiry, planning permission was given and the Minister concerned decided not to call in that planning permission for further public inquiry. The planning procedures were followed to the letter and it has been made clear that the route with which we are concerned was examined by a Select Committee in the other place.

Mr. Lloyd: The fact that the Minister in another place took a certain view does not necessarily bind the House or the county council. Most of us have considerable experience of Ministers getting things wrong—no doubt Ministers consider that such mistakes occur less often than we believe. However, on this occasion there is a considerable body of opinion that says that the Minister got it wrong. I will not delay the House by listing all the organisations that support that view and to which my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston referred.

Mr. Robin Cook: The Secretary of State's failure to call in the original proposal is important. However, it should be noted that the Minister in the other place, who spoke rather more fully about the subject than the Minister tonight, made it clear that the fact that the Secretary of State chose not to call in the route for public inquiry did not imply approval of that route. He neither approved nor disapproved.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Perhaps it would help if I confirmed that nothing that I have said in any way contradicts what the Minister said in another place. The reason I was rather brief is that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was rather lengthy.

Mr. Lloyd: I am sure that hon. Members found both those interventions informative.

I took the opportunity to visit Lyndhurst. I certainly would not claim that the dozen people to whom I spoke represented the unanimous view of the population. Certainly, some of them were strongly in favour of the road. The hon. Member for Wyre has sought to persuade me, with eloquence and vehemence, that the bypass is necessary to the community. However, other village residents have put forward the opposite view. They consider, for reasons already outlined, that it would be bad for the community and for the economy.

I am aware that a petition exists and it is claimed that it represents the views of more than half of the population, but it certainly does not represent the unanimous view of the community.

I have found it difficult to understand the traffic problems in the area. I asked local people how bad those problems were and the estimates of the worst traffic conditions varied considerably. Some people suggested that, at worst, the traffic delays lasted for 15 minutes. I find that difficult to comprehend as a major problem. I am sure that hon. Members will appreciate that I have an urban outlook and a delay of 15 minutes to cross my home city of Manchester would not be considered unreasonable. However, I accept that such delays may be a different matter in such a small community as Lyndhurst. Indeed, a 15-minute delay is not far off the estimate given by the county council and therefore it is important to take it into consideration. In fairness, I should say that another person told me that there were—at their worst—traffic delays of up to two hours, which was perhaps an extreme viewpoint. I merely report it as a matter of anecdote. It is precisely because such conflicts of opinion exist that the idea of a local inquiry into the route has considerable merit and is to be preferred to arguing anecdotally across the Chamber. It is far better that the issues should be put to a local inspector who could examine up-to-date traffic forecasts in detail.

Unfortunately, the detailed figures given by the county council are nine years old, dating from 1979. The more up-to-date figures refer only to a percentage increase, which makes it difficult to understand their validity. The right way to examine these traffic matters would be through a proper public inquiry.

People also mentioned the impact of the bypass on the village of Brockenhurst. I understand that the county council has no plans to introduce a bypass there, but some people are concerned that bringing a bypass to Lyndhurst will throw local traffic further down the road. I notice that the hon. Member for Wyre does not accept that—I raise it only because it was raised with me. It could have been adequately sorted out in the public inquiry. I am persuaded by the hon. Member for New Forest that, subject to information being made available by others, and given that the fallback of arbitration exists even now, the process could have been better handled in an alternative way. Local issues are far better dealt with locally and not in this House.

As far as my recommendation has any sway with my hon. Friends and the House in general, I say that the Bill does not have sufficient merit and is not exceptional enough to warrant a Second Reading at this stage.

9.27 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): In the short time that is available to us I shall endeavour to uncover some fresh perspectives on the problem. I have no pleasure in opposing my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson), who is a close neighbour, politically and literally. I admire him greatly and have learnt much from him in the short time that I have represented Salisbury — compared with the long time that he has represented New Forest. There are always gainers and losers and if I had been the hon. Member for New Forest I might, in the circumstances, have chosen the path of my hon. Friend. He must ensure that every inch, every centimetre of the forest is protected, but I hope that he will not misunderstand me if I take a contrary view on this occasion.

Lyndhurst must be seen from a national and international perspective. There is a fundamental issue of political approach here, too. To what extent will the market come to an acceptable solution? Should we engineer a solution in human terms by placing restrictions on car ownership? Can planning solve the problem? I recall that, in the 1960s, when I was still at school, Professor Buchanan produced his Norwich planning survey, which was going to solve Norwich's problems. A few weeks ago, I was in Norwich and it took 40 minutes to get out of the station in a bus, let alone go round the city.

We must think ahead about Lyndhurst and the forest. Whatever we do, traffic will increase and so will congestion, pollution and environmental damage — the problems will only get worse if we delay.

The environmental problems that all hon. Members experience in their constituencies are encapsulated in Lyndhurst. Typically, we find that demand for access to the countryside is increasing on all sides, from local people as well as from visitors. Demands from the military for training are also increasing. Demands for new houses are great in the rural areas—particularly from young people and those who cannot afford the sort of executive houses that are the only houses that can be built when land prices are high. Demands for light industry are growing; demands for out-of-town retailing facilities—which are great and controversial—are growing; demands on road transport are growing from private road users, who are becoming increasingly prosperous, and from heavy commercial traffic. At the same time, demands for the protection of our countryside have never been greater.

All hon. Members have problems with bypasses in their constituencies. Bypasses are demanded and then the routes are fought over. I shall not be pro-bypass for my constituents in Salisbury but anti-bypass for the people of Lyndhurst.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on his bypass plans. There has never been a period in our history when there have been more plans for bypasses or more bypasses being completed. They have given much relief, particularly to the small rural communities.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that the issue is not whether there should be a bypass, but where it should go? There is no dispute that, in due time, Lyndhurst should have a bypass. The dispute is about where it should go and whether it should prejudice the entity of the New Forest.

Mr. Key: Who decides where it should go? I shall address that question later.

Most hon. Members are deeply committed to conservation. It is very unusual to find someone who is not. In my constituency, we experience enormous pressures on conservation. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) is well aware of them and we enjoy sharing Salisbury with him. The pressure on the south of England in particular is intense.

I have problems in my constituency that make those in Lyndhurst pale into insignificance. We have problems with Stonehenge, the Army, archaeology, road works, river plunderers, city excavation, treasure troves, the river Avon, water meadows, pollution, fish farms and canoeists. At the same time, the Nature Conservancy Council maintains Parsonage down, which is one of our most precious reserves, the Forestry Commission conserves Bentley wood, and I have the headquarters of the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas in my constituency. Yet Lyndhurst is only six miles away from the edge of my constituency.

We must face one or two facts whenever we consider these issues. First, there are those who believe that the New Forest should be a museum. As a friend of museums, I suggest that there is a revolution in museum theory and practice that believes in opening up history to the younger generation, improving access and encouraging mobility. In that regard, one has only to look at the Museum of London or the Salisbury and South Wiltshire museum to see that that is the case.

If one believes that the New Forest is not a museum but is living and evolving, and if one does not believe that our countryside and rural communities are museums that are kept for the weekend enjoyment of townsfolk, how can we condemn Lyndhurst to a future locked into the inadequacies of a road system that strangles, suffocates and poisons residents and visitors alike?

That was recognised in Government policy in the latest circular issued in January which said:

> "Concentrating on conservation without concern for the rural economy would result in the death of communities and in dormitory settlements whose inhabitants had no involvement in the evolution of their rural setting."

We must take care to balance our arguments along those lines.

The constitutional position has been well explored by other hon. Members. I shall concentrate only on one or

[Mr. Key]

two aspects of it. There is no doubt that we are all fighting for the New Forest and for our environment. But who are we fighting for? Where are the vested interests? Are they the villages, the verderers, the tourists, the pressure groups, the public at large or the national, European or international public interests?

When the Whips are docile, as they are tonight, we must use our judgment as well as our powers of advocacy. I have listened to the evidence that has been presented and I believe that, given the fact that the objection of the verderers is so central to the debate, it is crucial to be clear who those honourable people are and who they represent. I believe that King John would have turned in his grave and that the ghosts would have walked the Rufus Stone if they had seen the way in which the verderers were treated in 1949, the way in which their court was decimated and their influence diluted. I believe that on this occasion the verderers have been sent naked into battle.

The predecessor of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, Colonel Crosthwaite-Eyre, said much about the court of verderers. He said that the court of verderers

"stood impartially as an interpreter as to how far the Crown prerogative should go, but far more important as a local and immediate court, to which any local resident could come and appeal if he thought that the Crown had gone too far . . . That was the situation of the verderers in the time of William the Conqueror."—[*Official Report;* 1 November 1949; Vol. 469, c. 218.]

The body fell into disuse from Queen Elizabeth's time until Pitt and the 1877 Act.

Who wants the bypass? The county council, the district council, the parish council, the residents association, my noble Friend Lord Congleton, who piloted the Bill through another place and who lived in the Lyndhurst area for most of his life until he became a constituent of mine, all want it. Lord Denning, Lord Montagu, Lord Boyd-Carpenter and 3,000 residents who love the forest all want the bypass.

Who opposes the bypass? It is crucial to consider the verderers among them. Lord Manners, who was appointed by the Crown, and the Countryside Commission, the Forestry Commission, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, a county councillor and five elected verderers oppose it. The verderers are elected by the commoners, who own at least 1 acre of land and get their living from the forest. Incidentally, until 1949, commoners had to own 75 acres of land or be entitled to a parliamentary vote. On paper, there are 877 commoners out of a population in the New Forest of about 140,000. None of the verderers lives in Lyndhurst. There is only one family of people who are technically real commoners and only 10 of the commoners graze beasts to support their livelihood. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest suggested that I had my figures wrong. I can only say that I got them from the assistant solicitor of Hampshire county council and I have no reason to doubt the truth of what he told me.

Mr. David Martin: Apparently, the verderers have no salary, emolument or perk besides a fee buck and the fee doe annually, so they get little for their pains.

Mr. Key: Indeed, the situation is wholly changed. All the other cattle and ponies in the New Forest belong to owners who do not have commoners' rights but are licensed by the agister.

In their petition, the verderers accept the need for a bypass and crave leave to demonstrate that other schemes should be planned. That is an important point.

I shall now discuss the petition of the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Ramblers Association. As a supporter of many environmental groups in my county, I was disturbed by some of the evidence presented to hon. Members on which we are supposed to base our judgment. The Council for the Protection of Rural England got its history wrong. It gave no consideration to the people of Lyndhurst and blatantly misrepresented in print the position of Hampshire county council. In its colourful and emotional leaflet the CPRE included a photograph not of the route but of an attractive woodland scene in the forest. The CPRE did not illustrate on its map the route that it advocated, which rather detracted from its argument. It claimed that the Bill avoided a public inquiry when, as we have heard, there have been two. In any case, what could be more public than a debate in Parliament? The CPRE says that it has proposed a viable alternative scheme. It has not. It does not even accept the need for a bypass in the material that it presented to the House, although I accept what the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said about the other place.

The promoters of the Bill are not blameless. I believe that they have misled us to some extent. On page 2 of their statement they say that the petitions of the Nature Conservancy Council and the Council for the Protection of Rural England and other bodies make no acknowledgement of the need for the bypass and complain of its alleged damaging effect. That is simply not true. When listening to the views of vested interests and pressure groups outside Parliament, we must be careful to use our own judgment, on the basis of personal experience.

One could hardly imagine a more reputable body than the Countryside Commisson. In its petition it accepts the need to find a balance and says that the forest cannot be sacrosanct. That is a very realistic approach.

However, one should not put one's trust in the Countryside Commission, because when there was a planning application in an area of outstanding natural beauty in my constituency, which involved the building of a factory farm and piggery, the Countryside Commission refused to oppose the planning application and to come to the aid of myself, the village and the district council. However, the Countryside Commission was wrong and lost, and the factory farm was not built in that area of outstanding natural beauty. We should not necessarily always assume that such bodies are right.

I say again that problems can sometimes rebound. Only a quarter of a mile from the New Forest, a constituent of mine is suffering. A family has, for generations, been grazing its animals outside the forest in winter and inside the forest in summer. The Nature Conservancy Council has said that it will turn that family's patch of grazing into a site of special scientific interest and that the family must stop using it for grazing land because it is not "according to nature". I suggest that that is absolute nonsense and that it is double standards in the Nature Conservancy Council.

I make those long points because I believe that we must be careful about listening to outside interests. We must rely on our judgment in such affairs. Environmental pressure groups will proliferate enormously. Sometimes they do not appear to know who their friends are or they think that

we are extremely naive. In coming years we must resist the temptation of seeing our role as advocates of particular pressure groups. If we do that, Parliament's role in deciding such issues will be enhanced. Far from tonight's situation — we have heard Opposition Members eloquently describe the Chamber being half empty and few people having sufficient time to devote three weeks to Committee discussions — we could enter a new era in which the judgment of Members of Parliament would become much more important on these issues.

In coping with decisions such as the Lyndhurst question, what we need more than anything else is sound judgment and common sense. In that spirit, I shall vote for the Second Reading.

9.41 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The issues that arise from our debate on this Bill echo back to the past because during the previous Parliament, as the House will remember, we had debates on the Okehampton bypass. The principal issue then was whether it was right, by a Bill, to cut into a national park. The main issue that the hon. Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson), who has the principal interest in tonight's debate, has made—many subsidiary issues have been raised—is that we as a House must decide whether we want to eat into the New Forest when it is not necessary to do so. That question would be much more difficult if nobody had worked out the problem and planned an alternative bypass route.

However, even if that were the case, a procedure has been laid down. We are risking a trespass into the change of the presumptions that the legislation in the 1940s provided for specifically. It is a valid and important point because Parliament debated a Bill and enacted it specifically to safeguard one of the most important natural areas of our country and our heritage. That issue is no less important now—and arguably it is more important.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who has just spoken, appeared to misunderstand the nature of a pressure group and of a statutory body. The Nature Conservancy Council has a duty to advise Parliament and other statutory bodies about the impact of changes in important habitat, such as the New Forest, which contains many rare species of birds such as the Dartford warbler and the hobby, which are on schedule 1; sites of special scientific interest; flowers, moths, plants and mosses, which are extremely important and delicate parts of our habitat and must be protected. As an alternative route for the bypass could be considered, the Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside Commission are absolutely right to put forward their points of view. They are not just pressure groups; they are doing their duty and doing it well.

Mr. Hughes: I am not a Hampshire Member. I have two interests. I have often been to the New Forest. I have relatives there and I have stayed there as a child and subsequently. I have good friends in Brockenhurst and Lyndhurst. I am a summer visitor, but I also have a concern, like anybody in this country, for our environment, and in that context the New Forest is particularly important. It is not for hon. Members but for those who are accountable to Parliament to alert us to what is at stake, and they have made it their particular responsibility to tell the House and the country that we are taking too great a risk if we have a bypass on this route around this small village in the New Forest. The loss would be too great and the bypass should be resisted.

Mr. Mans: I am glad to hear about the hon. Gentleman's interest in the New Forest, but did he take the opportunity that was open to all hon. Members to visit the New Forest two weeks ago to see for himself exactly what the different routes would do to the environment and village?

Mr. Hughes: On that day I was not available. I have been down within the past three weeks and I was down before Christmas. I have been there sufficiently often to be aware of the issues. I also have friends who are there all the time, to whom I have talked. Clearly, I do not have the hon. Gentleman's historic interest as a locally elected councillor in that area. But since he makes a potential complaint against people such as me, who do not pretend to speak as Hampshire men, I must make a complaint in turn.

The 1949 legislation established a system which, although antiquated, has historic traditions. The Court of Verderers was set up to allow people to make representations to it under a constitutional procedure. One can validly criticise the chief protagonists—I include the hon. Gentleman and his family, who clearly argued strongly in Hampshire for the bypass — for never availing themselves of the opportunity to go to the Court of Verderers to make a presentment, the technical word for their case.

Since the 1940s, that court has clearly accepted arguments for roads in the area and other potential environmental disadvantages after such cases have been put to them. It is wrong constitutionally for people to come to the House to argue for short-circuiting that procedure when they have not properly tested the one that has been shown to work.

Somebody reading or listening to this debate might think that the Court of Verderers was 300 or 400 years old, but the court, with its old name and tradition, was reconstituted in 1949 and given a role that was acceptable at a time when the country was legislating for national parks and the protection of the environment. Parliament did that conscientiously. It has never been challenged since.

In a recent letter to the newspapers, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) accepted that we should not bypass the proper public inquiry. Writing in relation to the Falmouth estuary a few weeks ago he said:

> "Just to give some background, this private bill would have the effect of short-circuiting the normal planning process by way of public inquiry. Objectors are effectively deprived of making their voices heard".

The same point of what is the right procedure arises. The hon. Gentleman was speaking perfectly properly as a Hampshire Member.

That is a perfectly proper point and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that it is right that, when a constitutional procedure is laid down and so far not been found wanting, it should be tested. The hon. Gentleman, and those sharing his views on the issue—his father on the county council and others—should have gone to the Court of Verderers and made their case. If that had not succeeded, their case would have had some credibility. It

[Mr. Hughes]

is notable that the county council representative on that court, elected to represent the people of Hampshire, opposes the Bill. There is an important environmental point. There is also an important procedural point. We should use the accepted procedure which clearly has worked.

Mr. Hill: The hon. Gentleman is giving a picture of the verderers' court as an amiable group to which the odd person in Lyndhurst goes to have a chat and put a case. The matter has been discussed for the past 12 years. I have said, in letters to people who have written to me, that the best solution would be to knock together the heads of people in Hampshire county council and the verderers' court so that they come up with a solution, rather than having to bring a private Bill to the House. The Bill is before the House tonight because those people have not been able to get it together. There has been no movement and this is the last possible way for the county council to obtain a decision on the bypass.

Mr. Hughes: I understand that point, but the hon. Gentleman is well aware of the recent events that have led to the presentation of the Bill. Only about a month ago, it appeared that the county council was going to vote the other way. The chief executive, the officers and their parliamentary agent all said that this was not the appropriate way because it would be a long drawn-out procedure, unlikely to achieve the reasonable solution that the hon. Gentleman would have preferred.

I understand why any community may want a bypass, but I am advised that the earliest date by which the bypass could be built, even if the Bill were passed, is 1992. There is no evidence that it would take longer by the other route, given that a public inquiry is immediately available. We must seek to redress the grievance of those people who suffer as a result of the traffic problems in Lyndhurst and the New Forest.

However, the evidence is not sufficiently persuasive that this route is the better route and it was marginal whether the county council would take that route, albeit out of frustration and mystification, rather than through any belief that it was the right route.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: The hon. Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) made a firm promise earlier that he was willing to act as an honest broker to bring the parties together. That would be a far better way rather than to try and push through the Bill, in view of the hon. Gentleman's opposition to it.

Mr. Hughes: That is quite right. We all try to respect each other's constitutional position. The hon. Member for New Forest is in an ideal position to do that. He has the constitutional responsibility in this place for that part of our country.

If we take the conventional route, laid down by parliamentary statute, the verderers' court can enable things to happen. That has been shown by, for example, the widening of the A31 and by the fact that it has allowed 1,000 acres of development in the New Forest.

Mr. Mans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: I shall give way in a moment.

In 1986, the verderers' court opposed an attempt to put a gas pipeline under the forest, but it then produced a better solution and the pipeline was still laid. The court appears to have done a sensible job. One of the things that troubles us all is that a body that works well is never criticised until somebody finds that it does not work to his advantage. Then it is thought to be unsuitable and outdated. When tested, the verderers have not been found wanting, whatever people may have presumed in the past.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Gentleman makes a point about the A31 dual carriageway. Does he agree that that road was built not by using the New Forest Act 1949 but by using a new public act, the New Forest Act 1964? Therefore, no verderers were involved. The verderers did not put forward any views on that under their statutory duty in the 1949 Act.

Mr. Hughes: I accept that there was a different procedure. I do not accept that the verderers had no role to play because I think that they still have the general role of guardianship of the New Forest. Therefore, they have a locus. But I accept that there was a technical and statutory difference.

On the timetable point, I understand that a public inquiry could be held. I am happy to be challenged if I am wrong about this, but I want to put it on the record. It is important that we do not allow ourselves to be bamboozled by wrong information. A public inquiry could test the information. I understand that a public inquiry could be held under the Highways Act 1980 to confirm classified road and side road orders. I understand that such orders would have been necessary but for the Bill and that Hampshire county council could revoke its planning permission, as it is allowed to do in exceptional circumstances, under section 45 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. Lastly, the Secretary of State could call in the application for planning permission under section 35 of the Town and Country Planning Act and precipitate an earlier decision. So I hope there is no strong argument that cannot be rebutted that the normal procedure could produce a solution as quickly as the procedure that the promoters of the Bill wish for in this place.

The national environmental issue is important. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has addressed the alternative route. We have the procedural issues. We have to address also our duty as a House. I am conscious that the present allocation of time is limited. I have no idea whether the promoter will allow us to have further time. I ask him to do so. I do not wish to keep Hampshire Members from speaking. Clearly, their voice should be heard. But we have to ask ourselves what our role is. It seems to me that it is to test whether as individual Members, not whipped by party, we believe that it is right that we should take to ourselves this process which, as the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) and others have pointed out, we do not carry out with great conviction, when alternatives are readily available with which the people of Hampshire would be just as happy.

Mr. Hardy: Do we not have another responsibility? The Government have said that they are neutral on the issue. So that they can maintain a feeble and suspect form of neutrality, they have disregarded the fact that the public agencies which are charged with the duty of giving advice to the Government and Parliament are ignored.

Mr. Hughes: That is true. The hon. Gentleman, whose commitment to the environment is well known, reminds us

that the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council have the responsibility to make sure that Parliament is alerted to matters of concern. The question has been raised whether some of the information produced in the context of the debate is accurate. That is exactly the sort of argument that should be tested at a public inquiry. If the Nature Conservancy Council or the Countryside Commission is not accurately representing a view, it is the inspector's duty to check on that. No doubt all of us have taken part in public inquiries——

Mr. Mans *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 106, Noes 26.

Division No. 195] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Batiste, Spencer
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chope, Christopher
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forth, Eric
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hannam, John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayward, Robert
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hill, James
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Tredinnick, David
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Watts, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Julian Brazier and
Mr. James Arbuthnot.

NOES

Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Benyon, W.
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cox, Tom
Gow, Ian
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Home Robertson, John
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNamara, Kevin
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Ruddock, Joan
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Wallace, James
Wolfson, Mark

Tellers for the Noes
Mr. Elliot Morley and
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr Hardy: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. During the debate——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I cannot take a point of order at this juncture.

Question put accordingly, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 96, Noes 28.

Division No. 196] **[10.11 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Batiste, Spencer
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowis, John
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forth, Eric
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hannam, John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayward, Robert
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hill, James
Holt, Richard
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knapman, Roger
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ryder, Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tredinnick, David
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Widdecombe, Ann
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Julian Brazier and
Mr. James Arbuthnot.

NOES

Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	McNamara, Kevin
Benyon, W.	Pendry, Tom
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Pike, Peter L.
Carttiss, Michael	Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*	Rowe, Andrew
Cox, Tom	Ruddock, Joan
Gow, Ian	Skinner, Dennis
Hardy, Peter	Spearing, Nigel
Haynes, Frank	Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Home Robertson, John	Wallace, James
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*	Wolfson, Mark
Kirkwood, Archy	
Livsey, Richard	Tellers for the Noes:
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*	Mr. Elliot Morley and
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*	Mr. Andrew F. Bennett.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read a Second time and committed.

Mr. Hardy: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Just before 10 o'clock you may have heard me say that the Government were exhibiting a very strange form of neutrality. The Minister assured the House that the Government were distinctly neutral with regard to the Hampshire (Lyndhurst Bypass) Bill. I noticed that the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Minister to whom the Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside Commission report — those bodies are appointed by him—disregarded their advice and voted in the Aye Lobby with several other Ministers. It seems that vote has not followed voice.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member knows full well that the way in which hon. Members and Ministers vote in the House has nothing whatsoever to do with the Chair.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will you give the House a ruling tonight? I did not know that it was customary for an hon. Member not representing a particular constituency to move a private Bill relating to a constituency other than his own. Tonight that has happened. I wonder whether it will be in order from now on for any hon. Member to move a private Bill relating to any other hon. Member's constituency, regardless of what his or her constituency interests may be.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is not for me to give a ruling on the matter, but I can tell the hon. Member that that is a frequent occurrence in the House.

Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (Northern Ireland)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the draft Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 1st February, be approved.—*[Mr. Stanley.]*

10.24 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): May I say, after what has gone on earlier today, that on this occasion I am giving two and a half cheers to the Government.

The Opposition welcome the fact that the Government, through the order, have taken the opportunity to update the provisions for the compensation of victims of criminal injury.

We share the commitment expressed by the Secretary of State to the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights about the provision of proper compensation to victims, and to support schemes that provide advice, assistance and emotional support to those who have suffered. The Secretary of State's reported promise to provide public funds in Northern Ireland to stimulate the development of victim support schemes is to be welcomed.

On the specific changes to the 1977 order, we are pleased to see several changes, including the fact that the Government intend to provide for a standard bereavement award of £3,500 under articles 3(3) and 9(5). We welcome the extension of the definition of "relative" in article 2 to include common law spouses. We welcome, too, the provision in article 5(2) to allow compensation in certain circumstances to the victims of domestic violence. Society has for far too long looked with indifference on domestic violence generally. Just as we are of the view that those who assault should be prosecuted, whether it happens outside or inside the home, so it follows that victims of assault should receive compensation, whether the assaults occur inside or outside the home.

We support the changes that will result in more equal treatment of the widows and widowers. The provision under article 9 of compensation of up to £5,000 for rape victims who, as a result, give birth to a child is welcome. However, there are some changes in the order with which we are far from happy and for which we seek further explanation.

In some ways this may be regarded as a mean-minded piece of legislation that seems to have been designed to minimise the cost to the Exchequer of the compensation of victims of crime. While the maxima for discretionary payments to a spouse or a child under article 10(3) remain at the levels set out in the 1977 order—£10,000 and £1,000 respectively—the limit on claims under article 5(12) has been raised from £250 to £400. In addition, the proportion of income regarded as having been devoted to personal expenditure by a deceased victim is arbitrarily increased in article 7(3) from 20 per cent. to 25 per cent. of total income. Are we to assume, therefore, that the Government believe that breadwinners have become more selfish than they used to be and now spend more of their earnings down at the pub, the racecourse or playing canasta and that, somehow or other, they have increased their personal expenditure by 5 per cent. in the past 11 years?

The net effect of the provisions will be a reduction, in real terms, of the level of compensation available to

victims and, in many cases, to the dependants to an extent greater than the £3,500 provided in the bereavement grant. As well as reducing the level of payments in that way the Government propose to exclude from compensation a number of classes of victims in what may well be, in practice, an arbitrary and unfair fashion.

Under article 5(15) police officers injured while attempting to arrest suspects and members of the public injured while performing their duty to assist the police will be excluded from compensation unless the risk they have taken is judged by the Secretary of State to have been an exceptional one. That provision would seem stupid anywhere, but in the context of Northern Ireland it smacks of lunacy.

Why on earth are the Government seeking to discourage people from assisting in the apprehension of suspects? If the argument is that other forms of compensation may apply, at least in the case of police officers, why does the legislation not simply require that they be taken into account when assessing the level of compensation? The order, having punished people for doing their duty, then provides in article 6(1) for the potential recipient's "character and way of life" to be taken into account in assessing whether and what amount of compensation should be paid.

If a hit-and-run driver breaks the legs of a pedestrian, and that pedestrian is a Minister of State, will he receive more than his PPS in similar circumstances? Will that mean that a secretary will receive more compensation than a tramp in the street? Should differences in lifestyle affect the decision that is made? Are payments to be based on moral judgments rather than objective criteria, such as the nature of the injury and the pain and suffering caused?

Article 5(9) provides that no compensation shall be paid to any person who has, at any time, been a member of an unlawful association or engaged in acts of terrorism. Those who, in common with us, abhor all acts of violence in Northern Ireland may feel that there is justice in denying compensation to those who mete out death and destruction when they themselves become its victims. I do not expect anyone to disagree with that general proposition. However, what happens to a man or woman who was dragged into trouble some 15 years ago when feelings were first aroused? If someone was convicted in 1971 of membership of Saor Eire, but has nothing further to do with it—that organisation no longer exists—and, as a family man aged 34, is killed by a mugger on the streets of Belfast, will his wife and children be denied compensation? The same could be said of someone who was a young member of the Red Hand commandos.

What about the statute of limitations? In such cases, should relatives have to rely on the whim of the Secretary of State's discretion, exercised under article 10(2)? We have further reservations about article 6(7) that provides for deductions for time spent in hospital, and article 5(12) which deals with mental impairment. In addition, we note the detailed and careful comments of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights regarding the legislation. We endorse many of the points that it has made, including its objection to the unequal treatment, in relation to appeals, of appellants and the Secretary of State.

We note that on some issues, the Government have made changes in line with the commission's comments, but on many others they have not done so. We would welcome confirmation that the Secretary of State does intend that the statistical information on the operation of the order will be made available later this year.

I have already made it clear that we have some reservations about the detail of the order. As we welcome the updating of the legislation that it offers and part of the broadening of its scope that it contains, we shall not divide the House on it, and I understand that my colleagues in the Social Democratic and Labour party accept the main points that I have made and will not seek to detain the House by making further comments.

10.30 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): The explanatory notes on page 27 of the order tell us that

"The principal amendments are . . . to restrict the cases in which compensation is awarded for nervous shock".

Article 5(2)(b) states:

"no person who is responsible for causing the injury will benefit from the compensation if it is paid."

Will the Minister clarify for us the matter of compensation that is paid to a family for nervous shock when it is found that the father of the home was a willing participant in an act of terrorism?

Take, for example, a family which claims that it had been held at gunpoint. The father claims that IRA bombers came to him—a security man—and told him that they were holding his family at gunpoint, so that he would have to admit them with their bomb to carry out their wilful destruction and murder. Under the order, will the Government pay compensation for nervous shock to that family, if it is discovered that the father was part of the original plan to commit murder and bring destruction to other families, the UDR, members of the security forces, or innocent civilians?

I have been informed of a serious case in which a person claimed to have been forced to admit IRA bombers to Castlecourt in Belfast. He alleged that his family was held at gunpoint at Turf Lodge. A short time ago he was tried, and acquitted on a technicality, for the La Mon murders. It would be a disgrace if a security man for the city of Belfast was suspected of having—indeed known to have —connections with IRA terrorism, and his family could get compensation from Her Majesty's Government and run laughing all the way to the bank.

I hope that the Minister will look into the murder of two UDR men last night. The person in question was from Turf Lodge and was the man who was tried and acquitted on a technicality for the brutal murders of La Mon. He is called Brophy. Will the Minister look into this information, and confirm or deny its truth?

10.34 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. John Stanley): I want to answer some of the points made by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). I shall write to him about those that I did not pick up quickly enough.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the importance of victim support schemes. I entirely endorse that sentiment. We are conscious of the needs of victims—particularly of elderly victims, whose needs are not wholly met by financial compensation and who need other forms of support. They need practical support in the home, and moral support at what is often a traumatic time.

I have been much impressed by the victim support work that is being done in the Province, but I also know that it

[Mr. John Stanley]

lags somewhat behind the development of such schemes in England and Wales. We are in the process of rectifying that. I have already announced an additional allocation of £47,000 for grants to local schemes in Northern Ireland in the coming financial year. That brings the total for such provision to £70,000. That is a substantial percentage uplift and I am confident that the significant increase in funding will produce a material boost to victim support scheme activity in the Province. It is somewhat overdue, and I am sure the House will be glad to know that it is in hand.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North referred to the decisions that we have made in relation to discretionary payments. In article 10 of the order we have made some small but important changes in the provisions for making discretionary payments to a widow and her children. We have removed an anomaly that prevented a discretionary payment being made to a widower. We have increased the discretionary payment limit for a child from £1,000 to £1,300 to keep it broadly in line with inflation. Although no change has been made in the adult limit, we have ensured—this is the important point for the hon. Gentleman — by the introduction of a bereavement award of £3,500, that the total sum paid to a widow or widower as an expression of public sympathy has been restored, in real terms, to the value of the adult discretionary limit when it was last raised in 1982.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the level of personal upkeep deduction. I am glad to tell him that the original proposal—the one that he mentioned in his speech—is one that, subsequently, we have decided not to pursue. Article 7(3) provides that where the victim has died, one fifth of his income shall be assumed to have been spent on his personal upkeep and will be deducted when calculating compensation. It had been proposed to increase that deduction to one quarter, but following representations, particularly from the Police Federation, we decided to retain the current deduction figure at one fifth.

As to accidental injuries, the hon. Gentleman was right to refer to article 5(15), which eliminates from the scheme accidental injury sustained in the course of law enforcement unless the applicant can show that when the injury occurred he was taking a risk that was, for him, exceptional.

Accidental injuries do not normally form part of a criminal injuries compensation scheme, but the 1977 order provides for compensation to be paid for injuries accidentally sustained when trying to uphold the law. Over recent years, however, case law has extended the interpretation of this provision so that now even a tenuous link between the injury and the act of arresting a criminal is enough to establish an entitlement to compensation. This new exceptional risk requirement had been a feature of the Great Britain scheme since 1979, when for the same reason it had become necessary to restore the original intention of the scheme. Although it is true that the restriction will mostly affect police officers, the number of such cases will undoubtedly be comparatively few, and those officers will be no worse off financiallly than any other policeman injured during the normal course of duty. In addition, as the hon. Gentleman has said, there are other benefits to which a police officer may be entitled, such as paid sick leave and industrial injuries benefit, and he can take civil action if necessary if another party has been negligent. In an extreme case, when an officer has had to retire early, there are the enhanced pension entitlements and gratuity entitlements which can be paid by the police authority.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North asked whether the introduction of the exceptional risk provision might deter ordinary citizens from helping the police to deal with a crime that they see being committed. We do not consider that that will be the case. The relevant provision of article 5(15) refers to a risk that was exceptional for a person to take at the time of his injury. Helping the police to arrest a criminal or to prevent a crime would not be a normal activity for a member of the public. In those circumstances, the risk taken would be regarded as exceptional in probably all cases, and compensation would be paid.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the question of better statistical information in relation to the operation of this order. That is a matter on which I have focused. I think that there is a requirement for improved statistical information. That will be much aided when we have additional computer facilities, which will be made available to the Department. I share the hon. Gentleman's wish for improved statistical reporting on the operation of the criminal compensation scheme. We shall try to make progress with that as soon as the necessary computerisation of the records permits.

In answer to the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea), paragraph 12 of article 5 makes two amendments to the provisions governing compensation for mental impairment. The first requires the injury to be a serious and disabling mental disorder. The medical reports will indicate whether an injury falls into that category and the courts will, in due course, define in case law the forms of mental impairment that will qualify for compensation. I stress that the 1977 order sought to achieve the same effect by imposing a minimum threshold of £1,000 for mental impairment. In practice, that measure alone did not stop compensation being awarded for relatively minor or transient psychiatric conditions. In this order, we seek to restore the original intention of the previous legislation. I assure the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster that I shall examine the case to which he referred and I shall write to him on how the provisions in this order will affect that case.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): At Question Time, the Prime Minister told me that there would be an investigation into the great tragedy in the centre of Belfast. Will the Minister ensure that the people making the inquiries inquire into the case described by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) because there is serious concern in Belfast that the security gates involved in the incident were manned by a person of Mr. Brophy's character and pedigree?

Mr. Stanley: I have noted what the hon. Gentleman said and I shall take account of his comments.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 1st February, be approved.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

CRIMINAL LAW

That the draft Drug Trafficking Offences (Enforcement in England and Wales) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 4th February, be approved.

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Statistics of Trade and Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 28th January, be approved. — *[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

National Health Service

10.42 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I seek leave to present a petition from patients, relatives, health care workers and friends of Guy's hospital in my constituency of Southwark and Bermondsey. The petition was brought here by nurses representing all the nurses' unions: the Royal College of Nursing — in a slightly different category—the Confederation of Health Service Employees and the National Union of Public Employees. The 1,250 signatures have been collected over the past week. The petition is aimed at influencing the Government to be more supportive of the Health Service at this time of crisis. It ends with this prayer, which those who signed it feel strongly should be taken into account by the Government in the coming days and weeks:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will do everything in its power to urge the Government to show its support for the proper provision of health care in this country by taking action to maintain the standard of provision of service by and to improve the level of staffing in the National Health Service.

I hope that that will meet with a welcoming response from Ministers and that the concern expressed by my petitioners and many like them will be met by the Government sooner rather than later.

To lie upon the Table.

Government Data Network

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

10.43 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the question of the Government data network. I begin by declaring an interest, as a consultant to the Electronic Engineering Association. It was through my work with that body that I became aware of the existence of the project, although I should add that I have no connection with any of the companies bidding for the contract. Indeed, I am sure that the EEA is strictly neutral and simply takes a benevolent interest in the project as a whole.

Having become aware of the project, I was surprised to find that the reaction to it in certain parts of the House and the media was rather negative. When I understood the concept, it struck me as having exciting rather than frightening potential. It also appeared to be an example of how a Government decision could be directly beneficial to British industry.

I take this opportunity to look at the matter in a more positive light. Obviously, I should like to examine with my right hon. Friend the Minister the doubts that have been expressed and to probe the Government's commitment to the project.

I had better confess that I am not a technical expert, far less a computer wizard. I can only try to explain in lay language what I understand the Government's data network to be — that is, a new and advanced communications medium. I understand that one should try to imagine a system of pipework, perhaps reminiscent of some examples of modern architecture, through which information invisibly flows.

Secondly, it is a medium that several Government Departments can share. I understand that the initial thinking is that four Departments would be involved— the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise, the Home Office and the Department of Health and Social Security. But the network would have the potential for others to be incorporated in due course.

The third feature of the GDN is that it would be supplied and serviced by an independent contractor. Discussion and examination of the project has advanced to the point where there are three contenders. In no particular order, they are the Computer Sciences Company working with British Telecom, Racal-Scicon Ltd. and Cable and Wireless working with ICL.

In simple broad terms, that is what GDN is all about. It is not somehow the apparatus of a police state, of which we should beware. It is plainly and simply an up-to-date means of conveying information. Nor is it an arrangement that poses an inherently greater threat to privacy, about which, naturally, we should have some regard. It is just as easy to pass a manilla file of information at the moment, and no greater ease is provided by going for a sophisticated electronic network of this kind.

There are a number of important advantages in the Government contemplating this step. The first is that the GDN implies a large network with a considerable capacity. It could probably support, in the early stages, as many as 100,000 terminals. Such an installation would enable the Government to cater for their communications needs for some long way ahead.

By the very nature of things, demand will inevitably rise. The GDN will give the Government the basics of a system capable of almost limitless expansion and with considerable built-in versatility. In the future, one simple connection point could serve all the communications needs of voice, computers, telex, facsimile machines and video conferencing. All the things which today require separate and therefore more costly and less flexible circuits will be linked to just one all-purpose communications medium.

The second advantage of GDN is adaptability. The Government have already made a commitment to an international standard known as open systems interconnection, which offers the means of connecting a whole host of information technology equipment from different suppliers on to one single communications system. Therefore, GDN offers a unique opportunity to put this commitment into action.

Thirdly, GDN offers the Government the prospect of considerable cost savings. The Government would be avoiding a huge capital outlay by utilising private sector investment in the implementation and operation of the network. They would be equipping themselves with a service which is expected to be cheaper to use.

The Government are already heavily involved in using publicly available services for transfer of information. My right hon. Friend the Paymaster General will probably be able to confirm that the costs to Government have been rising remorselessly as the volume of transactions has increased. It is probably difficult for an exact cost figure to be estimated at the present time, but I noticed that a figure of £300 million over 10 years was mentioned in a discussion on the "World at One" programme on BBC Radio 4 on Monday.

It is not really fair to apply that figure to the Government data network. I believe that the figure originates from a guesstimate by the Treasury's Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency of what it might cost the four Departments that could be linked in a GDN, if they were to go about making their own individual provision. The essential point to remember in trying to understand the scale of cost is that the Government would be procuring a service rather than a system.

The fourth advantage for the Government to proceed down that road is that there would be a saving in the problem of attracting skilled personnel into the Government service. The Government service would find it difficult to compete on salary scales with the private sector. The approach of a privately implemented GDN overcomes the significant skill shortage in Government, especially in telecommunications design and network management. Equally, I understand that the adoption of a GDN would not pose any significant threat to existing jobs in the Government service.

Fifthly, there is a positive attraction to the Government in having private sector input. A major advantage, therefore, would be the fulfilment of one of the Government's prime objectives — to encourage private sector investment in public service. There would also be a competitive element, and not only now when the project is at the tendering stage; if it comes into being, there would still be a competitive element in operation because Government Departments would not be forced to use the service, if it did not yield a cost advantage over already publicly available alternatives.

A less direct but none the less important benefit to flow from the Government's adoption of a GDN is that it would give a tremendous boost to the information technology industry in this country. We have some very good companies which would claim to have a leading edge in technology at the present time. We have some fine technical minds working in the information technology industry in this country, and it would be a great opportunity to exploit that fact at the present time. Therefore, it would be a significant uplift to the industry if the project were to go ahead.

Allied to that would be the importance for export potential. I am given to understand that there is vast export potential for such technology. If the Government were to show their confidence in the system, that would be a demonstration to the rest of the world that Britain can make innovative use of advanced technology and much good could flow from that.

Finally, in a more prosaic manner, it could be shown that the GDN would allow an all-round improved service. It means quicker access to information for those who operate the systems and are entitled to that information. If hon. Members took up a constituency case with the Department of Health and Social Security, they would not be told that there was a delay because the file would not be found as it travels between Newcastle upon Tyne or Blackpool and the Department in London. Such information could be retrieved much more quickly. Perhaps it is not too much to hope that the system would evolve to become even more customer-friendly by providing a better service in the delivery of benefits to members of the public.

I referred to the fact that disadvantages have been perceived by some people in their examination of the project. There is a worry that what it really means is the transfer of data between Departments. This seems to be an abiding fear of the National Council for Civil Liberties. As I understand it, the information of each Department involved in the GDN would travel separately in the system, with electronic protection built in. I believe that the jargon is that each Department would be a closed user group. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that there should be worries about privacy. I hope that my hon. Friend can offer assurances about the relationship of the Data Protection Act 1984 to GDN and also say whether the Data Protection Registrar is satisfied that the GDN creates no new loopholes.

As I have already mentioned, if there is a deliberate intention in some part of the Government service to transfer information, almost no method of data storage and transfer is proof against it. But taking information out of GDN in an unauthorised manner or passing a document would arguably be more difficult than anything else one could think of. Banks use data communication systems, and they have great regard for privacy.

Security is the allied problem. It raises the wider question of whether people outside the Government service could tap into information. I believe that that risk can be countered by messages being scrambled within the system. However, I imagine that security forms a major part of the specification that the Government would insist that tenderers should meet before taking the project further.

Then there is the question of a strike threat to the system. Again, I understand that, once the network has been created, it is difficult to pull the plug, so to speak. In any case, as the network does not hold information but is a means of transferring it, there would still be other ways of communication if for any reason something went wrong with the GDN.

Looking at the balance of advantages and disadvantages, I believe that the Government should go ahead with the GDN when they are satisfied that adequate safeguards are in place. Generally speaking, the Government should take advantage of modern technology where they can, especially if they can back a significant portion of British industry at the same time. My impression of Government Departments over the years has been that they are often reluctant to embrace new technology and that they trail behind others in taking it on, when Government ought to be in the van, setting an example.

The GDN seems to present a golden opportunity for the Government to place their internal data communications on an advanced footing. I am encouraged by the news that invitations to tender have been issued today, I understand. I hope that my hon. Friend will confirm the Government's commitment and enthusiasm for the development of the project and promise an early decision when the tenders have been returned and examined. I believe that this is an opportunity which we should not throw away.

10.58 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. Peter Brooke): My hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) has done the House a service in raising the subject of the Government data network tonight, and I am grateful to him for the opportunity to discuss what I shall henceforth call the GDN. It is a major and innovative project. If it goes ahead, it will bring widespread benefits both within Government and, I believe, in the private sector.

Yet, regrettably, there has been a great deal of misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the project in the press and elsewhere. My hon. Friend is very well informed on the technical and policy aspects of the project and has given me the opportunity both to explain the project to the House and to set the record straight — a process to which he has made his own contribution.

The GDN is an exciting project, and my hon. Friend's speech was a bullish one, full of enthusiasm. I share that enthusiasm, but it is also the lot of a Treasury Minister to point out hard realities. So, before we all get carried away with euphoria, I must make it absolutely clear that at this stage the GDN is a proposal, and no more.

There is a clear need for data communications within Government, and I shall say more about this shortly. The GDN looks to be a good way of meeting this need. We now know that it is a technically feasible route. The four Departments—Customs and Excise, the Department of Health and Social Security, the Home Office and the Inland Revenue — and the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency have recently signed memoranda of agreement with the three potential suppliers, identified by my hon. Friend: Computer Sciences Company with British Telecom, Cable and Wireless with International Computers Ltd. and Racal-Scicon Ltd. This is basically an agreement that each supplier's offering meets at least the minimum requirements set out by the Government.

But the acid test is financial. The Government have clearly stated that the final decision on whether the GDN goes ahead will be made on the basis of whether if offers

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

better value for money, over the life of the project, than the alternatives. As my hon. Friend said, invitations have been issued to the three potential suppliers to tender for the GDN. All are well aware that if they are to succeed they must produce bids which are keenly priced, and which take full advantage of the growth potential of the GDN. They are also quite clear about the risks involved in bidding for a project that has yet to be approved. It is now up to them to ensure that the GDN moves from being an attractive technical proposition to being a commercial reality.

Why do we need a GDN at all? To answer that question we need to look at what the future holds. Information technology is now being used to support a much wider range of tasks, and that will increase in the future. In 1987, the number of terminals in Departments was about 65,000. Their plans indicate a figure of 155,000 by 1992, with a likely growth to 240,000 by 1995. By the turn of the century, possibly 350,000 terminals could be in use on desks in Government Departments. This huge and sustained investment is directed to one purpose: improving the quality and efficiency of Government business.

However, effective data communication is an essential part of achieving this progress. It provides the bridge between geographically dispersed offices—for example, in the Inland Revenue—and central processing sites. It also provides the means of communicating between the many different computer systems within each Department. Often, to do a job effectively, an individual will require access to data from a variety of different systems within the Department. Data communication makes it possible for that individual to access those systems from a single terminal on his or her desk, rather than having to peregrinate using a multitude of different pieces of hardware. That objective is clearly reflected in the IT strategies of Departments, particularly those, such as the DHSS, with large dispersed organisations dealing with members of the public.

A GDN is one way of providing that data communications infrastructure. Its attractions are that, first, it makes the best use of scarce technical skills within Government; secondly, it shares circuits and switches to minimise capital costs and to make the best use of capacity; and, thirdly, by placing the implementation and operation of the network within a private sector supplier, it avoids distracting Departments from their mainstream objectives to the provision of services which, though essential, are incidental to the work of Government.

The role of Government so far has been to set out their requirements, and to encourage suppliers to come forward to meet those requirements. I know that all three potential suppliers believe that the GDN makes sound business and commercial sense for Government. I think that they also have an eye to the wider commercial opportunities, both in this country and abroad, that successful implementation of a GDN would open up for them. That is why they have all invested so much time and effort in preparing to bid for the project. It is now up to them to translate the potential advantages of a GDN into bids that make convincing economic sense for Government.

I mentioned a few moments ago the advantages of sharing circuits and switches. That brings me to an area that has caused much confusion and misunderstanding—that of security and privacy. My hon. Friend rightly spent much of his time on this, and invited me to deal with it in my reply. I am happy to do so.

Let me make one point absolutely clear at the outset. The GDN project provides for the sharing of circuits and switches because this makes economic sense. It does not provide some huge computing facility for the whole of Government; and it does not provide open access by Departments to each other's data. I will return to this later.

The importance of security for GDN was recognised at an early stage of the project. Consultations took place with the relevant bodies, such as the Data Protection Registrar, and with computer security experts within Government and from the IT industry. The security policy for the network, together with the implementation plan, has been established using specialist advice.

Security of data transmitted over a network is basically concerned with three things: first, data must arrive where it is intended to arrive, and nowhere else; secondly, it must arrive as it was sent, and not be corrupted in transmission; and, thirdly, it must not be accessed in transit by unauthorised people.

No system can be completely secure; absolute security would be both prohibitively expensive and impractical to use. The security planned to be built into the GDN is designed to provide adequate protection for the applications likely to use the network, but it is not designed to handle nationally classified data.

The responsibility for determining whether security is adequate for any particular application rests with the owner of the data in the Department concerned. If a Department considers that the GDN does not offer sufficient security for a particularly sensitive application, it must consider additional security measures, such as encryption. Conversely, any Department connecting to the network must have in place adequate security measures of its own to ensure both the integrity of its own data and that it will not put at risk the data of other users. There will be clear guidelines about the level of security required of departmental systems before they are allowed to connect to the GDN. It will be a central responsibility to ensure that these are respected.

Privacy is a related issue. It is about avoiding unauthorised access to data. This can occur through unauthorised access—commonly known as hacking—into the network and the systems using it; but it can also occur as a result of access to data by authorised users of the network who are, however, not entitled to have access to those particular data. The owners of data must ensure that all access to their data is properly authorised.

As I have said, a GDN does not involve sharing of data between Departments. Nor does it affect the srrangements for controlling and authorising access laid down by statute or regulation or in the form of undertakings given to Parliament. In fact, it strengthens those arrangements in two ways.

First, it will require Departments to write down clear rules on what authorisations may be given, who is empowered to give them, and the audit trails to record access to any particular data. One recent example, which my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary announced to the House in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. Mackay) on 27 October last year, was the compilation of access rules for the Inland Revenue's new computer system to modernise and improve tax collection, known as the BROCS project.

Secondly, it will provide information on connections and traffic volumes and maintain control over who is allowed to connect to which computer. These two factors apply whether the access is to data within a Department or to that held by another Department.

I can understand fears of the "big brother" syndrome, though I do not agree with them. For this syndrome to occur, there would have to be a wilful disregard of parliamentary control by users of the network, which I, my Government colleagues and, I believe, the civil servants who work in Departments would not be prepared to tolerate for one instant. This is true whether we have a GDN or not, or indeed whether we use computers or not.

In designing the arrangements for security and privacy for the GDN project, we have drawn on the most appropriate technical expertise available in both Government and the private sector. We have also fully involved the Data Protection Registrar. I met him personally last year to discuss these issues, and have ensured that he is kept fully in touch with our plans, and is content with them. In this field, I believe that the GDN project is setting standards for other networks that we can be proud of.

As my hon. Friend said, the GDN is an exciting project. I have been very impressed by the way in which the companies involved have come forward and addressed its technical and commercial challenges. On the technical side, the proof of this has been the signing of the memoranda of agreement on 11 January. The invitations to tender went to all three consortia today, as my hon. Friend said.

The ground is now set for a good commercial competition. I look forward to the outcome, and hope that the results allow the GDN to go ahead by showing that it provides value for money in meeting the Government's data communication needs.

Finally, I thank my hon. Friend for possibly having contributed to the creation of a parliamentary record by allowing me to speak. In the past three parliamentary days, all five Treasury Ministers have spoken from the Dispatch Box without taking part in a Committee and without answering oral questions as a Department. That might possibly be a record.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at ten minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 26 February 1988

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Transplant Surgery

9.34 am

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): I beg to move,

That this House welcomes recent advances in transplant technology and in the availability of transplant operations through the National Health Service; especially welcomes the Government's commitment to secure further progress in this vital area; notes that the recently published Hoffenberg Report recommends steps to improve the supply of donor organs; recognises that it is the shortage of suitable organs satisfactory for donation that limits people's opportunities to enjoy a greatly enhanced quality of life; calls for action to be taken to achieve further improvements by more effective procedures which, whilst being sensitive to the needs of patients, relatives, the bereaved, doctors and other health professionals, effectively identify potential donors and increase the availability of donor organs.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to introduce a short debate on the very important subject of transplant notification procedures. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security in her place. I know that she had to reorganise her engagements to be here for this debate, and I regard that as typical of the generous and willing spirit in which she tries to assist all constructive debate on health. I am grateful to her.

If necessary, I shall declare my interest, although it is not in any way a pecuniary interest. I am privileged to be involved in the Kidney Research Unit Foundation for Wales, which, two years ago, invited me to become one of its vice-presidents. I was proud to accept that position and I am proud of KRUF's contribution to kidney treatment in Wales.

The figures clearly show that, since 1984, there has been a marked and welcome improvement in kidney treatment in Wales—even more marked than the improvement in England. That is the result of a new approach to kidney treatment at two units in Bangor and Carmarthen in which KRUF has played a significant part. In turn, the two new units have played a significant part in the Welsh figures — so much so that the new approach, if properly followed in Wales and elsewhere, could ultimately eliminate all the shortfall in dialysis treatment, probably without the need for extra machinery or staff.

Kidney transplantation is the ideal conclusion to dialysis treatment. I contend that not enough progress is being made in this vital treatment. We are not capitalising on the tremendous fund of good will among the public. The number of transplant operations is increasing and will continue to increase, but so, too, are the waiting lists for transplant operations. We are not making the best use of our resources, by which I mean donors, potential donors and the willingness of the public to facilitate transplantation.

Why do we not capitalise on the known good will of the public? It is perhaps useful to consider a recent survey carried out by Cambridge university of 1,500 adults' attitudes towards transplantation. On being asked, 80 per cent.—a very welcome proportion—gave their approval for the transplantation of any or all of their organs. However, on further questioning, it was discovered that only 23 per cent. of the sample had donor cards, in recognition of their willingness to become donors. Furthermore, only 14 per cent. carried those donor cards. We might rely on donor cards to indicate a person's wish to donate organs at the crucial time, but the survey clearly shows that the cards do not provide an adequate means of identifying potential donors. Donor cards should not be written off, but they are certainly not the complete success that we should like them to be or that they were perhaps envisaged when they were first introduced some 17 years ago.

Donor cards are not the only device to promote the needs and benefits of transplantation. There is another Welsh success, again involving KRUF. In 1986-87 KRUF carried out two associated operations. First, it set up Lifeline Wales — a computerised system. It leafleted every home in Wales exhorting Welsh people to register on Lifeline Wales' computer their willingness to donate their organs.

The Lifeline Wales computer could then be consulted by on line computers in intensive care units to ascertain donor wishes. KRUF also held symposiums in 1986 and 1987 and, as a result, it was able to involve the consultants and nurses of all the intensive care units and to expound the benefits and needs for transplantation. Such an achievement would not have been possible as a result of one symposium.

As a result of the increased awareness and publicity of the need and benefit of transplantation, there was a marked increase in the number of such operations carried out in Wales in 1987. Can such an improvement be continued? The achievements of the symposiums and Lifeline Wales cannot be easily repeated. The operations were carried out at no small effort or cost. Indeed, a novelty factor may have been involved that could be lost in repetition.

I am sure that the House will recall that I sought to introduce a ten-minute Bill, the Transplant Notification Bill, on 3 February. Ideally, I would prefer that, this morning, I was moving the Second Reading of that Bill. I know that that is not possible, but I believe that it is pertinent to try to put forward the arguments and objectives of my Bill. The Bill sought to introduce what can popularly be described as "required-request legislation". That legislation would ensure that the necessary questions to ascertain donors' wishes are asked at the right time. I believe that such questions are not asked often enough.

In essence my Bill was a response to the Hoffenberg report—the results of a working party from the medical royal colleges set up on the invitation of the Department of Health and Social Security under the chairmanship of Sir Raymond Hoffenberg. I am disappointed by the conclusions and recommendations of that report. I do not believe that there is likely to be an improvement in the progress of transplantation operations, for which we all wish, as a result of that report. I am especially

[Mr. Gwilym Jones]

disappointed that the report did not argue that we should grasp any significant nettle that may hold out hope for progress.

The report describes the shortfall in organs for donation — that was the essential reason for the establishment of the working party. It refers to the important criteria relating to brain-stem deaths — an essential part of the practicalities involved with organ removal. The brain-stem death test was first established in 1976 and has been reaffirmed in 1979, 1983 and 1986. The report defines when organs need to be removed. Hearts, livers, pancreases and lungs must be taken from a heart-beating donor—the heart is maintained only as a result of the patient being in intensive care. Kidneys need to be removed at the same time or immediately after death, whereas corneas can be removed up to 12 hours after death.

The report estimates the number of brain-stem deaths that usually occur each year. It also gives the transplant figures for 1986 and the first quarter of 1987. In its introduction, it makes a vital projection relating to kidney transplants. Kidney transplants are our greatest need and represent the greatest number of transplantation operations carried out. The report projects that our total need for kidney transplants could be fulfilled if a greater proportion of the usual number of brain-stem death cases were to become kidney donors.

The report lists eight reasons for the shortfall in organ donations. The first is doubt about the success of the transplantation programme. I agree with the report that that can no longer be considered a valid reason for the lack of organs for transplant. I believe that the public are now aware of the benefits of transplantation; that contributes largely to public goodwill towards such transplantation. The report also states that doubt about the criteria for brain death contributes to the organ shortfall. It refers to certain publicity that has led to worries about brain-stem death criteria. As a consequence, there has been a marked downturn in the number of organs coming through for donation. The report emphatically states that there can be no question that survival is in any way relegated to second place after the need for transplant organs. With equal emphasis, the report says there is no possibility that organs can or will be taken from a live patient.

The report also refers to lack of medical experience and knowledge contributing to the shortfall. The report says that most doctors do not have frequent experience of brain-stem death or transplantation. It believes that doctors will not even encounter such cases once a year. However, the report does not state whether it means most doctors, or most doctors in intensive care units — I believe that there is a significant difference between the two categories.

The report also says that transplantation operations may be affected by the pressure on intensive care beds. There are other priorities with which an intensive care unit must deal that might frustrate the opportunities for organ removal. The report makes the somewhat unusual comment that, if relatives request organs to be donated, the move into an intensive care bed "should be considered". I believe that such a "consideration" is an insubstantial approach to a most important matter.

The report also refers to the effect of limited time — several hours must be spent in making the arrangements for transplantation. However, I believe that our transplant teams are well versed in all that is involved and the crucial necessity to ensure that transplantation timings coincide. Indeed, we are all aware of a recent example on television when a donor heart and the recipient had to be brought by aircraft from different parts of the country to Papworth hospital. I believe that transplant teams are geared up for such operations and that there should be no fear about limited time. The report also mentioned the problems of limited theatre time; that relates to the pressure on intensive care beds and the other emergencies with which operating theatres must deal.

Another reason listed for the shortfall in transplants —a new area for consideration—is that of costs. There is an increasing and justified need for clinical budgeting and an awareness of cost within the Health Service that has implications for other treatments.

The final reason suggested by the report for the shortfall was medico-legal constraints, but it believes that such constraints do not represent a problem. I am struck by the thinness of some of the reasons for the shortfall and the omission of what I consider, in common with many others, to be the main problem with regard to transplantation — the need to ask the right questions. Are those questions being asked? If not, why not?

At the beginning of the report, it states that a questionnaire was sent to all intensive care units. However, that questionnaire and its results have not been published —we do not know what has been gained from it. Three oral evidence sessions were held by the Hoffenberg working party, and evidence taken from another 37 individuals, but that has not been published. If all such information had been made available, we would have a much thicker document than the present six pages. Given the importance of the subject, I believe that the report should be thicker.

Recently, another survey has been carried out for the BBC television programme "That's Life". That survey was sent to 200 intensive care units and asked consultants and senior nurses why the important questions are not asked. Three reasons were given. The first was a dislike for adding to distress. There is a natural desire not to increase the distress of relatives at a very emotional time. The second reason given was the lack of training in approaching relatives at that crucial time. The third reason was bad publicity about brain death and transplants. I am surprised at that third reason from consultants and nurses in intensive care units. I feel that that survey, and the one pursued by the Hoffenberg working party deserve to be pursued further to see what else we can learn.

I am even more concerned about a statement from the British Organ Donor Society. It makes the following comment:

> "We understand that there are some intensive care units where, as a matter of internal or personal policy, families will not be approached concerning organ donation."

The three reasons given in the survey are worthy of consideration. The statement from the British Organ Donor Society suggests a negative position that frustrates a purpose that we should all like to see pursued.

There are 14 numbered paragraphs of recommendations in the Hoffenberg report, which are largely in line with the reasons given for the shortage of organs. The report reaffirms the working party's conviction about the brain-stem death criteria. The working party report states that brain death means death. It recommends the

important need for training of medical students and postgraduates in four sectors — the criteria for brain death, the success and demands of organ transplantation, communication with bereaved relatives — that is a particularly important matter — and training in procedures to arrange for transplantation.

The report recommends that clearly defined national and local criteria for the acceptance or rejection of organ donation should be established. It makes the specific point that paragraph 6 of the code of practice on organs for transplantation needs modifying.

In line with the recommendation for training for medical students and postgraduates, the report recommends that there should be similar training for nurses — in assisting with the determination of death, with the removal of organs and in communication with relatives.

The report recommends that theatre arrangements should be simplified. Reference is made to the Cambridge initiative, whereby a single team achieves multiple organ removal. That must be a simpler and better approach to organ removal.

The report recommends that district health authorities should be reimbursed for the cost of providing donor organs. That is an important matter, because it relates to at least three of the reasons that have been listed for the shortage of organs. The main reason given in the report is that entitled cost, and the needs with regard to clinical budgeting, the awareness of cost and the implications for other treatments. There are the further reasons of pressure on intensive care beds, the other priorities that must be considered and the limited theatre time, with the implications that that has for other emergencies.

The report recommends that corneal donation should always be encouraged. It says that there is a need to alter the wording on donor cards.

Running through the recommendations is an advocacy of the need for better information about transplants and their benefit. It says that better information should be provided on a continuing basis inside hospitals and outside hospitals for the general public. Essentially, it is an on-going public relations campaign to achieve improved transplantation.

On the fundamental matter of the asking of questions about a donor's wishes, the report is not brief, but it is still not as substantial or as positive as it might be. It talks about means that should be found to ensure that donor's wishes are better known. It uses the examples of the Lifeline Wales project and other similar projects throughout the country as possible ways of achieving that objective. It says that organ donation should always be considered. To my mind, that is a perfectly obvious statement.

The report comes down against an opting-out procedure. I would not wish to differ with that argument because with transplantation we should always maintain the important principle of the gift of life, which benefits the giver as well as the receiver, and which in turn comforts the relatives of the deceased.

The report comes down against the concept of required request, but it does not offer any evidence or argument as to why we should not pursue it. Instead, as a stop-gap, the report calls for an audit of the diagnoses of brain death, of the numbers of transplants and the reason for the shortfall. It expects that the senior doctor should make the first approach on all occasions to ascertain a donor's wishes. It recommends that each district health authority should develop a policy for transplantation.

With regard to the Hoffenberg report, I would say, "Fine so far, but not far enough." I have a vague feeling of superficiality about it. It has skimped the main problem of the questions that are not being asked often enough. Perhaps the survey would have told us more, but it has not been published. If it had been, we might be aware of another problem that has recently been highlighted by the heart transplant surgeon, Mr. John Wallwork. He sought to define the knock-on effect of the shortage of hearts for transplantation. He said that if hearts could only be transplanted earlier into a fitter patient, it would require less nursing and less caring than is being devoted at present to looking after a less fit transplant patient. That extra nursing and caring could be devoted to an increased number of transplants. I think that that is the most relevant point about that knock-on effect.

Equally relevant is the projection that Mr. Wallwork has made that one in five people on the waiting list for heart transplants may be expected to die before an operation can be carried out. That is an improvement, because until recently it was expected that one in four might die before a transplant could be carried out. We do not know whether any of those aspects were covered in the survey that the working party considered or in the evidence that it took.

The report abruptly comes down against required request, but we are no better informed about it. I suspect that lurking within the recommendations of the Hoffenberg report is the spurious argument that required request interferes with clincial freedom. That spurious argument has yet to be defined in a meaningful way. Clinical freedom concerns judgments about a patient's care. I cannot see how wishes for donation interfere with a patient's care. In that context, Mr. Ross Taylor of the Royal Victoria hospital in Newcastle upon Tyne said:

"By not legislating we are protecting non-existent rights of people in intensive care units in the form of doctors and nurses, disregarding very definite rights of donors and donor families who are not being asked."

I should add that we are disregarding the rights of people who are waiting for transplants. Mr. Taylor goes on to estimate that there is potential for increasing the number of transplants fivefold.

Professor Arthur Caplan of the university of Minnesota is even stronger in his defence of required-request legislation. He has good credentials because, besides being professor of medical ethics at the University of Minnesota, he has been involved with the setting up of required-request legislation in various states of America. That legislation is now in place in the majority — 33 — of the states. He argues that required-request has nothing to do with restriction or coercion; he says that it offers a choice. Already, thousands of people in the United States have benefited from the coming to pass of required-request legislation. He feels that that is the finest justification for its introduction.

Professor Caplan said that he would say to doctors:

"Take seriously your obligation as healers. Take seriously your duty to transform tragedy into something good. If it's not legislated, then by choice, I would hope that the British Medical Association would very quickly decide to put the policy in place on its own, and it could — there's nothing to stop them from doing it anyway."

[Mr. Gwilym Jones]

Although I have great reservations about the Hoffenberg report, I by no means totally condemn it. It contains much of great value. I look forward to finding out whether my hon. Friend the Minister can tell me about progress in implementing the important recommendations in the report. By "important considerations" I have in mind the recommendations that each district health authority should institute an operational policy for transplantation and the recommendation that training should be provided for medical students, postgraduates and nurses in all the various areas, not least in communicating with bereaved relatives. Importantly, cost is highlighted in the report. There is the recommendation that district health authorities should be reimbursed for the cost of organ removal.

None of us would want aspects of clinical budgeting or the awareness of costs to be the cause of frustrating further expansion in transplantation. Certainly, there are financial implications, not just in cost but in savings to the Health Service. For example, kidney transplants are the ideal conclusion of dialysis. It is estimated that dialysis costs an average of £15,000 a year for each patient. That expenditure would not have to be maintained and would be a saving that could be applied to further patient care in the NHS.

There is also the aspect that my hon. Friend the Minister recently and rightly observed. Each successful transplant means that an ill person becomes a fit person. There is a greatly improved quality of life and patients would probably resume their occupation or take up an occupation, in turn making a contribution to our economy, at the very least by paying tax. The recommendation about cost in the Hoffenberg report certainly needs to be pursued.

I should remind the House of the minor point about altering the wording on donor cards. The card refers to the removal of eyes. However, it is not eyes that are removed but corneas. The Hoffenberg report has drawn our attention to that possibly off-putting effect, which may worry some people.

We should go further than the Hoffenberg report. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to add lustre to her reputation and to be remembered for a long time as the Minister who seized the banner of required-request and achieved tremendous progress. I have referred to some statistics but it is not enough just to use bald statistics. We are dealing with human beings.

With that in mind, I refer to a recent tragedy that is relevant to the debate. It was written on the front page of the Fareham and Gosport *Street Life* of Thursday 18 February. It said:

"Genna Trapp died a month before her third birthday because doctors could not find a donor to replace her damaged liver . . . And they now say Genna should never have died. A change in Britain's transplant laws could have saved her, they say. Liver specialist at King's College Hospital in London, Doctor Roger Williams watched Genna die . . . He wants drastic changes to make more livers available. 'The law should be changed so that people are automatically asked about donating organs when a child dies', he said. 'It's a system that works in America and it is called Required Request. There are children like Genna dying and they will continue to do so unless this happens. It is a terrible waste.'"

My fear is that our waiting list for transplants could continue to increase beyond the level of potential donations. The current waiting list for kidneys is 3,485. Last year, 1,566 kidney transplant operations were carried out. However, our waiting list will not decline at the rate of 1,500 a year, because each year more patients are diagnosed as being in need of dialysis and, eventually transplant. It is likely that the waiting list, even with that level of operations being maintained, will grow by 1,000 per annum. The Hoffenberg report estimates that there are 4,000 brain-stem deaths each year. That means 8,000 kidneys. If our waiting list continues to increase by 1,000 per year, in what year will that waiting list be greater than the potential number of kidneys available for transplant?

There are grotesque alternatives that are being pursued. Attempts are being made to use pig valves and baboon hearts for transplant purposes. For instance, a baby was kept alive in 1984 for 20 days by the transplant of a baboon's heart. I learned this week of a $3 million grant project in the United States of America for the farming of chimpanzees so that their hearts and kidneys can be taken for transplantation. We know of the trade in India of purchasing kidneys from healthy poor people.

Occasionally, some of those techniques might be indispensable in adding to the sum of our medical knowledge, but in general I feel that we are going down dangerous roads. We are taking immoral and unethical avenues that we should not be pursuing. The detestable trade in India of selling kidneys and preying on the poor is but a short step from even more vile practices such as murder, body snatching and the involvement of organised crime. We may detest those practices, but we recognise that desperation for transplants is the essential motivation.

On balance, I acknowledge and praise the tremendous progress that has been made in transplantation and the continuing increase in transplants. It may be said that over 8,000 people are now alive and enjoying a greatly improved quality of life who might not be alive if it were not for the transplant programme. I acknowledge and praise our Government's commitment to wanting to achieve further progress. At the risk of repetition, it is only required-request that will make significant progress. Substantial authorities are in favour of required-request, as are various medical experts. It is already in operation in various states of America.

Arguably, there is overwhelming support for required-request. We can already show good will towards transplantation and a wish to see it expanded further. Closest to home, the chairman of the Kidney Research Unit Foundation for Wales, Mr. Wilkinson, has told me about discussions at the Elephant and Castle in which he participated, where the majority favoured the earliest move to required-request legislation.

Against that is the position set out in the Hoffenberg report, of essentially trying to continue to rely on the voluntary approach, when it must be staring us in the face that the voluntary approach is not succeeding and when the demand on the waiting list is likely to increase. So much has been done and continues to be done. However, I argue strongly that we should grasp the nettle of required-request.

10.8 am

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): I convey my warm congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on the excellent contribution he has made to our debate and to his sustained leadership of a campaign on a crucial crusade which will, when he

succeeds—I hope that it will be only a short time before he does so—enhance the quality of life of so many of our fellow citizens.

I also congratulate the health authorities in Wales which, in many areas, show a commendable initiative that could well be copied by other regional health authorities in the United Kingdom. For example, Heartbeat Wales is at least two or three years ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom. The results of Heartbeat Wales have been shown in the coronary heart disease statistics. That is another area in which we grievously need to make progress.

When I had the privilege of filling the post now so splendidly filled by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), it became clear to me that organ transplants were a technique that should be looked at positively. The more I examined it, the more I became convinced that it was the way to go. I therefore went to the United States two or three years ago and was deeply impressed by the progress that individual states of the Union had made. Their record since then amply justifies the optimism that most of the proponents of the required-request system then had. It was partly my own enthusiasm which led to the creation of the committee under Sir Raymond Hoffenberg. I share the disappointment of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North at the failure of the Hoffenberg report to go any further.

Those of us who have examined the issue recognise the immense sensitivities and difficulties about the time of bereavement, and the great anxiety of the next of kin and of the doctors and nurses concerned with the case. We must also recognise that those of us who are not in the profession would offer views on the clinical and medical aspects only with the greatest timidity and sensitivity. That being said, I believe that, for all the reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North mentioned—I shall not weary the House by repeating them—we must re-examine what we should do.

Of all groups in the country, members of the medical profession are the most conservative. I am afraid that my hon. Friends at the DHSS cannot just sit back, accept the medical advice and leave it at that. There are clinicians who know of the immense advantages for quality of life and rapidity of treatment—not to mention economic savings in the Health Service—but the balance of medical opinion will always continue to push in the opposite direction. We need leadership from the Ministry and the Department—and from us, as legislators. It is for that leadership, positive encouragement and active promotion that we look to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

10.13 am

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): I hope the House will forgive me, but I almost completely lost my voice yesterday, and it has only partly returned this morning. I shall be brief and, I hope, to the point.

I warmly thank the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) for bringing the issue back to the House today and for the points that he made in support of his motion, with which I almost entirely agreed. He was right to say that there is agreement that more action is needed and that the situation is unsatisfactory. Advances in transplant medicine have meant that thousands of people, who would otherwise have died or been condemned to lead a miserable life, can live and enjoy an almost normal one. Many people, because of the shortage of transplant organs, cannot benefit from transplant surgery and must wait a long time in misery, or die while they are waiting. So there is general recognition that something more needs to be done, but there is no agreement about what.

Some would argue that organs should be taken unless the deceased's relatives veto that action. That approach has been adopted in some states in the USA. It dramatically reduces the waiting lists and increases the supply of organs available for transplant. However, some people fear that, however watertight we try to make the system for ensuring that a veto has not been exercised, some people's organs will be taken, despite profound objections on the part of relatives who did not find out in time.

The Hoffenberg report makes nine recommendations, which include further publicity and education but essentially leave the structure of the system unchanged. The Government should adopt all the proposals in the Hoffenberg report and implement them straight away. I also understand the concerns that the report's proposals do not go far enough, will not ensure that enough organs are available for transplant, and will not significantly reduce waiting lists. Required-request is a middle way between requiring people to opt out with a veto and leaving the position as it is now.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, North discussed the required-request system, distinguishing it from a voluntary one. I think that the required-request system remains a voluntary system because, after the request has been made, the organs are taken for transplant only if they are volunteered by the relatives. It would become an obligation for the doctor to consider whether an organ donation would be possible, and if the doctor thought that the organs were suitable for donation the obligation would be on him to ask the relatives whether the organs could be made available. Some have expressed concern that that would upset newly bereaved relatives, but I believe that if there were a statutory obligation it would help doctors. They would merely be carrying out a task that they were obliged to do. That would assist them in approaching relatives and making the request. Similarly, doctors ask someone for consent before an operation because there is a legal requirement to do so, and people understand why they are doing it. It does not necessarily mean that they think things will go wrong. It is a formal procedure that people understand doctors must go through.

If doctors explained to relatives that they were required to request the organs and that the decision was entirely up to the relatives, that would be a straightforward procedure which I would welcome. There is no risk in that approach that organs would be taken against the wishes of the relatives, because they would have to be asked. There would also be no risk of relatives, who might have wanted the organs to be donated, not being asked. We should be concerned about that, too.

This is not a substitute for a proper public information campaign about the importance of organ donation and the transplant programme. The required-request system should be accompanied by a public information campaign about the possible benefits for those who have transplants. I urge the Government to accept the approach recommended by the hon. Member for Cardiff, North, and to go further than that. They should do more to promote the development of bereavement counselling and

[Ms. Harriet Harman]

to train hospital staff to deal with relatives who have recently been bereaved. At the same time as adopting the required-request approach, I want them to carry out research into the long-term effect on relatives who have allowed organs to be used for transplant. Often, recently bereaved people's feelings change. We might find that people feel a greater degree of gratitude if they have the opportunity to donate their deceased relatives' organs for transplantation.

We need a better understanding of the short-term effect on people. We also need a longer-term research programme to examine the effect on bereaved relatives, particularly parents, of making organs available for transplantation. I urge the Government to make sufficient finance available to district health authorities so that the cost of intensive care is not a deterrent to making organs available. The Government must also take action to ensure that there are enough nurses and medical staff so that the removal of organs can take place. Obviously, I should like to see an expansion and development of research into the matter. It is the responsibility of the Government of the day to provide the basis for medical advance and lay the groundwork for breakthroughs in future.

Transplantation is a difficult matter, surrounded as it is with fears about spare parts surgery. When I asked myself whether I would be prepared to have my organs used after my death, without any hesitation and difficulty I said yes. I have carried a donor card for years. I have absolutely no difficulty about that. My husband, who comes from a Catholic background, is certainly against the cremation of his body. He has a different approach, but he automatically said yes, he would be prepared for any of his organs to be used for transplantation after his death.

We asked ourselves whether, if one of our children suddenly died, we would be prepared to allow their organs to be used for transplantation. We paused and felt that sense of horror that parents obviously feel when they think about their child's organs being taken out of their dead body and donated. For a few seconds, we imagined ourselves in the shoes of the parents of a desperately ill child who needed a transplant. It is easy to understand why the required-request system must be introduced. Our answer to the request would be yes. We must always recognise that there is a sense of contradiction. We must be on the side of those who have the possibility of life, and we must make that possibility a reality by ensuring that organs are available.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, North has a great deal of support for his motion. He has the support of many hon. Members who are not able to be here today but have asked me to convey to him their support. They are concerned that the Government should take action. In particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is not able to be here, but I can say that he fully supports the points that were made by the hon. Member for Cardiff, North. I support the endeavours of the hon. Gentleman and hope that the Government will respond positively and take action where it is needed.

10.23 am

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on his good fortune in the ballot and on choosing the important matter of transplant notification procedures as the subject of debate. I am pleased to support his motion.

My interest in this subject arises from the fact that one of the country's principal centres of excellence in heart and heart-lung transplantation is Harefield hospital, which is situated in my constituency. As a result, I have a close, ongoing relationship with Professor Magdi Yacoub and his team, and take a close interest in the availability of donor organs and the advancement of transplant surgery generally. The only real limitation on the number of transplants that are carried out at Harefield is the availability of donor hearts. The clinical criteria for carrying out transplants are widening as the success of operations becomes more clearly demonstrated.

In 1987, 180 transplants were carried out at Harefield. A total of 550 transplants have been carried out there. The longest survivor is now eight and a half years on from a transplant operation. There is an 80 per cent. survival rate at two years, as against the possibility that all patients would have died within six months had no transplants been carried out. Of the 550 transplant operations, some 250 have been carried out during the past two years. Now, unlike other operations, there is almost complete certainty that patients would have died had no donor hearts been available.

In the current year, Harefield has about £3·1 million to carry out 180 transplants under the National Health Service. That sum includes an additional £740,000, which has just been allocated by North West Thames regional health authority. I pay tribute to the North West Thames regional health authority for the wonderful support that it has always given the transplantation programme at Harefield. The regional health authority and the Hillingdon district health authority have ensured that it is now one of the premier centres of excellence. As evidence of that, the expansion of the National Health Service and the improvement in patient care, only last Thursday Her Royal Highness the Duchess of York opened the new intensive therapy unit at Harefield, which is now providing excellent care for transplantees. The unit cost about £1·4 million. It is yet another example of new NHS facilities being opened and of the way in which the taxpayer is receiving better health care.

The unit looks after adult cardiac and thoracic surgical patients and adult patients who are recovering from heart or heart-lung transplants. It contains a range of highly sophisticated monitoring and life support systems. Alongside it is the new Eric Morecambe department of cardiology, named after the comedian whom we all knew and loved so well and who benefited from cardiac surgery. The building costs were paid by the generous support of the Sportsman's Aid Society, and the furniture and fitting were paid for by the hospital league of friends. I pay tribute to their generosity. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North will not mind referring to those matters in passing.

All the facilities and the substantial available funds can be deployed to maximum effect only if more donor hearts are available. The Hoffenburg report attempts to discuss the present position of organ donation and the reasons for the shortfall in donations. It makes a valuable contribution to a better understanding of the main problems facing doctors and the problems of relatives of deceased persons whose organs are needed for transplants.

The report sets out to reassure the public about the criteria to be adopted before organs are removed. It is clear, reassuring and helpful on brain stem death.

As my hon. Friends, the Members for Cardiff, North and for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) pointed out, the report rejects the concept of legally required request—a concept that has now been adopted in 30 states of the United States of America — whereby a hospital administrator or his assignee should ask a deceased person's relatives for the gift of organs.

As my hon. Friend has said, the option of an effective audit is, in the opinion of the working party, preferable to the legally required-request procedure. My hon. Friend has pointed to all the difficulties that that would present in the future and he is not optimistic that it would lead to an increase in the supply of donor organs. I must agree with him. I am sure it will mean a continuing shortage of donor organs and a continuing waiting list for those patients for whom a transplant is the only hope of life.

I think that I can understand why the report reached that conclusion. No doubt, among the many other matters that they considered, the members of the working party had in mind the distress to relatives of those who have suffered sudden death. However, I wonder whether they took account of the feelings that relatives expressed in "That's Life." They made it clear that if they had been asked to agree to the donation of the organs of their deceased relatives, they would have done so, and that today they would have felt a great sense of comfort that the organs of their loved ones were making it possible for another person to live a normal, happy and healthy life.

The hon. Member for Peckham made what I thought was a good suggestion; namely, that research should be initiated by the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), and her Department into the attitudes of bereaved relatives. We need to know more on that subject. We need to know the views of those people who have suffered bereavement.

If the concept of required-request is not to be adopted, what is the alternative? Indeed, is there a reasonable alternative that would lead to an increase in the supply of donor organs? I believe that there is only one realistic alternative and only one other way forward: to secure the support of the public, and especially of young people, for carrying donor cards or, even better, some other form of a much more permanent indication of their willingness, or otherwise, to donate their organs.

Yesterday two young women work-shadowed me in the House of Commons. They came from Bishopshalt and Swakeleys schools in my constituency. Last night we discussed this debate and I asked them about their attitudes towards the donation of organs. I was proud to find that both those young women carried donor cards. One of them had obtained her card from a chemist and the other one had seen the cards in a doctor's surgery and collected her card from there. The only realistic way forward is to ensure that the vast majority of people are persuaded to carry a donor card, especially young people.

One nasty aspect of this whole business is that often in serious accidents the donor card is separated from the individual who has suffered the accident, and it is not found until too much time has elapsed to remove an organ. We need to find other ways to signify an individual's agreement to donate organs. The report talks about the possibility of agreement, or otherwise, being shown on a driving licence. Another possibility would be that each individual who holds a driving licence should be entitled to notify the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre of their wishes and that that information should be kept on the DVLC computer. Another way of handling this matter might be to encourage the wearing of what in world war 2 were called "dog tags"; in other words, a simple and elegant chain around the neck, perhaps with a small plate bearing one's name and an indication of one's wishes.

In addition to those identification procedures, I believe that there is another way of tackling the problem. I urge my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to discuss with her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science the carrying out of a sustained education programme in our schools.

Public opinion on this matter is most likely to change if people make the decision themselves. Young people are far less apprehensive about such matters than their parents. They have grown up in an era when heart and heart-lung transplantation is almost an every-day occurrence. They believe in it and are proud of it and in many cases want to support it. That presents an alternative way forward to required-request. We should secure the voluntary support of the public, and especially of young people.

I welcome the motion most warmly. It is important. It could well be that in the next year many people who receive heart or heart and lung transplants will have cause to be grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North for drawing attention to these matters. He may have succeeded in taking a major step forward in encouraging many people to indicate their wishes now and thus make more organs available.

There is no doubt that in the years to come major advances will be made in cardiac surgery of every kind. It could well be that within a decade or more we shall no longer have to rely on the transplantation of human organs, and that it will be possible to substitute for them artificial organs of some kind. Although we have not yet reached that stage, I have no doubt that it will come. Until it does, I have no doubt that we need to secure the support of the population of this country to donate organs to make it possible for other people to live.

10.36 am

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) for giving all of us who feel strongly about this subject the chance to join the debate. The part of the motion about which I wish to speak relates to identifying donors and obtaining organs. However, having heard the discussion about required request, I am prompted into saying something further about that.

The reason I want to join the debate is that I can speak from direct personal experience. It is important that those of us with such experience join in, because far too often any discussion of these issues is either academic-led or medical-led. I believe that those of us who have been through the mill ought to speak up; we have something to contribute.

Six and a half years ago our daughter choked to death at school. She was taken to hospital and my wife and I rushed there. To this day, I can remember every awful detail of what followed. We were surrounded by enormous help and a huge amount of support so what I want to say

[Mr. David Wilshire]

implies no criticism of anybody. However, no use was made of any part of Sarah's body. No thought was given to it by us, and it was not mentioned to us by anybody else.

Six and a half years later the dust has settled a bit and it is possible to think positively and constructively about what we went through. Sharing that sort of experience may well help people to come to some sort of conclusion of their own, and it may help us to nudge people towards thinking about it for themselves. Indeed, it may nudge the medical profession into plucking up the courage to ask more often. I use the word "nudge" and will talk about "encourage" deliberately, because I am against compulsion. I am against legislation trying to force anything in this sensitive area.

That experience taught me and my wife three things. Our first conclusion was that a great deal more could be done to encourage people to think about these nasty issues when there is no crisis. We had long since carried kidney donor cards, but if only, when there was no crisis, somebody had encouraged us to think about the unthinkable—our children's possible death—we could have done something then. We would have mocked and said, "Of course we do not need to think about our children's death", but in our case circumstances proved otherwise.

Our second conclusion is that some thought needs to be given to what happens when people have been encouraged to do something for themselves. I have a feeling that no one in the NHS or anywhere else knows that I carry a kidney donor card. The chances are that if I turn up when someone is interested in knowing whether I have a card I shall be in no position to tell that person, and there is a good chance that I shall turn up without my wallet. If someone said to me, "Here is a computer-based register. Would you like to put your name on it?" I should be the first to volunteer.

The third conclusion that I reached was that ways must be found of asking distraught relatives whether they are willing to help. Much has been said about required request. My experience teaches me several things. Any suggestion of the right to remove must be resisted at all costs. Any suggestion that distraught relatives have to go through some sort of system of opting out must be resisted. Compulsory asking is far too insensitive a way to deal with an issue that is complex and needs to be handled in a different way. I realise that what I am saying means that there will probably be fewer organs available than if we went down the road of compulsion. My experience taught me. Although I regret that I was not asked, I cannot bring myself to accept that compulsion in that circumstance would help.

The problem is that someone must do something and it has to be done at the worst possible time. It is in the moments after an unexpected bereavement that the question must be asked. Time is of the essence and, sadly, accident victims are often the best source of organs. If progress is to be made, the asking process must be made natural and normal. Whatever we decide to do, we must all accept that there will always be a risk of hurting people when one asks. Sometimes, one will even outrage people, but, looking back, I wish that someone had asked me.

How should we get the question asked? Perhaps training could be given — this has been mentioned several times in the debate — to all hospital staff in how to decide for themselves whether the bereaved people with whom they are dealing are the sort whom they should ask, and training could also be given in how to ask. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will consider whether district health authorities and family practitioner committees could be encouraged to develop local guidelines on how to set up some sort of system for getting the question asked more often.

Perhaps people such as myself who have been through this mill and know, although we are laymen, exactly what we are talking about, could somehow be encouraged to volunteer and the hospitals be asked to keep a list or register of those whom they could telephone asking them urgently to come and talk to people going through what others had been through before. I stress that it must be encouraged request, not required request.

If we are to make progress, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North wishes, it will come from identifying donors and obtaining organs rather than from anything else. Looking back on what happened to me, I believe that we must encourage people to think the unthinkable. We must persuade them to offer parts of their own bodies and, when they are least able to think about these matters, to agree that parts of their relatives' bodies can be made available as well.

If my personal experience teaches me anything, and if that experience is of any help to other people, I sum it up like this: I wish that I had been asked and, as I said earlier, I mean no criticism of anyone that I was not, because I could always have said no. Because I was incapable of thinking clearly at the time and because no one asked me, no part of my dear daughter's body has ever been able to help anyone.

10.44 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mrs. Edwina Currie): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on his success in the ballot and on again giving us an opportunity to debate this important subject. His speech was not only interesting and extremely well researched but a major contribution to the debates and thinking on these topics.

I thank also my hon. Friends the Members for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney), for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) and for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) for their speeches. I was deeply moved by the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne. I was going to read out some letters from parents whose children had died and who had been unable to make a donation of that kind, but my hon. Friend's comments have made that unnecessary. I hope that his words will move the nation as they have moved me.

As part of my research for this debate, I read through some old *Hansards* on the subject. It was a fascinating exercise for anyone interested in how attitudes have changed in this tricky subject, and I recommend it. If one goes back to 20 December 1960 and the debate on the Second Reading of the Human Tissue Bill, we find Mr. Kenneth Robinson, then the Opposition spokesman on health, telling the House:

"About ten years ago I was approached by certain members of the medical profession about the difficulties of getting sufficient corneas for grafting. I spoke to the then Minister of Health and asked whether there was anything I could do by way of publicity and Parliamentary Questions. The right hon. Gentleman went away and, having seen his

advisers, came back and said to me, 'For heaven's sake do not raise this matter. Corneal grafting is going on, but the moment we give it any publicity there will be religious objections and the whole matter may come to an end. So please leave it alone.'" — [*Official Report*, 20 December 1960; Vol. 632, c. 1235.]

The thought that these days anyone would have strong religious objections to corneal transplants probably seems preposterous to us, and the thought that these days any Minister of Health might want to discourage progress is, I hope, also preposterous.

The Human Tissue Bill was not the first legislation on this subject, for it replaced and augmented the Corneal Grafting Act 1952 which, in turn, augmented the Anatomy Act 1832, which was the first legislation on this subject, and parts of which are still extant. To look back on all that was an interesting exercise. There were ten-minute Bills, one after the other, in the 1960s and 1970s, many at the instigation of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). There was the statement in the House 20 years ago, almost to the week, again by Mr. Kenneth Robinson following Britain's first heart transplant.

The House, in the shape of its Back-Bench Members, has an outstanding record in raising this important issue, but some features have struck me forcefully. First, there has always been much public support for the transplant programme. The British public has always been interested in the subject and very supportive. Outright opposition has always been confined to relatively few people among the lay public. Secondly, one of the key necessary changes has had to come in attitudes to death. I noted with interest the words of Norman St. John-Stevas, now Lord St. John of Fawsley, in the debate in February 1969, in which he said firmly:

"death is the final and irreversible cessation of perceptible heartbeat and respiration."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 1969; Vol. 778, c. 1739.]

Twenty years on I think that it is now generally accepted that brain-stem death is the appropriate criterion. Legislation in other countries copies our codes on brain-stem death, which have been in operation here for some time.

The third feature which is obvious to anyone who looks back into this subject is that the surgery is technically much trickier than anyone expected. The first 100 or so kidney transplant patients all died and the first heart transplant patients never left hospital. For many years, the success of kidney transplantation was below 50 per cent. Only recently have many of the technical difficulties been overcome, with increased attention to the removal of the organ, so that it is not damaged, and to the insertion in the patient requiring the transplant and with the advent of cyclosporin and other drugs, which have been an immense help in preventing rejection. This is now one of our most, rather than least, successful forms of surgery.

The fourth thing that struck me was that there were never enough organs. There never have been enough organs and I suspect that there may never be enough organs. When Lord Ennals stood at the Dispatch Box and some 700 kidney transplants a year were being done, the waiting list was 1,200. We could now cover that in about eight months in any particular year. However, I suspect that our waiting list now, to which attention has been drawn, suggests that there is possibly no natural limit to what could be done in this area.

Far more people are now on dialysis, and the advent of continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis, which is particularly helpful to diabetics and to the elderly, has shown that many people can be kept alive for longer and many more people can benefit. One might speculate that in future the transplantation of heart or kidney might be as commonplace as putting in a heart pacemaker. With the improvement in anaesthesics that is now occurring, it may well be done in future under a local anaesthetic. One can see that by the beginning of the next century, in other words another 20 years on, the debate may take much the same form about not enough organs as now.

Yet what has become apparent in all the years during which this has been discussed is that the operation is never commonplace and never can be. It is not commonplace for the recipient for in many cases we are talking about people who face death quickly or, if not death, many years of misery on dialysis. It is never commonplace for the donor, the family or the staff concerned. My experience goes back to the early 1980s when I was the chairman of the Central Birmingham health authority. I can well remember walking into the Queen Elizabeth hospital one day to find the place abuzz. When I asked what was going on, they looked at me and said, "If you find out, chairman, you will stop it." I had to promise that I would not interfere before they would tell me that Mr. McMasters was going to do a liver transplant that afternoon. Everybody knew about it and was excited and apprehensive.

It is worth bearing in mind that the staff are also affected by this. The lady concerned needed 42 pints of whole blood, the entire laboratory was up for many nights testing her every 15 minutes. The intensive therapy department was completely tied up looking after her and a large number of other operations had to be cancelled. Everyone was excited that it should happen and devastated when, despite the fact that the operation was successful, the patient died. We must bear in mind that all our staff, not just the doctors, are greatly affected by this event.

Our record on organ transplantation of all kinds is excellent and all those concerned can take pride in it. We have more patients with a functioning kidney graft than any other country in Europe — about 7,000 people. In 1986, the most recent year for which we have comparable figures, we were the leaders in Europe, together with the Federal Republic of Germany, in the total number of kidney transplants performed. We think that it managed two more than we did. For transplants using cadaveric donors, we were clearly in the lead with some 1,500 compared with about 1,200 in West Germany. No other country in Europe had over 1,000 in that year, although many are now increasing their transplantation programmes rapidly.

Our heart-lung and liver transplant programmes are probably the most successful in Europe, and have expanded year by year in the 1980s as the operation has become technically much more successful. I apologise to the hon. Member for Peckham. I mean absolutely no criticism of anyone before 1979, but the figures I have are only for the period under this Government. In 1979, we performed 842 cadaveric kidney transplantations in the United Kingdom; the provisional figure for last year is 1,479. That is a total increase of some 76 per cent. In 1979, we did three heart transplants; last year, we did 244. We did no heart-lung or liver transplants in 1979, but last year we did 72 heart-lungs and 170 liver transplantations. There

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are no longer any accurate statistics on corneal grafts because it is now routine, but we believe that between 1,500 and 2,000 such transplants take place every year.

The survival rate of the transplants is improving all the time. In 1982, only about 50 to 60 per cent. of patients with a heart transplant were surviving for a year; now it is about 80 per cent. From 1977 to 1983, about 40 per cent. of liver transplant patients survived for a year; by 1985, the proportion was about 70 per cent. and it is rising. In 1980, some 61 per cent. of patients with kidney transplants still had that kidney functioning after a year; in 1985, the figure was 77 per cent. This is encouraging, but it puts even more pressure on us to increase the number of organs available for transplantation. As all hon. Members have said today, large numbers of people still die in circumstances which could make them suitable donors but where donation is not even considered.

The operations are not only successful, but getting cheaper. I noted with interest a report from Dr. John Wallwork, the consultant cardiac surgeon at Papworth hospital in Cambridge, in *The Daily Telegraph* of 19 February 1988. The newspaper said of heart-lung operations:

"The operation, which takes between 2½ to six hours, used to cost £22,000, including hospital care for 12 months post-operatively. With advances in treatment which allow the patient to return home after three weeks — half the time initially allowed—the cost has dropped to £15,000."

Kidney transplants now cost us about £8,000 and about £2,500 in following years. If someone has a good job, they probably pay more than that in tax, and that point has been well made.

Mr. Shersby: My hon. Friend has said that the cost of a heart-lung transplant is about £15,000. Does she agree that the cost of a heart transplant is substantially less than that?

Mrs. Currie: My hon. Friend is ahead of me slightly. To finish the comparison for kidneys, a kidney transplant costs £8,000 haemodialysis varies between £12,000 and £15,000 and CAPD varies between £8,000 and £10,000. That is based on a 1982-83 study, but uprated to current prices. It shows how much a kidney graft is entirely cost-effective, especially considering the high success rate that I have mentioned.

A heart transplant costs £12,000 at current prices and a liver transplant £18,000 on current prices for an adult and £25,000 for a child. We must reflect that, since the alternative is almost certain death and in many cases these people can be returned to normal life — indeed, for children a lifetime of normal life — they are a bargain and value for money. On that basis alone, we should continue to pursue them.

I mentioned that our success on transplantation has been helped by a considerable measure of public support. The most recent survey that I have been able to lay hands on was that by the British Kidney Patient Association which commissioned a survey by Gallup, published in January 1987. It shows that 68 per cent. of all those questioned said that they would agree that their kidneys could be used after death for transplant purposes and 66 per cent. said that their hearts could be used. That was at a time of considerable controversy about this topic. Twenty years ago the figure was roughly the same, about 70 per cent.

Our approach to organ donation is that it should be voluntary, that the rights of individuals must be protected and that the education of the public is vital. That is the basis on which we have the most successful programme in Europe. Public education — I have heard many good ideas about it today — has been focused on repeated campaigns through poster displays and advertisements on television, in doctors' surgeries, in banks and many other places. These usually involve the distribution of our donor cards.

While I accept many of the criticisms that have been made about the donor card scheme, we emphasise that all those who carry a donor card should discuss their wishes with their families so that, even if the card is not found, the family of the potential organ donor will know what that person would have wanted. We must also get across the message that families do not have to wait to be asked. They can, should and do let the doctors know the wishes of their loved ones. We have co-operated with commercial organisations, sportsmen, entertainers and other well-known people, and at present British Telecom is helping us by including cards with telephone bills sent to customers in the London area. We are grateful for that help. At present some 5·5 million donor cards are in issue.

We are in no doubt that publicity has a direct effect on the number of donor organs becoming available, but it can go both ways. A "Panorama" programme in 1980 gave the public a bad impression of organ donation and the number of kidney transplants dropped by over 8 per cent. in the following year. In 1984, Esther Rantzen publicised the case of Ben Hardwick who needed a liver transplant, and when we renewed the donor campaign the number of kidney transplants increased by 26 per cent. Therefore, many other children owe their lives to Ben's circumstances.

In December 1986, a series of newspaper stories suggested that people diagnosed as brain-stem dead were not actually dead and was followed almost immediately by a fall in donated kidneys. That explains why the 1987 kidney transplant total is marginally down on the record 1986 figure. But I was able to take part in the "Gift of Life" programme on 10 January this year, and again the figures have turned upwards dramatically. I pay tribute to Esther Rantzen and the team from "That's Life" for the efforts that they have made. They do not know the figures that I am about to read out, which are a tribute to their work.

I examined the figures for the number of transplants reported to the United Kingdom transplant service in the four weeks following the "Gift of Life" programme and compared them with an exactly equivalent period at the beginning of 1987. At the beginning of 1987, we did 72 kidney transplants. At the beginning of 1988, we did 138, which is almost double. At the beginning of 1987 we did 83 cornea transplants. We think that we did 143 at the beginning of this year, although, as I said, the figures for corneas are a little uncertain and are almost certainly higher than that.

At the beginning of 1987, we did 12 heart transplants. This year, the figure was 21. We did no heart-lung transplants at the beginning of 1987. In the first four weeks of this year, we did 13. In 1987, we did nine liver transplants. This year, we did 17. In the four weeks from 10 January to 6 February 1987, the lives of 21 people were saved by heart, heart-lung and liver transplants. In the four weeks from 9 January to 5 February this year, 51 lives were saved. All those people will join me in expressing thanks to Esther Rantzen and her team. I met her recently

at the Woman of the Year lunch held by *Woman's Own* magazine, and I was delighted that she was chosen Woman of the Year by the readers of that magazine. That was well deserved.

There is still much more to be done, but we believe that a considerable impact has been made in the education of the general public. We are less happy about the attempts to make professional staff in the Health Service more aware of the need for donation. It is clear that more cadaver organs would become available if more relatives of potential donors were approached about the possibility of donation. In that I agree completely with everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North and other hon. Members have said. Although it can be distressing at a very sad time, it can also provide an opportunity for something good to come out of a tragedy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe said that he had visited the United States to see what had been done on required request. After his visit, we approached the medical royal colleges and asked them to recommend how we might proceed on the subject. They have told us that hospitals should have clearly defined procedures for identifying potential donors and for referring them to the appropriate transplant unit or co-ordinator.

We do not know how many organs there are that might be suitable for transplants, nor do we know why those organs are not made available. There are many possible reasons. Staff may be unaware of the need for organs. They may be unwilling to approach relatives at a difficult time. The relatives may be unwilling to agree, even though they know that the deceased person would have wanted his organs to be used. In many cases, doctors are unlikely, or feel unable, to proceed because of the distress that they or the relatives may feel.

There may be different problems. For example, if there is pressure on intensive care facilities, it will not always be possible to use them to maintain a donor in a suitable condition until organs can be removed if another patient's life could be saved by using the facilities. Because we do not know the relative importance of the possible reasons, we agree with Sir Raymond Hoffenberg's working party that there is a need for an audit of cases where organ donation is a possibility. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North asked how we are getting on with that. I have in front of me an outline of a draft circular that has not yet gone beyond the word processor stage. We intend to issue a draft circular soon to the health authorities. We shall then have the usual three-month consultation period, as we do on draft circulars, and we expect to issue the circular proper later this year.

Some district health authorities have already started to audit brain-stem deaths. I understand that audits are being conducted in Cambridge and Brighton, and there may be others. It is interesting to think about the headings that may be contained in such a draft circular. For example, as my hon. Friend said, we shall ask health authorities to ensure that hospitals in which potential organ donation is likely to arise have written procedures for the identification of potential organ donors and for notification of the appropriate transplant staff. We shall ask authorities to record all instances of brain-stem death, collecting information that will be set out clearly in the circular, and reporting the results to the Department.

I take seriously the points that have been made about training, and we shall give careful thought to the matter. We are after two things: first, consistent information, and, secondly, the creation of structures within health authorities and within each hospital involving all the staff concerned. By the very means of collecting the information, those structures will be set up. I am confident that that will have a beneficial effect. It will force every doctor to consider whether a person who has died offers the opportunity for donation. It will also force doctors to consider their attitudes to the matter and to record precisely what they propose to do. The information to be reported from the audit of each case of brain-stem death will show whether the transplant co-ordinator was notified and, if not, the reason—the age of the donor, infection, malignant disease, unstable circulation, relatives not approached, relatives refused and other items. We are giving serious and urgent thought to whether we should collect more information than that, although I am conscious that in the United States one aspect of the required request programme that produced complaints from medical staff was the number of forms that had to be filled in. That put some of them off.

We have taken seriously the work that has been done on required request in the United States, and my hon. Friend is not alone in believing that we should follow the American pattern and require hospital staff by law to ask relatives for permission to take organs. The medical royal colleges have advised against that, and I understand why. Apart from anything else, and despite the fact that we have had legislation for nearly 30 years, the United Kingdom programme has not been based as much on the law as it is in other countries, especially the United States, and we would not lightly change that.

I have gone into the matter in some detail and I put on record our thanks to the United States authorities, especially those in New York state, with whom we are in close touch. I have many documents from America, including some that were sent to us only a couple of weeks ago. During the past two years, 30 American states have passed laws requiring hospitals to request organs or to develop procedures for doing so when a clinically suitable patient dies. From 1 October 1987, a federal law took effect establishing a national system for organ sharing, which we already have, and stating that hospitals should not participate in Medicare or Medicaid unless they developed written protocols for the identification of organ donors. That is precisely what we intend to do following the Hoffenberg report.

As yet, there has been no reliable or even regular collection of data on the effect of the laws introduced in the United States. It is important to put on record the fact that there is only anecdotal feedback. Indeed, there is little on which we can draw. Few articles have been written. I have read all of them, and they have not yet convinced me to change my mind. An article by Tolle and others in the "Annals of internal Medicine 1987" pointed out that Stanford university medical centre had experienced a 38 per cent. increase in heart and heart-lung donations since implementation of the law in California. An article by Kayali in "Dialysis and Transplantation 1986" said that in New York donations had increased by 48 per cent. and corneal donations by 160 per cent. since the advent of required request laws. We have also received a communication from Oregon showing that corneal donations there have increased by 134 per cent. since the introduction of the laws.

I am going into this in some detail because this is my best opportunity to respond to my hon. Friend the

[Mrs. Currie]

Member for Cardiff, North and to say why our thinking does not entirely go along the lines that he advocated, although I do not disagree with him entirely, as he knows. The first interesting factor is that the number of transplants in the United States is increasing steadily anyway, and some of the change that has been attributed to required request legislation might have happened without it. For example, the number of liver transplantations since 1982 has been doubling every year. In 1981, there were 26 liver transplantations, and there were over 60 the following year, over 160 the year after, over 300 the year after that, and over 600 in 1985. Therefore, the rate of growth has been fast.

The rate of growth of the number of heart transplantations in the United States has also been doubling every year; there has been a substantial increase. The rate of growth of kidney donations went up by between 10 and 15 per cent. every year before the required request law.

When we look in detail at what is happening in New York—my most recent communication from New York was on 15 January this year — we find that, unfortunately, despite the fact that detailed figures on organ procurement were collected in the first 17 months after the introduction of the law, we do not yet have a clear answer. Between 1985 and 1986, the number of organ donors was rising. In 1987, the number of donors dropped. The number of organs procured changed in ways that were not entirely consistent. For example, the number of hearts went down, the number of livers went up, and the number of kidneys seemed to be fairly static. That suggests a different pattern of harvesting from the donors who become available. It does not suggest an increased number of donors. In this country, that is one of the things that we should be keen to get at. The increase in organ donors in 1986 was not maintained in the first months of 1987.

It follows that required request might not have been an unqualified success. Again, personal communications from New York show that the variation, which seems to be diverse across the different centres in New York, seems to be a function of the personalities and attitudes at different hospitals. Part of the problem in places such as New York are rising worries about AIDS and that in the past a large proportion—as much as 20 per cent.—of the programme has been based on living donors. New York is trying to shift that emphasis.

A report to the governor and the legislature in 1987 from the New York state Department of Health contains a sentence that struck me:

> "It was frequently observed by surveyors that success in organ and tissue retrieval was largely the result of a strong commitment by key medical staff, supported by clear direction from administration and programme co-ordinators."

We are after exactly the same thing. We are convinced that, by the implementation of the Hoffenberg report, we can have the essential ingredients of the success that seems to have been developed through the required request legislation. But perhaps we can make it much more consistent across this country, which already has such a strong record and history in organ donation.

I give my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Cardiff, North and everyone in the House this firm pledge. I have given it on television and it is probably appropriate that I give it in the House now. If the Hoffenberg system does not work and does not produce what we want, we shall consider it again, but I suspect that among the other things that it will produce will be a lot of evidence about what actually happens in our hospitals, which will assist us if we feel obliged to persuade the House in future that legislation is required.

Ms. Harman: Will the hon. Lady set a particular period within which she expects the Hoffenberg proposals to work? Although she is refusing required request, those of us who favour it would be much reassured if she said that the Government would give the proposals four years to work and that, if they did not, we should have required request. Will she give us that guarantee, even if she does not accept required request now, as we should like her to?

Mrs. Currie: I am sure that the hon. Lady will understand that I cannot give absolute views on that, because a successor of mine might have to act on the results. Our present view is this. We expect that the circular will be out before the end of the year. I hope that we can get everybody started on it—I should prefer a fixed date, such as 1 January. We are considering and taking advice on that. I hope that the bulk of the hospitals that might be involved in the programme will be by the beginning of next year—in other words, by this time next year. It will be at least 12 months before we have any consistent figures.

Apart from anything else, the accident patterns in this country have seasonable fluctuations. I think that it would be wise at least to give the system another year after that before any firm conclusions were drawn. In other words, we are talking about around 1990 before it would be wise to draw up any strong conclusions about whether the programme has worked. It seems sensible to do so.

Meanwhile—let me make this point once more—as the system is introduced, the essential ingredients of what the Department of Health in New York state feels to be the working in parts, the effective parts, of its system will be brought in this country. We hope that, by voluntary means, as several of my hon. Friends have said, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne, we can achieve the success rates that are anticipated and hoped for by everybody concerned.

No one would expect me to stand at the Dispatch Box without saying something about prevention. One of the things that struck me as I went back through 30 years of debates was that nobody asked questions about how we prevent end-stage kidney failure, which leads people to need the donations in the first place. Therefore, I asked for some professional advice and I should like to offer the House this information.

I am told that the commonest cause of end-stage kidney failure, which is glomerulonephritis, cannot be prevented, but control of hypertension, which often accompanies that disease, can slow the progression to give the failure. I am advised that the role of raised blood pressure in the development of kidney damage is twofold. First, high blood pressure per se, particularly in its most severe forms, can cause kidney damage and renal failure. Hypertension by itself accounts for some 10 per cent. of all cases of end-stage renal failure. Control of hypertension has already succeeded in halving the number of cases proceeding to kidney failure. It is therefore absolutely essential for anyone who is interested in the organ donation programme, particularly kidney donation, to take into account the fact that high blood pressure is a key factor.

That is one of the items that we are taking into account as we develop our reforms of primary care. We are particularly keen that general practitioners should know and be able to take cognisance of the fact that kidney failure and high blood pressure are associated, particularly in ethnic minority populations, in which hypertension is more severe and damaging. There is also concern about certain drugs and the effect that they can have on kidneys. Those matters are kept under constant review by the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

I am also aware that many children suffer from kidney failure. I understand that the role of urinary tract infections causing kidney failure has been greatly clarified in recent years. All the research points to the fact that damage to the kidneys is done in young children when infection and vesicureteric reflux — otherwise known as VUR — coexists. VUR is a condition in which the urine goes the wrong way — it goes up to the kidney. It is usually due to an inborn malformation, which can be detected by ultrasound screening. The value of such ultrasound screening in the prevention of kidney scarring is now being studied in Cardiff, thanks to the generous support of the Laura Ashley Foundation. That also suggests that infections should be controlled in children, or they can cause permanent damage, particularly later.

The principal inherited disorder often found in children is polycystic disease of the kidneys. It is now possible to detect that condition in utero. But there is a certain amount of difficulty in recommending therapeutic termination, for many patients with polycystic disease live to a ripe old age, particularly if a rise in blood pressure is detected and controlled. Strict control of diet is also an important and valuable factor, particularly in the postponement of end-stage renal failure, when the kidneys are weakening. Research is being done on that in various centres.

I should like to conclude by making two important points. We must have the support of the public in this area of work. We cannot go faster than public opinion, but I am reassured by the remarkable interest and the remarkably consistent support that they have demonstrated through opinion polls and in other ways. We must have the support and understanding of the medical profession and all the staff concerned, for that work will always demand the highest standards of technique, which is why we limit the number of centres where we can do the work, because nothing succeeds like success, particularly with the medical profession.

It is also a matter of ethics. The programme is based ultimately on trust. Those are the absolute necessities. We believe that the cautious, methodical and detailed approach recommended by the Hoffenberg committee will achieve those results and thus help us to secure the programme in future. I have taken careful note of all the points made and I am glad to repeat my pledge that if we do not make progress this way, we will give the matter further consideration.

11.20 am

Mr. Gwilym Jones: We have had a worthwhile debate on this important subject. Friday is not the easiest day for debates. As the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) said, right hon. and hon. Members who would have wished to be here have been unable to take part because of the commitments that we all try to juggle, and because Friday is a popular day to be in our constituencies.

The debate has focused attention on this subject, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Peckham, to my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney), who was kind enough to be one of the sponsors of my Transplant Notification Bill, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), who has had to leave for a constituency engagement, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe, who has an obvious constituency interest in the form of Harefield hospital.

As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State said, we were all most moved by the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), whose personal experience is most apposite to this emotional subject. I cannot applaud highly enough his speaking out. We need his contribution to this subject. He takes a slightly different approach from me, but it is clear that we all want to achieve the same objective. There is plenty of opportunity for constructive debate about how we reach that objective.

I join my hon. Friend the Minister in applauding the BBC television programme "That's Life" on "Gift of Life", which was shown on the first Sunday in January. All the publicity has been rewarded by a doubling in the number of transplants performed. We had an excellent response from my hon. Friend the Minister. One of the greatest values of these debates is hearing a ministerial contribution. My hon. Friend has done a valuable service to the future consideration of this subject with her well-considered speech. What she said will be considered widely. I was pleased to learn that there is a draft circular on the word processor, and I hope that it will be in place by 1 January.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will continue to consider cost and the recommendations of the Hoffenberg report — reimbursing district health authorities for the cost of removing organs. My hon. Friend talked about the required request experience in the United States. She said that much of what is said to have happened as a result of it might have happened anyway. The other approach is that the success of medical advance breeds demand. The more successful transplants are, the more people will be encouraged to add their names to the waiting list. There is no point in queuing for operations that are not available, but many techniques have been devised only recently. We shall have to run faster merely to stand still. My hon. Friend mentioned a waiting list of 1,200 some years ago. That could now be dealt with by eight months of operations.

I regret that my hon. Friend the Minister is not in full agreement with me, but I know that she will continue to give the matter deep consideration. I appreciate the pledge that she gave on the "Gift of Life" television programme, which she has now repeated in the Chamber. I have hopes of the consideration that she will give the matter and of the progress that we shall make.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House welcomes recent advances in transplant technology and in the availability of transplant operations through the National Health Service; especially welcomes the Government's commitment to secure further progress in this vital area; notes that the recently published Hoffenberg Report recommends steps to improve the supply of donor organs; recognises that it is the shortage of suitable organs satisfactory for donation that limits people's opportunities to enjoy a greatly enhanced quality of life; and calls for action to be taken to achieve further improvements by more effective procedures which, whilst being sensitive to the needs of

[Mr. Gwilym Jones]

patients, relatives, the bereaved, doctors and other health professionals, effectively identify potential donors and increase the availability of donor organs.

Property Services Agency

11.25 am

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I beg to move,

That this House urges the Government to convert the Property Services Agency as rapidly as possible into a fully commercial organisation whose future would depend upon successful performance at the market place.

I have noted that the second report from the Environment Select Committee on the Property Services Agency, Session 1986-87, and the Government's observation thereon, are relevant.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to move the motion. I do not win many raffles — unlike my wife, who is forever drawing her own tickets out of the tombola drum — and I still await any significant win on the football pools, but this is the second time since I was elected in 1983 that I have had the second motion on the Order Paper.

The first occasion was on 22 March 1985, but the preceeding debate finished at 2.20 pm, leaving me just 10 minutes in which to give my reasons for choosing the subject of my debate. As the Chancellor had that very week yielded to most of my demands in his Budget—my motion appeared on the Order Paper just six hours before the Budget was delivered—I did not need to labour my point. Today I am more fortunate, thanks to the comparative brevity of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), who has presented a worthy motion to the House.

I have plenty of time—about three hours—in which to explain why I have chosen the future of the PSA as the subject of my motion and to try to develop the argument why I think that it should be converted as soon as possible into a fully commercial organisation.

When my name came up in the ballot for today's debate, I thought, "Good. It will give me another opportunity to expose the iniquity of the PSA in relation to the sale of land declared redundant to the Ministry of Defence's needs in my consituency". Upon considered reflection, it seemed that a narrow and parochial subject would be more appropriate to an Adjournment debate, and that it would be unlikely to attract much vocal support from my hon. Friends.

Thus I decided to chose the somewhat broader subject of the PSA's future. The announcement on 3 February by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State that the Crown Suppliers is to be privatised — with my unequivocal support—encouraged me to think that the time is ripe for the PSA to take the first steps towards whole or partial privatisation by being set up as a Government trading fund.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): My hon. Friend whetted my appetite. He mentioned the sale of land in his constituency by the Ministry of Defence, that sale being the responsibility of the PSA. Perhaps my hon. Friend could satisfy my keen interest and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) the chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment with just a few sentences on this topic.

Mr. Couchman: I can hardly wait to satisfy my hon. Friend's desire for knowledge on this subject. He need have no fear—I shall tell him and the House about it.

During Question Time on 3 February, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary was careful not to underrate the

difficulties of privatising the PSA. He did not encourage me or my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), who I am delighted to see present, or my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), who cannot be with us today, to believe that such privatisation was just around the corner. Indeed, he stressed that the PSA does not yet have proper commercial accounts.

At Question Time on 17 February, my hon. Friend the Minister encouraged my hon. Friend the Member for Wells to believe that he is willing to cosider seriously the recommendation in the report by Deloitte Haskins and Sells that the PSA should be set up as a trading fund, but discouraged notions of early privatisation.

On Thursday 18 February, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made a most important statement about the future management of certain Civil Service functions, and announced that the Government have accepted major recommendations in the efficency unit's report "Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps". In particular, my right hon. Friend paved the way for certain important executive functions to be established as agencies — some to be retained within the Civil Service but some to be placed outside it.

The PSA is already an agency headed by a chief executive, whom I am delighted to see in the Chamber. It seemed to me that this should not preclude the placing of the PSA outside the Civil Service. I suggested to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that, presumably, those Government activities that were wholly or mainly commercial would lend themselves to being set up as agencies.

Furthermore, I suggested that my right hon. Friend might consider existing agencies such as the PSA as suitable candidates to be placed outside the Civil Service. My right hon. Friend agreed that functions of Government that are essentially commercial services would lend themselves to being set up as agencies outside the Civil Service. She also reminded me that the Government are considering and reviewing the PSA and how best to reform its activities. I hope that today's debate will prove to be one more modest step towards that reform.

To initiate on blind prejudice a debate on a subject as important as the future of a £3 billion turnover Government agency employing more than 22,000 people would be foolhardy indeed, not to say monumentally impudent. Therefore, I have spent a good deal of time reading about the PSA to augment the limited but not encouraging knowledge gleaned through dealings with the PSA in my constituency. I have been much helped in my research by the second report of the Select Committee on the Environment for 1986-87, which deals with the PSA. I have read volume I most carefully and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi)—who I am delighted to see in his place—on the concise distillation of so much evidence into just 28 pages. I must confess that my reading of the evidence in volume II was more selective. My research has also been helped by the Library and its splendid staff.

I do not want to repeat in detail what I said during Adjournment debates about the PSA's estate agency activities in the Medway towns. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne has requested information and it was my constituency experience that led me to my unease about the present operations of the PSA. Therefore, it is as well to offer a brief resumé to illustrate my case. On talking to other hon. Members who represent garrison towns and constituencies, I find that my experience is reflected in theirs. Perhaps my prejudice is not so blind after all.

The 1981 Defence review recommended the closure of the Royal Navy base and dockyard at Chatham, which was mostly in my constituency and about which I have spoken on many occasions. Aside from the cataclysmic loss of employment in the area, that closure, which was confirmed and ultimately carried out in March 1984 — the Falklands campaign notwithstanding — posed the problem of what to do with 500 acres of land and several hundred old and outdated naval dockyard buildings that have not been available for upwards of 400 years.

The PSA's response to the challenge that such a disposal potential offered was twofold. The largest, and arguably the finest, collection of scheduled monuments in the country, would be mothballed — closed up, made wind and weather proof and left. The historic Georgian dockyard would simply be abandoned to the ravages of time and weather. The PSA's solution for the so-called modern — that is Victorian — or commercial dockyard was to dispose of each of many dozens of buildings and areas of land piecemeal to the highest bidder — indeed, to any bidder, as most of the buildings had long outlived their useful lives and were in poor condition.

It was only as a result of local indignation and shock at the proposal of such a shoddy solution to what the PSA saw as an inconvenient problem that Gillingham council and Kent county council prevailed upon the then Secretary of State for the Environment, Patrick Jenkin, who is now Lord Jenkin of Roding, and a more far-sighted and productive solution emerged.

A commercial dock operation was set up by the Medway ports authority in one of the basins to augment that body's operations at Sheerness. A trust was set up under the chairmanship of Lieutenant-General Sir Steuart Pringle to manage and develop the historic dockyard as a living museum. It must be said that much of the trust's funding was already committed by the PSA to substantial and long overdue maintenance work on the fine Georgian buildings.

The central and largest part of the yard, including the huge naval barracks known as HMS Pembroke was handed to English Industrial Estates Corporation, now English Estates, to undertake an integrated development. That redevelopment is now going ahead under a most imaginative scheme, but I stress that it was local pressure that brought about a worthy solution to this difficult problem.

The PSA's answer would have led to fragmented and partial occupation of the best of the outdated buildings. The rest would have fallen into dereliction, so replicating all the problems of London's docklands from the 1960s to the 1980s. It was simply too big a challenge for the PSA to comprehend and, in any case, as the land was to cease to be occupied by the Crown, the PSA was not really interested. As it was, we were left with some difficult problems in the form of unwanted tenants let into the dockyard on short leases or licences by the PSA in the twilight months of the base.

That insensitivity to the legitimate aspirations of the local community has been repeated by the PSA in its handling of the disposal of Ministry of Defence land declared redundant to the Army's needs in 1985. My hon.

[Mr. Couchman]

Friend the Minister will know that I refer to the land known as the Great Lines, Lower Lines and East Camp and Garrison No. 2 sports ground in my constituency.

Inevitably, in a garrison and Navy-based town, much land finds its way into the Crown's hands over the centuries—I stress "over the centuries". Some of it, such as the dockyard, is intensively used, and when such a facility is closed the land cries out for imaginative redevelopment. Other parts, acquired perhaps as fortification land or as a safety cordon around a great establishment, remain undeveloped open land. In time, such open space is used, courtesy of the services, as open recreation land to be enjoyed by the local people as a green lung in what is usually a tightly developed and urban area around the military establishment. That was the case in my constituency. It comes as a shock to local people suddenly to have their open space threatened by the Ministry of Defence declaring the land redundant and the PSA being commissioned to dispose of it.

When that happens, would it not be sensible for the PSA to sit down with leaders of the local community to discuss sensible development where that is appropriate and the conservation of open land where that is the responsible disposal? Such a sensible and sensitive course of action has not commended itself to the PSA. Its response to the task has been to file a series of predatory and highly-provocative planning applications.

When thwarted by local council refusal the PSA has appealed under planning law—as it is entitled to do—to the Secretary of State for the Environment. As such appeals are sent to the PSA's Secretary of State, I believe that people have a right to feel a certain amount of cynicism about natural justice. There is public disquiet about what is considered to be an incestuous relationship. The PSA has conducted its affairs in this regard in a most obtuse and awkward way. It has refused even to prove title to the land to the local council.

I do not wish to labour the particular when my motion is about the general.

Mr. Gow: Before my hon. Friend leaves this part of his fascinating speech, will he explain to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) and myself what has happened so far with the land? Has the Secretary of State appointed an inspector to determine the appeal, and is it to be determined by written representation or by public inquiry?

Mr. Couchman: There have been three applications, two of them for highly contentious land. I understand that the first application is under appeal to the Secretary of State. I am not yet aware whether an inspector has been appointed or whether that inquiry will be determined by written representation or public inquiry. I suspect that, because of the vast interest and disquiet in my constituency, it will need to be determined by a public inquiry. One of the other applications has also been rejected, but I am not aware, that an appeal has been lodged.

The third application concerns less controversial land. Indeed, development on that land would be welcome to the local council and it has prepared a planning brief. I suspect that, in due course, planning permission for development of that land will be given. There are, of course, the usual matters to be ironed out between the applicant and the local council.

I have tried to illustrate a certain ineptitude in the PSA's role as the Government's estate agent. In the case of the dockyard disposal, its approach was flabby, lazy, unimaginative and uninterested. In the case of open space land, the PSA has proved unwilling to consult and insensitive to local aspirations. Another unsatisfactory feature of its role as the Government's estate agent is what I consider to be the dichotomy of responsibility. If one challenges the PSA about its disposal of land it states that it is just acting as the estate agent. If one challenges the holding Department — the MOD in this case — one is referred back to the PSA because it is claimed that the PSA is responsible for the disposal of the land. It is a sophisticated version of pass the parcel, and it is extremely frustrating.

I understand that there is a growing feeling wihin the MOD that it would like to regain control of its land management affairs from the PSA. That would certainly eradicate the problem of split responsibility. Indeed, when the MOD is rearranging its land holdings, but staying in a given area — the great military establishment, the Royal College of Military Engineering has remained in my constituency at Brompton barracks — it will wish to maintain its good relationship with the local community.

I understand from paragraphs 65-71 and 83 of the Select Committee's report—as well as comments in the more general paragraphs—that there is good reason for concern about the PSA's handling of the MOD estate. Attention was especially drawn to the "built heritage"—the handling of some 500 historic buildings gives cause for grave concern. With 270,000 hectares on some 4,500 sites in the United Kingdom and abroad the MOD needs, as the Select Committee succinctly put it in recommendation (g), sharper focus of the strategic control of the defence estate and the gradual untying of its management and capital works programme from the PSA. The prospect of losing its monopoly with regard to defence estates should be sufficient to concentrate the minds of those charged with PSA management.

Hon. Members have only a limited contact with the Civil Service and few of us have an opportunity to see the PSA in operation. We tend to encounter the work of the PSA only when there has been a particularly glaring failure or shortcoming — perhaps an unusually serious time or cost over run that excites interest of the Public Accounts Committee or the Environment Select Committee. The Derby Crown court or the Hanslope park scheme for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office mentioned in the debate on Estimates on 24 June 1986 — column 249 in *Hansard* — by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) spring to mind.

We also hear of the PSA when there has been a serious fraud such as that perpetrated by the PSA staff at Hampton court — recently successfully prosecuted — or indeed the series of frauds investigated by Sir Geoffrey Wardale during the early 1980s. It is inevitable that such scandals jaundice the views of hon. Members about the PSA. They overshadow some of the best work done or supervised by PSA.

Tribute is due to the PSA. My hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, in his foreword to the PSA's report for 1986-87, said:

"The Property Services Agency at its best is outstanding and has a deserved reputation for its achievements."

I understand that the fabled Durbar court of the Foreign Office is a magnificent example of refurbishment. However, paragraph 40 of the Select Committee's report expresses concern about the conservation of historic buildings and states:

"More energetic central supervision of historic buildings to prevent their deterioration or damage by insensitive treatment, must be operated by PSA."

The Committee also offers robust criticism regarding general maintenance and refurbishment. In particular it is extremely critical about the unacceptable level of backlog of maintenance, regularly running at £100 million.

When speaking of the achievements of the PSA, I must pay tribute to those who were responsible for the remarkable civil engineering project in the Falkland Islands, the Mount Pleasant complex. I have seen that considerable military establishment. I visited the islands, courtesy of the MOD, in 1985 and was grateful for that magnificent runway that allowed us to travel in a wide-bodied jet instead of the more spartan circumstances of a Hercules. In paying tribute to the PSA personnel involved in one of the great civil engineering projects of the 20th century, I also applaud the consortia of our great civil engineering companies that carried out the construction. That immediately highlights another question about the PSA's operation.

In a briefing paper distributed recently by Sir Gordon Manzie, the PSA's chief executive, much was made of the fact that almost 90 per cent. of PSA's activities — measured in expenditure terms — are carried out by the private sector. I applaud that. The key components of such private sector work include 100 per cent. of new construction, although under PSA management, and 85 per cent. of maintenance. The directly-employed labour force of about 9,500 now carries out only 15 per cent. of the maintenance work. Some 65 per cent. of design work on major projects is also contracted out, with PSA in-house teams now responsible for only 35 per cent. of such work. I applaud such contracting-out, but it again begs the question of the PSA's role.

I understand that Government land and property must be vested with some definable entity. For the time being, the PSA is a suitable holder of the 8,000-plus freeholds and leaseholds of the civil estate and the 4,500 establishments that comprise the vast defence estate. However, that is by no means an immutable situation.

The National Health Service owns many hundreds of properties. It designs and builds new hospitals and it upgrades and maintains its hospitals and clinics. It does that without the influence or help of the PSA.

Paragraph 57 of the Select Committee's report points out that the performance of the Health Service in managing its capital programme — £1 billion for this year — governed as it is by the capital procedures code, Capricode, compares very favourably with the PSA's performance, particularly in relation to the important aspects of cost and time overrun.

Tens of thousands of schools are built, maintained and owned by local education authorities. There should be little difficulty in vesting property ownership, construction and maintenance functions in individual Departments. Already, the somewhat bureaucratic property repayments services system represents a first step towards making Departments more conscious of and more accountable for their property costs.

The Select Committee clearly expressed reservations about whether the PRS system represents the best way forward to commercialisation, but at least it is a step in the right direction.

I have tried, without mimicry of the Select Committee, to touch on the important responsibilities of the PSA — estate ownership, management and agency, its duties in regard to design, construction and maintenance and its supervision of the increasing private sector contracting.

I have said little about the Crown Suppliers because my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, in his statement of 3 February, has already cast the die about the future of that part of the organisation. He has set in train a process which should be followed in respect of the PSA.

Those who are worried about the PSA feel that the problem lies with its management. It is frequently said that the National Health Service suffers from a superfluity of administration but a lack of management. That perception of stifling bureaucracy pervades when one reads the Select Committee report on the PSA or when one has contact with a local PSA office. It would be an interesting experiment to contract-out the duties of one of the PSA's district works offices to the private sector. I cannot help feeling that such an experiment would focus sharply on the difference between a commercial contractor's or consultant's office and the present bureaucratised and over-regulated operation that pertains in the DWO. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will conduct such a scheme when he is searching for more commercial accountability. Perhaps he will comment on that idea when he replies to the debate.

Paragraph 72 of the Select Committee's report concisely sums up the failure of the original concept of creating an all-embracing agency providing a "total" service to client Departments. It points out that the PRS system has given Departments a taste for increasing control of their accommodation matters. That applies to Departments other than the Ministry of Defence, to which I have referred. It is clear that the PRS system of assessed rents and delegated works and maintenance gives Departments a greater sense of responsibility, although I understand from the Select Committee's report that the accompanying bureaucracy tends to dilute that benefit.

The Select Committee recognised the problems of Departments competing for accommodation if the estate were to be fragmented. The PSA has had only modest success in rationalising its highly valuable office and storage accommodation, particularly in central London. There still appears to be an unacceptable amount of vacant space, and when the Select Committee took evidence, the PSA admitted, in its supplementary note dated 3 February, that it had about 3·5 million sq ft of accommodation "surplus for disposal" or unallocated on the civil estate in September 1986. While 3·6 per cent. appears to be a relatively modest figure, it equates to the area of about 140 superstores. I should be interested to hear my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary give the relevant figure for 1987 to see what progress has been made.

If the level of voids is a performance indicator, the performance of the PSA in disposing of unwanted space still has some way to go. The initiative and impetus for that disposal must surely come from central management. The

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success or failure of the disposal of that vacant capacity is a measurement of the senior management's determination in this important matter.

The findings of Sir Geoffrey Wardale on financial control and management were strongly critical and are worth repeating. In section 4.2 he said:

"The fundamental problem which we have identified relates to management's reluctance to acknowledge that problems exist and its lack of vigour in handling them when they are identified. We believe that this indicates a degree of complacency on the part of management, which is reflected in its attitude towards dishonesty and fraud."

Section 4.3 says:

"This problem has resulted in a failure by management to recognise that there are shortcomings in respect of a number of important matters."

Section 4.5 says:

"The concept of financial control is not sufficiently understood. Management control techniques are inadequate either to prevent or to detect cases or irregularity."

Section 4.6 says:

"The policy for disciplinary action against both staff and third parties is unsatisfactory."

Section 4.4 says:

"Furthermore where management has identified that a problem exists, for example that the existing management information system is defective, prompt action has not been taken to ensure that the deficiency has been rectified."

I freely admit that those words were written almost five years ago. What worries me is that succeeding reports from Select Committees and the Comptroller and Auditor General during 1984 and 1985 reinforced the Wardale findings. More sinister is the Select Committee report, which in paragraph 6 sets out what the Committee called the,

"PSA's weakness of attitudes and organisation"

and enumerates them as follows:

"Lack of energetic central management of the Government Estate. Lost opportunities in the property market and inadequate use of 'spend to save' schemes because of the inflexibilityof 'annuality' accounting; serious neglect of maintenance because of inadequate funding; cost and time over-runs in project control; lack of responsiveness to clients; defective performance measurement."

I said "more sinister" because four years separate the Wardale report and the Select Committee report, but there seems to have been precious little improvement in those intervening years. The Select Committee was clearly impressed by criticisms levelled by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, the Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors and the Royal Institute of British Architects, which is mentioned in paragraph 5.4. The perception of problems in the management structure and process of PSA is clearly general. Furthermore, the views of the institutions were reinforced by individual firms of surveyors and contractors.

I have spoken at length about the symptoms of a deep malaise and weakness in the way in which the PSA performs its duties and responsibilities. There have clearly been improvements since the darkest days. The present management has introduced changes that have gone some way to untying the strings between the PSA and its client departments. The PRS scheme has made those Departments more aware of their accommodation costs and information technology strategy is in an advanced stage of preparation. Sir Robin Ibbs's efficiency unit has proposed far-reaching changes in project management. Resource-cost budgeting and examination of overhead costs are now playing their part in ensuring tighter financial controls. The next major change will happen in 1988 when Departments will become directly responsible for meeting from their Votes the cost of major civil building projects funded from their expenditure programmes. They will be able to commission outside agents rather than the PSA. That will be a good test of client satisfaction. That major change was announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 23 July 1987.

I fear that although those changes may improve the situation, the PSA will still be an overblown bureaucracy, insensitive to the aspirations of its client Departments from which it will become progressively decoupled. Apart from holding the Government's Crown freeholds and leaseholds, it is difficult to identify any of the PSA's responsibilities or functions that could not be performed equally well or better by the private sector. I respect the skills of many individual personnel in the PSA, but the corporate performance leaves much room for improvement. I do not wonder at that. I suspect that professionals in land management choosing between a career in which they can exercise entrepreneurial skill in the private sector or the comparative safety of the job security in the Civil Service will choose the PSA only if they are lacking in ambition.

What is to be done? I am forced to conclude that only the disciplines of the market will bring about a sea change in the PSA's philosophy, enabling it to compete successfully for its own client Departments' business and —who knows—other private and public sector business. Furthermore, from all that I have read and heard I am forced to conclude that the Government have been tardy in accepting the Deloitte, Haskins and Sells report recommendations. Conventional Vote-accounting arrangements should give way to full commercial accounts as soon as possible or as soon as the new information technology systems allow. The PSA should be converted to a trading fund under the Government Trading Funds Act 1973. Thereafter, it should be possible to determine whether the PSA is performing well or badly. Sir Gordon Manzie admitted to the Select Committee that that could not presently be done. That statement is contained in paragraph 7 of volume 1 of the Committee's report.

Once the PSA is established as a trading fund producing a proper profit and loss account and balance sheet and given a three or four-year track record, serious consideration should be given to full privatisation by way of a management buy-out. The Crown's land holdings would not be part of such a flotation or sale. Professional and trading functions and possible special refurbishment activity would represent the core of a new public limited company.

I have spoken at length and critically about the PSA. I have not done so out of malice, although I confess that the unhappy relationship between my borough council and the PSA was the catalyst that galvanised my choice of motion. I hope that some of what I have said has been positive and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be equally positive. I certainly hope that his response is more positive than the Government's response to the Select Committee report published on 20 January 1988, to which I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green will wish to refer in some detail. It remains only for me to say how grateful I am to have the opportunity to move my motion.

12.3 pm

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): I do not intend to paint the gloomy picture painted by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman). Sadly, because of a constituency duty, I shall be unable to hear all the debate, and for that I apologise to the House now.

I shall describe the PSA as I see it. The issue is not black and white: there are varying shades of grey. The PSA has good and bad points, as would be expected but, above all, it must try harder in order to succeed.

The Order Paper says that the second report from the Select Committee on the Environment and the Government's observations thereon are relevant. Those I have read. Indeed, they are so relevant that I looked at the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi). On page 125 of the report of 14 January there is a lovely little phrase that bears repetition. He was talking to my hon. Friend the Minister and he said:

"there is at present no objective way of assessing the success . . . of the PSA in the round. Now, as the responsible Minister, does that give you any cause for concern, and if it does is there any solution you see to the problem of not being able to assess the efficiency or success . . . of the PSA?"

My hon. Friend the Minister, a politician to the end, said:

"It does cause me concern."

That is an understatement. On page 126 he said:

"At the moment they cannot really prove that they are as efficient as the private sector. They can say it and I have no doubt that in many areas they are just as efficient as the private sector, but at the moment there is no way in which they can demonstrate that; but I think that a trading account or commercial accounts would move towards enabling them to demonstrate that."

It is against that background that I continue the story.

Since 1986, the senior management of the PSA have been boosted — I could say strengthened — to include from the private sector three non-executive members, each with a separate skill. One is skilled in construction, one in finance and the other in property. It is interesting to look at the PSA's main business. I bow to the superior knowledge of my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham, who has obviously looked at the matter through not only a microscope but a micro-microscope.

If we exclude Crown supplies, I see the PSA's main business as the management of all the Government's civil and defence estates, the management of Government maintenance, and the design and project management of all new work. The total package of work is valued at just under £2·8 billion. That is a lot of money, and is not a sum to be sneezed at.

The staffing level of the PSA was 24,000 as at December 1987. That includes 14,500 professional, technical and administrative grades. I assume that that is what they are called. Since coming to the House I have learnt of many new things. The staff of the PSA includes a glorified direct labour organisation; directly employed labour. I imagine that there must have been teams of people sitting there coming up with that phrase. The directly employed labour totals 9,500 people. The total staffing level has been slimmed down from the fat cat days of 1979, when it was 36,000.

It is interesting to examine the way in which the slimdown was achieved. It is due to a major shift of work to private sector contractors, but further changes have also been made. During my education in the House, I have also discovered the acronym FMI, which stands for financial management initiative. The House of Commons is a place where one learns a lot. I am sure that my education must have been sadly neglected before coming here. Believe it or not, the FMI was Government-inspired. It has given Departments greater responsibility, including responsibility for their own accommodation. That must be progress.

How is the £2·8 billion spent and where does it go? I discovered that 90 per cent. of it goes to the private sector and I have no worry about that. All construction work goes to the private sector. A total of 85 per cent. of the maintenance work goes to the private sector and consultants from the private sector will be executing over 66 per cent. of all design and management on new work.

I appreciate that some of the Government's building, design and construction has not been the responsibility of the PSA. However, a further part of my education has been the examination of Government buildings. I was surprised to read that PSA projects won 14 national and international awards in 1986-87 and have so far won 31 such awards for 1987-88.

Some of those that I have seen in London would not win any awards for beauty or being pleasing to the eye. Some buildings can best be described as functional, with limited—if any—architectural merit.

I have been looking at some of the buildings that the Government own. The DES building is what I would call typical 1960s. The Department of the Environment's building is like three sore bandaged fingers sticking up into the air, and looks as rude as the image that that conveys. The building must have been designed as a sick joke, housing as it does the people responsible for the environment. If one walks from Victoria Station, one will see that they have put up some beautiful concrete walls, of which I would have been ashamed in my time as a building contractor. They are covering those walls with a creeper, which is growing at about half an inch every ten years. The crack in the wall has been there for a long time, and whenever I examine the creeper as I walk past, I see that it has still not yet crept over the crack. It might have been easier to face the structure with some of that imitation stone that they stick on the outside of decent buildings and then wonder why they are damp inside.

The modern building that houses the Home Office is a classic concrete construction; it is pretty, well done and pleasing to the eye. The new DHSS building not far from here is also good, and the Treasury building is, I suppose, the best that money can buy. In Sheffield, we have a building that is the headquarters of the Manpower Services Commission. It brings employment to the city, but it is not aesthetically pleasing. It is a crenellated structure, a mixture of Legoland and a pyramid on which a giant has stomped, squashing it to the ground. Lest anyone should think that other Government buildings, with the employment that they create, would not be welcome in Sheffield, I assure the House that they would. But taste, style and architectural merit would make them even more welcome.

I have given these examples because I appreciate that some standards need to be set and kept for Government buildings to set an example. A cadre of professional skills is needed, from architects to stonemasons, to do work, to supervise, execute and co-ordinate. They need to be London-based, but the PSA does not need to be London-based—it could be a vehicle or shelter for such work.

To continue with some of the PSA's other duties, but not exhaustively, I may say that I learned quite a lot from

[Mr. Irvine Patnick]

my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham. Rents and service charges are a key component of the PSA. In the United Kingdom, defence work estates and overseas estates amounted to 18 per cent. of the PSA's turnover in the private sector. My education in the House has also been improved, while I have been up in London, as they say, by learning that the Government-inspired charging system has been implemented for all Government Departments and all accommodation has been subjected to internal checks for efficient usage. But the PSA is still big business, as I said earlier, despite having 1,000 civil estate holdings fewer — that is another expression that means it has a great deal of property — than in 1980 when it had just under 1 billion sq m—0·926 million sq m of space — it still holds 1,000 holdings with 11·4 million sq m of space. Some holding; some property.

The PSA is also responsible for the disposal of surplus property; this year's yield from the sale of property will be £120 million.

The location of the PSA's staff is also interesting. Two thirds of them are outside London, with offices in Scotland, Wales, London and seven other regions; it is responsible for 143 district offices, together with Ministry of Defence work overseas, mainly in Germany. That is the size of the PSA empire.

Meanwhile, Ministers may be considering a report mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham recommending that the agency become a trading unit and be put on a commercial footing. But the time scale must be one of the key points for consideration, as the Environment Select Committee report said in paragraph 85. Paragraphs 85 and 86 are worthy of the House's attention. Paragraph 85 states:

"While we are convinced of the need to open up the PSA to competition, we are equally certain that a substantial core of skills needs retaining as one unit, even if this may be on a reduced scale; and that, if central management of the estate as a property resource needs strengthening, as we believe then PSA is the only candidate for this role. But in carrying out this important strategic task, the PSA will need to have its influence strengthened."

Three more points will serve to illustrate the route that the PSA needs to follow:

"(a) new financial arrangements should be established for the PSA based on commercial accounts and a Trading Fund and the Government Trading Funds Act 1983;

(b) in any future system, a central body of PSA expertise should be retained as one unit, as a source of specialist expertise to Departments and other clients . . .

(c) in the light of (a) and (b), the PSA should be restructured to create a leaner, fitter and more professional organisation with reduced overheads, eliminating the wasteful overlap between professional and administrative work identified in paragraphs 54 and 55, so that the PSA can compete effectively and provide an efficient service in all its traditional areas of work."

12.18 pm

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): Over the years, the PSA has been the subject of much criticism, ranging from accusations of inefficiency to corruption. All is not well with the PSA — that was the impression gained by the Environment Select Committee as a result of our yearly examination of the PSA main estimates. So we embarked on an inquiry into the PSA and published our report last March, to which the Government responded in January. This is the first opportunity the House has had to discuss the report and the reply to it, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) for making this possible and for the terms of his motion, which he so ably introduced and which I firmly endorse. I am also grateful to him for his kind remarks about my Committee's work and report, which he found a useful source of reference.

The general view of the PSA formed by my Committee as a consequence of our inquiry is encapsulated in the evidence given by Sir Nigel Mobbs and Mr. Idris Pearce, who were brought in from the outside property world to act as chairman and member respectively of the advisory board of the PSA between 1980 and 1986. We begin our report with the following quotation from their evidence:

"The PSA contains much that is good and much that is unjustly maligned. Its weakess lies in its attitudes and its organisations, rather than in its people. To rectify this the Government and the Treasury should redefine the role and purpose of the agency, give it proper authority and delegated powers and start to assess it by results rather than by its adherence to procedures."

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) reflected those conclusions in his speech.

I am somewhat disappointed that the PSA does not appear to be a possible candidate for treatment as a free-standing agency, under the recent report to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, entitled "Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps". Perhaps it is because the PSA has such a large budget that the Treasury does not wish to release it from its stranglehold. But it is precisely because of the dead hand of the Treasury upon it that the PSA has not been able to perform as it should.

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend underestimates his own powers of persuasion and his eloquence. He should put his faith in the Minister. I am sure that, following my hon. Friend's unanswerable arguments, that which he wishes to happen will happen.

Sir Hugh Rossi: I wish I had such confidence in myself as my hon. Friend appears to have. Nevertheless, as a result of his encouragement, I shall return to the argument with even greater enthusiasm and force.

In giving evidence to my Committee, Sir John Cuckney, the chief executive of the PSA from its inception until 1974, told us that, when he was first asked to accept that position, he was led to understand that the PSA would be

"a free-standing departmental agency",

but that, in the end, it was established as part of the Department of the Environment. He considers that that decision was

"a very great pity",

and missed an opportunity to move towards a trading fund with greater freedom from vote accounting.

As our inquiry proceeded, it became more and more apparent to the Committee how great a pity that was, and how important it was that serious moves were taken to redress the initial mistake of not creating a free-standing agency along the lines of the Crown Suppliers, which have shown the value of the trading fund route and commercial accounting.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham enumerated the six weaknesses of attitudes of organisation listed in paragraph 6 of our report, and I shall not repeat them. However, I draw attention to the fact that three main interlinked themes emerge from the Select Committee's inquiry and report.

The first theme I term "investment and annuality". That as much as anything else, exemplifies the effects of too strong Treasury control and, consequently, the rigid application of time-honoured Treasury conventions. The property market is not one in which strict annuality is appropriate. The existence of so-called annuality is understandable. The Chancellor of the Exchequer raises income for the Government and the various Departments in his yearly Budget. Therefore, expenditure is calculated also on a yearly basis. However, within that annual expenditure little, if any, distinction is made between capital investment and ordinary current running costs, so opportunities to acquire good properties at reasonable cost are missed.

The PSA has recently laid a supplementary estimate to cover the cost of some favourable purchases. That may be a sign of greater commercial realism, but the system that we examined is too slow and unresponsive to market opportunities, and good buys are snapped up by somebody else.

Also, annuality forces the acquisition of leaseholds rather than freeholds. The price of a good freehold may be prohibitive within the annual budget. Therefore, a lease is taken at a lower sum within the budget. In modern days, such a lease is subject to regular rent reviews which, in the long run, cost the taxpayer a great deal more for what is essentially a wasting asset. That cannot make financial sense for a continuing organisation such as the Government.

The next main theme of the report is the maintenance of property in Government ownership. Maintenance suffers from the same problem of annuality. There was a strong tendency to look for savings in a current year, at the expense of, probably, higher costs later. An example is the roof at Sandhurst. In 1972, repairs were estimated at £300,000, but they were deferred for 10 successive years. Finally, the cost was £3 million—partly, it is true, as a result of inflation, but mainly because of the effects of the neglect of essential maintenance work over the 10 years.

Another matter of concern was the evidence of inadequate maintenance of historic buildings in the defence estate. My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham has addressed the House in some detail on that matter. It is probably understandable that the Department of Defence is more concerned to spend available money on modern military hardware than on historic royal arsenals such as that at Woolwich, which have been shamefully neglected.

Therefore, the Committee felt that the PSA should operate a more energetic system of inspection and supervision and have a landlord-and-tenant relationship with Departments on the basis of strict tenant repairing covenants. In that respect, we welcomed the increased delegation to Departments of maintenance and minor new works which, when they have acquired the necessary skills in-house, will be able to operate much more efficiently and cost-effectively than has been the case until recently.

The third theme, which recurs throughout the report, is the need for current accounting on a commercial basis. It affects not only matters of investment and maintenance to which I have referred but such things as responsiveness to clients and management performance. In their evidence, Sir John Cuckney and Sir Gordon Manzie, the present chief executive, stressed the importance of that. Evidence from other witnesses revealed continuing cost and time overruns on construction work. Much of that was due to clients making changes to their briefs, over which a stricter regime must be exercised.

Witnesses in design and construction complained of over-long lines of communication within the Department and the PSA, too much administrative cross-checking, slow decision-making, and a high staff turnover during the contract. It was difficult for the contractors to deal sensibly when the manager in the PSA would be a different person in successive months. Tendering and contracting difficulties also came in for heavy criticism.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): When my hon. Friend refers to high staff turnover, could he tell us whether that is a function of people being promoted or moved within the organisation, or moving out of the organisation altogether?

Sir Hugh Rossi: It is a mixture of both. Natural promotion within the PSA means that the manager in charge of a contract is moved away and that somebody else comes in, who has to start all over again and who possibly has different ideas about the way in which a contract should be run. People trying to carry out their obligations under a contract find it impossible to accept that situation recurring over a period.

Another aspect of that was criticism from, for example, consulting engineers, that the manager with whom they had to deal was an administrator, and somebody who did not have the scientific knowledge to assess the advice that they were giving—often their advice was not accepted for bad reasons, and certainly not for professional reasons. Therefore, the management of contracts is an area of difficulty. We felt that those criticisms are real and cannot simply be ignored.

On construction and design a matter not before the Committee, but of which I have subsequently heard is that Richmond terrace, which was praised just now by my hon. Friend the Member for Hallam and which looks a most attractive building from the outside, nevertheless required the intervention of the Minister for Social Security and the Disabled at a late stage, asking why there was no real provision for access for the disabled to that building. I believe that about 30 variations had to be made to the architects' plans so that the Minister could ensure that he would be able to see some of his clients, who would naturally want to visit him in their wheelchairs. I also understand that not long after occupation, the temperature in that building was running at about 90 deg F. Therefore, questions need to be asked and answered.

We came to the conclusion as a Committee that the commercial approach to the PSA operations was the only way in which the necessary internal structural changes, which have been subject to constant morale-lowering tinkering over the years, could be achieved. It was at that point that we noted the success of the Crown Suppliers' trading fund arrangements and its commercial approach.

As has already been said, it is doubtful whether the PSA system as presently constituted earns its keep. It is costly to administer, and the benefits are not easily quantified, as was admitted to us in evidence. Untying is a step in the right direction but, by itself, it is not enough.

The Committee came to the conclusion that the original concept of an all-embracing agency has failed the test of experience. The property repayment service, introduced in 1985 to bring home to Departments the cost of the

[Sir Hugh Rossi]

accommodation that they occupy, gives a confused message, which is rapidly becoming more confused as new modifications and extra categories are introduced. We believe that the office estate must be treated as a central unit, and that the PSA should continue to have a landlord-and-tenant relationship with its clients. Our principal conclusion was that the PSA should remain the central agency, but operating on a commercial basis as a trading fund.

After we had published our report in March last year, the Government received a report that the Department of the Environment had commissioned from the consultants Deloitte, Haskins and Sells. The consultants confirmed my Committee's findings. They certainly endorsed our view that the PSA adopt commercial accounts as a prelude to establishing a trading fund. If one took the Committee's recommendations seriatim they would show that, to the extent to which Deloitte's were briefed to consider the same areas looked at by the Committee, they have come to broadly similar conclusions.

What I find most disappointing is that, although the Department has had the Committee's report since March 1987, and the Deloitte report since last summer, it has not reached a decision. Certainly it had not declared a decision on those matters in its response, published but a month ago. I hope that, in the intervening few weeks, Ministers' minds will be concentrated on this subject somewhat more than they were a month ago, especially in view of this debate. I hope that I shall hear a more positive response from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State than was made in the Government's observations on last month's report.

For the purposes of the debate, I have addressed my remarks to those aspects of the Select Committee's report that were raised directly by the wording of the motion, but it might be valuable for hon. Members to look at the report as a whole if they have time, because other important aspects are worthy of consideration.

Having criticised my hon. Friend the Minister for those parts of the report to which the Government have not responded, may I say that I am grateful for those positive responses that have been made to some of our other recommendations—the fact that the defence estate is to be untied from the PSA, although no time scale has been announced; the fact that staff are to be trained in Departments to be able to deal with property, management and maintenance matters; and the fact that greater resources will be made available for maintenance purposes so that there is not a rerun of the Sandhurst situation or a continuing backlog of about £100 million a year.

This has been a helpful and useful debate for ventilating a Committee report, although I should have preferred it to take place in prime time, when more hon. Members could have considered our findings. The Opposition have fielded only one lone Front-Bench spokesman, totally unsupported throughout the debate. If they expect to form a Government and to deal with administrative matters, they should consider these matters. One can think only that they do not expect to have to deal with these problems in the foreseeable future, and therefore administrative matters are of little interest to them.

If hon. Members wish to help the Environment Select Committee and feel that is reports are of some value to the House, I point out that there are two other reports—"The Planning Appeals System", in which we deal with major inquiries such as Sizewell, and "Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments", which has attracted great attention outside the House. I should welcome any hon. Member who is lucky in the ballot choosing those as subjects, because I fear that the Government may not find themselves able to give us time to consider them. While dealing with the Government, may I ask my hon. Friend the Minister when I shall have a response to our report on water pollution, which we published last May? The Government are well out of time.

Once again, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham for raising this subject.

12.38 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) on his fascinating speech. Like him, I have a considerable defence interest in my constituency, having both Regular and Territorial units there. I should like to focus in the next few minutes exclusively on defence, principally the PSA's role within the Ministry of Defence and as it relates to district headquarters, and then refer to the relationship with the Territorial and Army Volunteer Reserve Associations.

Last year the level of defence spending through the PSA was about £1·5 billion. About £800 million was spent on new projects and rather more than £600 million on maintentance. The dissatisfaction within the armed forces of their treatment by the PSA is running high. Buildings which desperately need repairs are left unrepaired and the state of many of the quarters is one cause of the present high wastage which is primarily among officer grades and, to a lesser extent, in other ranks. Projects are running behind. It is not just a case of insufficient funding and, indeed, it is not primarily to do with the funding level; it is the enormous amount of waste resulting from mismanagement.

I shall give the House just one example of that. When I was living in Germany a friend of mine, who was a dependant of an army officer, took a temporary painting job during the summer with the PSA, which has a large labour force of German civilians. During his first week he completed his week's allocation by Tuesday night and was immediately told that he had offended the German union by doing his work so quickly. Most of us would agree that Germans are not normally known as an idle nation, and it takes a remarkable degree of mismanagement for the level of productivity to be so low. Anybody who has lived in Germany with BAOR will relate how the productivity of those who come to repair quarters is so low as to be almost unbelievable.

The worst aspect of the PSA as the armed forces see it—my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham touched briefly on this—is its complete and utter failure to provide anything like a cheerful and responsive service to its customers. Its attitude is one of bureaucratic muddle.

The district headquarters under the Government's financial management initiative are supposed to have much greater control over the funding of operations in their area, but on the property side progress has been absolutely minimal. There is now a small sum that can be spent directly by district commanders, but the PSA is still on one side and is not in any sense under the control of the district commander.

At every level in individual garrisons there is no real relationship with the PSA. There is neither a customer-supplier relationship, because the garrisons cannot go to anybody but the PSA, nor is there a direct command relationship. The PSA is in the cosy position of being the only body allowed to organise the supply of services, yet it is not under the direct control of those whom it is supplying.

What is the solution? My hon. Friend made a good speech about the Select Committee's recommendations, and I am delighted that part of the report suggested detaching the MOD operations of the PSA—nearly half the total—from the other operations. I firmly believe that at the macro level the PSA's MOD operations should be handed over to the MOD. The Select Committee is absolutely right on that. I may mention by the by that contacts in central staffs in the MOD inform me that even for something as basic as placing their bid for the long-term costings, the PSA is always the last to get its bid in and always the most difficult to get any accurate forecast from. It would be thoroughly healthy if the entire operation were taken over by the MOD itself.

I want an end to the remaining direct labour force employed by the PSA. The Government have made much progress in this area, but about 15 per cent. of maintenance staff are still directly employed, and the figure is higher overseas. There is no need for direct labour. All the work should be put out to contract.

To move from the macro to the micro level, the maintenance side, which accounts for almost half the total budget—more than £600 million—should be handled at district level instead of centrally from Whitehall. It would be much more efficient if district commanders had substantial powers to control maintenance in their areas and, in turn, to delegate powers to garrison commanders. It would be more efficient if the manager responsible at district level and his counterparts at garrison level were made directly responsible to the district commander, instead of being part of a framework reporting directly to Whitehall. He should not only be geographically located in the district headquarters, but the district commander should be able to hire and fire the individual. Once all the work is contracted out, at least at garrison level and possibly at district level, too, we should put retired officers into those posts. They understand the frustrations of the armed forces in relation to maintenance problems. They are also trained, at least in the case of the Royal Engineers, who used to do all this work overseas, in project management in civil engineering and works.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham will forgive me for mentioning the Territorial and Army Volunteer Reserve Associations because this is on the edge of his motion. A further complication is caused by the fact that Ministry of Defence works that apply to territorial units are handled by the TAVRAs. They are at least equal in incompetence to the PSA. Furthermore, those completely unnecessary bureaucratic bodies — I have never discovered anything useful that they did—are not even conterminous geographically with district headquarters. A unit that deals with one district headquarters whose companies are dispersed to separate locations may have to deal with two different TAVRAs. Paperwork is the bane of all units' life, especially territorial units where the small permanent staff are overstretched, so they have to deal with two more bureaucratic organisations to get their drill halls repaired.

Severing the Ministry of Defence work from the PSA would give the Secretary of State for Defence an excellent opportunity to reopen the debate on whether we need the TAVRAs, especially in the light of the structure that I propose for bringing the work much closer to the user.

If the Government carried out the Select Committee's recommendation to hand over the work to the Ministry of Defence, it would make an enormous difference to morale in the armed forces. Within the same budget, a much larger proportion of quarters and barracks would be brought up to standard, which would do much for our soldiers' morale.

12.49 pm

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) on the subject that he has chosen for the debate. It was chosen wisely, and my hon. Friend's speech matched its importance. You have had the misfortune, Madam Deputy Speaker, to miss not only the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham but the speech by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi). He made a speech filled with a deep knowledge of the Property Services Agency, which he gained throughout the years of his distinguished chairmanship of that Committee. Our debate has been enriched by those two speeches.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green saw fit to rebuke the Labour party because at no stage today has there been more than one member of that party in the Chamber. However, I do not know why my hon. Friend reserved his rebuke for only the Labour party. Ought not that rebuke to have been applied even more severely to the Liberal party, not one single member of which has seen fit to attend this most important debate? Is not the absence of the Liberal party even more astonishing when it claims, rather spuriously you may think, Madam Deputy Speaker, to be the party that cares passionately about the environment and about the buildings entrusted to the care of the PSA?

I wish to make only one other preliminary observation, and that is to express my respectful disagreement with my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham about security of tenure being one of the characteristics of those who are employed by the PSA. It is within your recollection, Madam Deputy Speaker, that not so long ago a former chief executive of the PSA, following an appearance before the Public Accounts Committee, of which I have the honour to be a member, left office on account of the most unsatisfactory replies that he had given to a Select Committee of this House. So my hon. Friend was wrong to say that security of tenure is one of the characteristics of those who work for the PSA.

Before I come to the main part of my speech, I want to address a serious question to my hon. Friend the Minister, which arises out of two answers that I received from our hon. Friend the Parliamentary-Under Secretary of State for the Armed Forces. Those replies were given six weeks ago today, on 15 January 1988. They revealed a deeply disturbing state of affairs. My hon. Friend told me:

"As at 30 November 1987 . . . the total number of service houses and flats"—

that is to say, houses and flats owned by the Ministry of Defence—

"vacant was 15,801." —[*Official Report*, 15 January 1988; Vol. 125, c. *412*.]

[Mr. Ian Gow]

Of those 15,801 empty houses, the Ministry of Defence had decided that 2,397 were surplus to its requirements. Even if one deducts 2,397 from 15,801, there are still more than 13,000 empty houses and flats owned by the Ministry of Defence. Of course, the House understands that there have to be empty houses and flats owned by any landlord. Time has to be allowed for a changeover. Sometimes there is an incoming tenant who has to be decided upon.

I should like to ask my hon. Friend who, although not the Minister responsible for housing, is an Under-Secretary of State in the Department of the Environment, whether he is quite certain that none of those 13,000-plus empty houses and flats, none of which were surplus to the requirements of the Ministry of Defence, could have provided a home for the homeless in any part of the kingdom.

Does my hon. Friend understand how absurd it would be for a house or flat owned by the Ministry of Defence, and not in a sensitive area where there might be security implications which made it impossible to use it, not to be available? Will he please consider that question? The PSA may manage those houses and flats, which is why the matter is relevant to the debate.

Will my hon. Friend inquire whether we could, under the short-hold system introduced by the Housing Act 1980, make some of those houses and flats available even on a short-term basis to house the homeless or to provide mobility, thus enabling the unemployed to move from one part of the country where they cannot get a job to another area where they may be able to get one?

The other part of the answer given on 15 January was:

"2,397 houses and flats had been declared surplus to MOD's requirements and were still owned by the Ministry of Defence. Of these, PSA had been instructed to sell 844".

I put it to my hon. Friend the Minister that I have little doubt—perhaps he has no doubt—that all, or virtually all, those 844 houses and flats are empty. My hon. Friend knows what happens to empty property. It gets vandalised. Local authorities tend to receive no rates and, most appalling of all, an empty house is unable to provide accommodation either for those who seek it or for those who would seek it if they knew that it was available.

Sir Hugh Rossi: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way and for his kind remarks about me. Does he agree that if the PSA were established as a free-standing trading fund, it would have an incentive to realise its assets more readily and put the money in the bank so that it could be used for what the PSA wants to use it for?

Mr. Gow: I agree with my hon. Friend. I shall return to that matter.

I remind my hon. Friend the Minister that, at 15 January, the PSA had been instructed to sell 844 houses and flats. I am urging him, when he gets back to 2, Marsham street, the building whose architectural features my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) had occasion to mention, to ask his private secretary to get an answer to these questions: how long have the 844 houses and flats which the Ministry of Defence has asked the PSA to sell been empty, and how long is it since instructions to sell were received? I put that question because the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces did not answer a key part of the question that I asked him last month. I asked:

"how many houses and flats owned by his Department are surplus to requirement; in how many cases the Property Services Agency has been instructed to sell such properties, and how many properties remain unsold *(a)* more than four months, *(b)* more than 8 months and *(c)* more than 12 months after the Property Services Agency was instructed to sell them."

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary replied:

"I regret that the information required to identify the number of the properties remaining unsold after four, eight and 12 months is not available to the PSA". —[*Official Report*, 15 January 1988; Vol. 125, c. *411*.]

I am making a grave charge against my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces. However, although the charge is levelled against him, it is, I am afraid, also a charge against my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, for whom I have a great regard. When Ministers give answers that involve more than one Department—something that happens frequently—the other Departments concerned are always consulted. Therefore, I think that my hon. Friend the Minister will have told my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces that the information was not available to the PSA.

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend makes an extremely telling point. I am sure that he will be interested in the question that I asked my hon. Friend the Minister earlier this week. I asked him how many outstanding planning applications the PSA had and for some detail on that. The Under-Secretary replied:

"The information is not available centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost."—[*Official Report*, 22 February; Vol. 128, c. *60*.]

Does my hon. Friend agree that that suggests a certain lack of central control of the Property Services Agency?

Mr. Gow: Yes, I agree with every word that my hon. Friend says. His intervention reinforces my point to the Minister. The PSA knows how many houses and flats remain unsold four, eight and 12 months after instructions to sell have been received. It is deeply regrettable that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces should have given a parliamentary answer which, to my knowledge, is untrue.

I have read most carefully the report of the Select Committee on Environment. I believe that that report has done a great service to Parliament and to Ministers.

My hon. Friends will note with satisfaction that the hon. baronet, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) is now seated in his rightful place on the Treasury Bench—a Bench from which I deeply regretted his departure some years ago. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to contribute to the debate, because, in common with my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green, he has a profound knowledge and understanding of the PSA.

I have read most carefully the report of the Committee of which my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green is Chairman. I believe that the most telling paragraph is paragraph 72. Of all the paragraphs—there are many—this was the one that most caught my attention. I wish to remind the House what that paragraph said:

"The original concept of an all-embracing Agency has failed the test of experience. PSA was established to provide a 'total' service to Departments, but its functions are gradually being chipped away by its client Departments. It has been found to be too impotent, and too cumbersome, with lines of communication that are far too long."

The concluding sentence of that paragraph — the last which I wish to read—states:

"As a result, PSA is facing a consumer revolt. Its clients have acquired some direct responsibility under the PRS delegations, enjoy the freedom it gives them and some at least are wanting more."

I am sure that they are the words of my hon. Friend. They display the kind of clarity and precision that we have come to expect from my hon. Friend who is a distinguished lawyer as well as a distinguished author.

The House will note that we have been joined by my hon. Friend the Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household. He is here in weekend attire to listen to this important debate, initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham. There may be military establishments managed by the PSA in the Vice-Chamberlain's constituency — it is almost certain that there is something in his constituency managed by the PSA. If the PSA has been invited to sell something my hon. Friend should not be too anxious because I do not suppose that it will have been sold yet. However, I do not wish to be led astray, even by the most welcome presence of the Vice-Chamberlain.

I had just quoted and paid tribute to the report of the Select Committee. I wish to contrast that report, which pointed out the deficiences of the PSA, with the words of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in the annual report of the PSA for 1986-87 —the latest available report.

Those words have already been quoted, quite rightly, by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham. If, for the second time in the debate, those words are quoted from the Conservative Benches, it is because they are words of my right hon. Friend, and, above all people, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State should heed the words of the head of his Department. Indeed, from time to time, the Secretary of State will be making reports on the progress of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, and therefore I commend his words to my hon. Friend. It may be that I shall make a report to my right hon. Friend on the speech of the Parliamentay Under-Secretary when he comes to reply. One of the joys of being out of office is that one does not have reports written about oneself by Ministers.

The Vice-Chamberlain of the Household (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): They are written by the Whips.

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend says that reports about us are written by the Whips. I will have a discussion with the Vice-Chamberlain about that on another occasion because otherwise you, Madam Deputy Speaker, might rule me out of order.

In the PSA's annual report, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said:

"The Property Services Agency at its best is outstanding and has a deserved reputation for its achievements."

I find myself in respectful agreement with those words.

Until two and a half years ago I had, by one of those accidents of events, ministerial responsibility for the PSA. The remainder of my speech will not be a criticism of the PSA. On the contrary, it will be directed at the sheer impossibility of the tasks that Ministers have asked it to perform.

I underline the tribute that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State paid in the PSA's annual report. Ministers are to blame for the PSA's shortcomings, which were inevitable given the tasks that we asked it to carry out. I include in my rebuke to Ministers a rebuke to myself. I must accept my share of the responsibility for the failure of the PSA, or its diminished successor, to carry out the role that we asked it to perform.

There is a devastating sentence later in the PSA report. It was overlooked by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham, although he reminded the House of what appears on page 11. My hon. Friend reminded us that 85 per cent. of the maintenance work for which the PSA is responsible is carried out by private contractors. He said that all new construction work is done by private contractors. That comes as no surprise to me. If all new construction work is not done by the PSA but by private contractors, and if 85 per cent. of maintenance work is done not by the PSA but by private contractors, do we need the PSA to be involved in new construction or maintenance work?

If a Government Department wants a new building, why is it necessary to involve the PSA? If a Government Department believes that rain is coming in through its roof, would it not be sensible for it to obtain, from a builder or roofer, quotations for its repair? Do we need the PSA?

My hon. Friend the Vice-Chamberlain, who is clad in his weekend attire, may be about to make a journey to his constituency. There he may see roofs that were damaged during the storm of 15 October 1987. Will he be saying to his constituents, some of whose roofs may not have been repaired, "You must go to the PSA. It will be able to arrange for your roof to be repaired"? That advice will not be given by my hon. Friend.

If asked by his constituents about repairs to their roofs or leaking taps or about repainting a factory, warehouse or office he would not say, "Go to the Property Services Agency and have it done." On the contrary, he would suggest tht his constituents went to a builder if they wanted a new roof or a painter if they wanted their property painted. Even if one of his constituents said that he needed a new warehouse, he would tell him to go to an architect who may be able to design the new warehouse.

Do you, Madam Deputy Speaker, see why the chief executive of the Property Services Agency agrees with that? The sentence in the PSA annual report, which was overlooked by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham, made a deep impression on my mind. As I have said, the PSA annual report was published after my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green had written his outstanding report. My hon. Friend the Vice-Chamberlain has only been able to rush in to the Chamber from his other activities. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green made a telling point — not within hearing of the Vice-Chamberlain—that his report had been produced by the Select Committee on 23 March 1987. Have I got that right?

Sir Hugh Rossi: Yes.

Mr. Gow: By common consent, today is 26 February 1988. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green reminded the House that his report was produced in March last year and that it was not until January this year that he received a response. I am glad that the Vice-Chamberlain is present. There are now three Ministers on the Treasury Bench. We do not always have three, so we are greatly honoured. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton was also on the Treasury Bench a moment ago but he is no longer a member of the Administration.

[Mr. Gow]

We can remind those three Ministers of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green. The Government have many resources, the Department of the Environment has many Ministers and the Property Services Agency has 25,000 employees. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green asked why it took from March 1987 to January 1988 to produce a reply to the report.

I have news for you, Madam Deputy Speaker. If you and I got together to prepare a reply to the report we could have completed it within 24 hours. The report is so clear and lucid. Why did it take the Government so long? How many Ministers are there in the Department of the Environment? I believe that there are six or seven. There are also some Ministers in the House of Lords.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton has just returned to the Chamber. That is good news. I remind hon. Members that my hon. Friend held the same position in the Department of the Environment as my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green once held. If I have that wrong I hope that I will be corrected. Therefore, two former Under-Secretaries of State for the Environment are in the Chamber. If my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton was in the Department of the Environment and in charge — as he was — of the PSA and had received a report dated 23 March from the chairman of the Select Committee — one of the most senior and respected figures in the House—when does he think that he would have replied?

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): I am glad to have this unexpected opportunity to intervene so early in the debate. I recall receiving several reports from the Select Committee. On one occasion, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) even threatened to deduct my salary because of the PSA's performance.

I have no doubt that he would have received some response and I am sure that when my hon. Friend the Minister replies he will give a full account and a proper answer to the questions that my hon. Friend has posed, a number of which I was not in a position to listen to.

Mr. Gow: I do not want to be guilty of tedious repetition by making my speech again. That would be testing the patience of the Chair——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I am listening carefully.

Mr. Gow: I do not want to be led astray because I want to get to the key passage that was overlooked by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham. I wanted to call in my support — one may think this strange — the chief executive of the Property Services Agency and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. On page 2 of the report there is a picture of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. The report is available to all my hon. Friends. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary keeps a copy of it by his bedside—we all know that. It is an excellent photograph. I do not know whether it was taken by a photographer employed by the Property Services Agency, but we let that pass.

On page 3 there is a picture of the chief executive of the PSA—again, an excellent photograph. I pay tribute to the photographer; again, he could have been from the Property Services Agency.

Mr. Rowe: Does my hon. Friend have any views on the possibility that the excellence of the photographs reflects the excellence of the people being photographed, and that that excellence may well depend on the fact that they are both maintained by the Property Services Agency?

Mr. Gow: I agree with my hon. Friend. A number of properties in his constituency are managed by the agency. I am paying tribute not only to the quality of the photographs but to that of the people. Who appointed my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State? My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did. Who appointed the chief executive? My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment did. I agree that both of them are of the highest quality, just as one would expect from appointments made by the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State.

I do not want to be led astray any more, because I want to come to the important sentence that supports what I am saying, which is that the Property Services Agency is being asked to do something that it should not be asked to do. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green could not have taken it into account because it was published after he wrote his excellent report. I hope that the hon. baronet, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton will give me his attention. I see that my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury is now in his place. I give him a special welcome because he occupies the Treasury Chambers in Great George street. That building is not a monument to brilliant management by the Property Services Agency. Alas, I was a Minister there only for 10 weeks. I add that I did not leave it because it was such a ghastly building, but I must say that it is not well maintained. I can well understand the PSA trying to get its own back on the Treasury by deciding not to treat it particularly kindly. The PSA report says:

"Work for the biggest customer — US forces in this country — has been increasing considerably in volume in recent years."

Mr. Garel Jones: It is on page 9.

Mr. Gow: The Vice-Chamberlain is closely following the debate. It is on page 9. If the Financial Secretary would like a copy, I am sure that we could get one for him. It says:

"Work for the biggest customer — US forces in this country — has been increasing considerably in volume in recent years."

It goes on:

"That for British Telecom, formerly a very large customer, is running down and will cease altogether in the next few years as the privatised British Telecom make their own arrangements for work."

Just so. British Telecom was a captive customer. It has moved sensibly, wisely and to the advantge of all into the private sector. It currently employs PSA for a great deal of its work. In the annual report, we read that in the next few years it will make its own arrangements for work. That is work currently done by the PSA. The Vice-Chamberlain will read the words "will cease altogether".

That is the theme of the debate. It was also the theme of the response that was given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary in his answer to my hon. Friend the

Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn), the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister of State, Department of Energy:

"From the same date"—

That is, 1 April this year—

"Departments will be able to test the market, and to use agents other than the PSA for design and project management".

Later in my right hon. Friend's reply—I shall make a copy available to the Vice-Chamberlain — the word "untying" is used on two occasions. Again, that is of the greatest importance. My right hon. Friend said:

"The introduction of competition, by untying Departments from PSA, will provide an opportunity for Departments to test other sources of supply as well as an incentive for further improvement of the efficiency of services provided by PSA."

That is what we must do. We find the word "untying" in the next paragraph. It states:

"Under untying"—

My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham may think that that is not a felicitous choice of language—

"Departments will not necessarily be expected to test the market from the outset or to use agents other than the PSA."
—[*Official Report*, 23 July 1987; Vol. 120, c. *433*.]

That does not go nearly far enough. I wish that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary had gone further.

In the foreword to the annual report, the Secretary of State said:

"1986-87 was a year of preparation for change as individual Government Departments have been getting ready to accept greater responsibility for managing their own operations, including their accommodation requirements."

That should happen. Government Departments should be free to decide whether to engage the Property Services Agency or another agency. To this day, I have not understood why the Ministry of Defence does not instruct an estate agent to sell the houses, flats, land or buildings that are surplus to its requirements. Earlier, the Vice-Chamberlain nodded his assent when I invited him to agree to the proposition that if one wants to build a new building in Watford, one would instruct an architect to design it and a builder to build it.

If my hon. Friends wished to sell a house, they would not go not to the Property Services Agency, but to an estate agent. I put this point to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green. If he had a house or flat in this country that he wished to sell would he go to the Property Services Agency? Would he put a telephone call through to the chief executive or to his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment asking whether he would be able to arrange for that house or flat to be sold? I do not think that my hon. Friend would do that, but I shall give way to him if I have misunderstood his intentions.

I ask myself the grave question, "Why do we still have so much tying?" I know that I have said that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury used the word "untying" twice in that telling parliamentary answer, but there is still too much that is tied between the Property Services Agency and Government Departments. The more we can allow Departments to choose who should carry out the functions that are at present too frequently still carried out on a monopolistic basis, the more we can allow freedom and competition, which will help the Property Services Agency to become a better organisation, more responsive to the needs of Departments and able to render a better service.

I hope that when my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary replies to the debate, he will explain that the Government intend to liberalise the Property Services Agency still further and that Departments will be able to choose who they wish to carry out the services that are presently carried out by the PSA. As the House knows, I look forward to the day when the Property Services Agency will be entirely in the private sector.

1.32 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): When I entered the Chamber this morning, it was a lovely day. I do not know what it is like now outside in the big wide world. As I walked through St. James's park, I became increasingly aware of the pleasure that was being derived by a number of Londoners with nothing to do but exercise their dogs; by a number of tourists who were enjoying the view; and by the large number of people such as myself, who were using the paths in St. James's park to get from their home to their place of work directly through one of the more pleasant parts of this great city.

I could not help reflecting that the park would make a wonderful site for a large number of private houses. Why should a relatively small number of people enjoying themselves prevent the exploitation of that central space for private housing? We know that the royal parks are run at a loss. Indeed, if one looks at the scandalous way in which their landscape is being allowed to age, one realises that the loss at which they are run should, for the purposes of environmental conservation, perhaps be increased.

I wondered why we do not have applications for private housing in St. James's Park, Hyde Park or Richmond Park. Of course, there are two reasons. The first is that, by a happy accident of history, the royal parks are protected by a Act of Parliament and if planning applications were received they would have to be dealt with through an Act of Parliament in this place. The second reason why the threat to the London parks is not great — not yet — is that among the people who walk those paths and enjoy the sunshine are Ministers of the Crown and senior civil servants. That is why London's inhabitants enjoy this large and beautiful environment.

When one gets out to some insignificant provincial centre, such as the Medway towns, there are no senior civil servants to walk their dogs and enjoy the sunshine. Ministers come only occasionally usually under pressure from hon. Members — such as my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), whose debate this so aptly is — and, as soon as they have been, they are whisked away in their ministerial cars, another troublesome assignment duly done.

As a consequence of this London-based introversion, what happens to green spaces in places such as the Medway towns is of no importance. It takes a poor second place to the need of the Property Services Agency in this respect alone — as this debate has so well demonstrated — to act precipitately. In nothing else, as far as one can tell from this debate, does the PSA exert itself to act with any dispatch, but when it comes to putting in planning applications on the Great Lines at Gillingham, of course the PSA tries to act with such dispatch that it does not even have the courtesy to sit down with local authorities to work out the best way of dealing with their conflicting needs.

Mr. Couchman: I am especially pleased to see my hon. Friend here, because he shares this problem with me in the

[Mr. Couchman]

Medway towns. In view of the answer to my question on Monday 22 February, this week, it may not be known to central management of the PSA that any planning applications have been made for development in the Medway towns.

Mr. Rowe: That is a possibility, but one diminished by the activity of my hon. Friend, who has at least told Ministers on several occasions—on some of which I had the honour of helping him, I hope—about the threat under which the Great Lines lie.

In case you do not have this piece of knowledge, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Great Lines are a large area of green space which has remained a green space because, for defence purposes, no buildings were allowed to be erected on it. Given that this land has been insulated from any development or planning by local councils, the local councils have made shift to place their houses, shops and other buildings in other places, leaving this as a guaranteed green lung for the people of the Medway towns.

There it stands on a great hillside overlooking the Medway towns, easily the most prominent natural feature for many miles, in an area that has been sacrificed to allow the people of south London to move out into the countryside. The whole of the rest of the Medway towns is now a network of housing estates, built densely, partly because the local authorities have been able to say, "There is this large area of green space for the recreation of the people of the Medway towns."

Now we find that the Ministry of Defence no longer has a need for this open space. The Ministry hands it over, as it is bound to do, to the PSA. The PSA is under an obligation to maximise the profitability of the land it holds, although, as we have heard in the debate, its performance in that task is curiously patchy.

Without any consultation with the district councils and the people most directly concerned, the PSA submits ad hoc, haphazard planning applications in a way which will cause maximum damage to the environment. As we have heard, parts of that space could properly be developed, but oh no, we do not have any consultation with a Government agency about that. We must simply accept planning applications thrown in by the PSA as it suits it. Were it not that this debate has demonstrated that the idea of a Machiavelli lurking in the PSA is absurd, I would wonder whether these applications are as haphazard as they appear. Perhaps they have been worked out on some amazing plan, so that by developing these parts other parts will become less easy to defend. That is unacceptable, and I urge the Minister at least to give us an undertaking that the PSA will consult the people of the Medway towns about the disposition of the whole of this area.

Within my constituency there is a large farming estate which, after a great deal of searching by the MOD, was chosen as the ideal site for a training area. Everybody in my constituency welcomed the MOD application to use this area as a training area, but it will not happen—for one simple reason. The PSA was outsmarted by a neighbouring farmer simply because its procedures are so cumbersome, and, as the Select Committee report pointed out, its lines of communication so long that it was unable to respond at anything like the pace needed to conduct a simple commercial transaction in the market place.

If that is the case, what possible defence can there be for the PSA acting as the Government's estate agent? It is perfectly clear both from this example and those adduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) this morning that the PSA is incapable of acting in the commercial market as an estate agent, and that that function should be taken from it.

If, as we have heard today, Ministers are unable to answer questions of simple fact and to comment on matters of detail in the Select Committee report, does that not suggest that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) is right and that both the task to which the PSA addresses itself, as well as the agency, are too large, too amorphous and too confused to be effective?

I had intended to restrict my remarks simply to examples from my local area, but this debate has demonstrated to me beyond peradventure the paramount need for an overhaul and a grand redistribution of functions. The PSA seems to be constitutionally incapable of performing the many functions which it is expected to perform. Most of them should be handed to other people, and the expertise which it has acquired in design and certain other areas should be concentrated on a small area and made available to anyone who chooses to use them.

One of the most interesting pieces of information that I have gleaned recently is that the local authority in Nottingham has carried out a useful experiment in using schools as joint property. As rolls fell, the authority found ways of keeping open schools by using some of the buildings as community centres for old people and as day bed centres for minor operations. Provided that people can act directly with other Departments, such joint use of buildings will occur more frequently, but it will happen rarely, if ever, if everyone must go through a third party.

For that reason, too, I believe that the role and function of the PSA should be diminished and that responsibility for making management decisions should be devolved to those who are directly concerned with the outcome.

1.45 pm

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): I shall speak briefly to give the Minister ample time to reply. I shall be asking him some questions, and if he cannot answer them immediately, I shall be happy if he writes to me.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) on his success in the ballot and on choosing an important subject for discussion. He said that it was the second occasion on which he had been successful, but today he is more fortunate in having adequate time for his motion to be fully discussed. He said that he did not have as much luck with the football pools, but that is shared by all of us.

Although I did not agree with everything the hon. Gentleman said—he would not expect me to—I thought that his speech was interesting and well-argued. It will certainly please his constituents. But it was no surprise to me that he made such a logical speech. The hon. Gentleman's higher education was at Newcastle university and some of his political education was gained in the north-east when he attempted to win the seat of Chester-le-Street. I believe that it was his first attempt to gain a parliamentary seat. He probably did not go there with much hope of success, but his experience there helped him to get a seat where people welcomed his views. It is unfortunate that many of the important aspects of his

education in the north-east have been thrown overboard during the past few years, but from his speech today I believe that there is plenty of potential for recovery.

The fate of the Property Services Agency has been much discussed recently, and the debate is opportune. I regret that the Government have not provided time for a full debate, but have relied on a Back-Bench motion debated on a Friday when hon. Members on both sides of the House have busy schedules in their constituencies. But, as the hon. Member for Gillingham said, it requires luck for the second motion to be reached. If the first motion had been so important that many people wanted to speak on it, we should not have had even this short debate.

For too long, the future of the PSA has been dogged by uncertainty, with its fate hanging in the balance. In whatever direction the Government steer the PSA, the present position causes uncertainty and much loss of morale among the staff. There would be many advantages in retaining the PSA in the public sector. The opportunity for it to demonstrate its viability and ability is affected by the Government's constant interference. It appears to many, both inside and outside the PSA, that the Government are deliberately attempting to demonstrate that the PSA cannot work, by creating an air of uncertainty. To Opposition Members, that calculated destruction is abhorrent.

There has been a continuing reduction in the number of staff from some 39,000 to about 24,000 a cut of about 36 per cent. The maintenance arrears come to over £100 million on the civil side and over £100 million on the defence side. Although the Under-Secretary announced an expanded budget for that work in the next financial year, the PSA no longer has adequate staff to tackle the problem. It is ludicrous that the Government's policies have undermined the PSA's work in that way. If the PSA is to become a more commercially minded organisation, it must be allowed to do so without continuing and continuous ministerial interference.

It is Ministers who have decided that two thirds of PSA design work must be handled by private consultants, as a matter of policy, irrespective of whether in-house design is better and cheaper for the taxpayer. It has been demonstrated that it is about two and a half times more expensive to undertake externally the PSA's works programmes. Not only that, but the use of private consultants jeopardises the integrity of the PSA's work.

The Public Accounts Committee was recently told that the PSA had blacklisted 31 firms for fraud or performance. Many comments have been made about the staff in the PSA, but only 34 PSA staff out of over 25,000 or 30,000—the figure could be as many as 50,000 if one takes into account the turnover of staff—have been prosecuted for fraud since 1981. I believe that only 29 were found guilty of an offence. Do the Government accept that the policy of forcing the PSA to use private consultants for Government contracts is now giving rise to serious public concern?

It is ridiculous and naive for Conservative Members to suggest that the PSA should be privatised. If that happened, what arrangements would be introduced to ensure accountability for the expenditure of huge amounts of public money? The PSA's expenditure in 1986-87 was about £2 billion. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), who has now left the Chamber, made much of that. From 1 April 1988, Departments will be "untied" from using the PSA for major projects worth more than £150,000. If Government Departments still choose to use the PSA because it offers good value for money, will the Minister accept that as a good enough reason not to privatise it? That should and will be an important indicator to the Minister when he is determining the PSA's future. It is vital that the Government, like most big commercial companies, retain an in-house works, estate and design organisation. The Government must not bow to pressure from inside and outside Parliament to privatise the PSA.

The PSA has a good track record in protecting taxpayers' interests. Its good name must not be jeopardised by gratuitous privatisation mania. Yesterday during the statement about electricity privatisation my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said that it represented

"a triumph of ideology over common sense". [*Official Report*, 25 February 1988; Vol. 128, c. 456.]

I have to say that if the Minister is considering privatising the PSA, I must echo that comment.

The Government have so far failed to give the PSA any assurance that it will be retained in the public sector. In the Southwark district works office, an experiment in privatisation is going on against the advice of senior permanent officials. Will any assurance be given that the office will not be privatised if it proves cheaper to keep the work in-house? If political prejudice forces the PSA to take non-commercial decisions, how will it be successful in the market place, as the motion demands?

It would be helpful if the Minister would stop prevaricating and announce publicly his decision about the PSA's future, following the Environment Select Committee's report. Perhaps he is under pressure from Conservative Members. This is one matter on which I hope the Minister can give us some information. It is nearly a year since the Environment Select Committee report was published on 23 March 1987. I accept that the Government's observations were printed on 20 January 1988, but it is about time that the Minister made a full statement on the Government's attitude to the report.

Will the Minister comment on what is to happen to the 65 per cent. of the PSA's work that is undertaken for the Ministry of Defence? Will he acknowledge that the PSA has an unparalleled record of securing good value for money in MOD building work? There has been much conjecture and discussion about the relationship between the PSA and the Ministry of Defence and between the Secretaries of State for Defence and for the Environment. It would be useful, if the Minister could comment on that.

When will the Minister release the report prepared by Deloitte, Haskins and Sells? Will he release it? I understand that there are matters of commercial confidence in it. Does the Minister accept that several reports that contain confidential information have, nevertheless, been published with the relevant chunks removed or blocked out? It would be useful if the report was released so that the public could have the advantage of knowing what it says. The prevarication is appalling, considering the implications for a 24,000-strong work force. There are tremendous implications for them and they want to know the Minister's intentions.

If the PSA is to be more commercially viable, it must be free to take decisions based on commercial considerations rather than the ideological prejudices of Ministers. This is not the time for a full-scale debate on the PSA. Although I welcome this opportunity to discuss the future of the PSA, we must discuss the Minister's proposals for its future. He knows from private and public

[Mr. Roland Boyes]

statements made by the Opposition that we will oppose privatisation of the PSA should such a measure be brought before the House.

I hope that the Minister will give the work force and trade unions—not just us politicians—some idea about his plans for the PSA. We are anxious to know what they are. I hope that he can make a positive statement in the next 30 minutes.

1.59 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): We have had an excellent debate and some formidable contributions, not least from my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) who introduced the debate with a detailed and strong analysis of the problems and difficulties to ensure that we started off on a sound footing. Certainly, his criticisms of the Property Services Agency — we have heard many such criticisms — were constructive and without rancour. That is the spirit that has typified our debate.

We also had a formidable contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), whose chairmanship of the Select Committee on the Environment, which reported on the PSA last year, has been referred to frequently. We have all looked at that report and thought about it seriously.

We heard a typically strong contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), who has great knowledge and experience of the Property Services Agency. We have heard other contributions—all from Conservative Members—drawing attention to particular constituency issues. My hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) and for Gillingham referred to the Great Lines. My hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) and for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) made useful contributions, and apologised that, because of constituency engagements, they would not be here for the end of the debate.

This is our first debate for a long time on the Property Services Agency. Although it has been on a Friday, it has been a full half-day debate and it is disappointing that the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) has been alone on the Labour Benches, while the Liberals and the SDP have not been represented at all. As was pointed out in the debate, that shows Opposition Members' lack of interest in the administration of the Government. They lack interest because they do not expect to have the opportunity to participate in it again.

Mr. Boyes: Might it not show that a number of hon. Members are engaged in other activities and that it is remiss of the Minister to have allowed this debate only because one of his hon. Friends was lucky enough to win the opportunity to raise this subject in a raffle? It is not becoming of the Minister to comment on the number of hon. Members present on a Friday. There were very few Conservative Members present when I spoke, but I did not find it necessary to lower the tone of the debate by commenting on that fact. This has been a cool, calm, well-argued debate, and I hope that the Minister will not be reduced to such remarks in his speech again.

Mr. Rowe *rose*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is for the Minister to reply.

Mr. Chope: It is a matter of priorities. It was my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green who first noted that, with the exception of the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington, this debate has very low priority for Opposition Members.

Mr. Rowe: The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) spends much of his time and energy tabling motions relating to my constituency and other Kent constituencies; yet, when a motion is tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), he cannot find the time to turn up.

Mr. Chope: I understand what my hon. Friend says about that.

Shortly, I shall discuss the particular issues that have been raised, including Great Lines and other pieces of land within Gillingham. In the meantime, the Government are happy to accept the terms of the motion, and I welcome the opportunity that my hon. Friend has provided of taking stock of the PSA and the way in which it is evolving.

The PSA has existed in its present form since 1972. It was established as a separate agency within the Department of the Environment to carry out many of the functions previously discharged by the former Ministry of Public Building and Works. PSA's activities cover both the civil estate, where ownership of property is vested in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, and the defence estate, which is vested in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Apart from the Crown Suppliers, the PSA's responsibilities, as ordered at present, fall into three main areas. It acquires, leases and manages Government property and disposes of it once it is no longer needed. It manages the design and construction of new works, and it maintains Government property. The expenditure involved is, as we have heard, considerable. The PSA's total annual turnover amounts to £2·8 billion, with almost £550 million attributable to estate management, more than £1,300 million to design and management of new works, and more than £900 million to maintenance.

The PSA now is different from the PSA that we inherited in 1979. We have initiated sweeping changes in the management of Departments across Government under the umbrella of the financial management initiative. For PSA, that radical thinking challenged the previous conventional wisdom that all accommodation matters should be funded, organised and implemented centrally. We have also fostered, and the PSA has responded to, a policy of using the private sector where it offers better value for money than doing work in-house. We have also had to deal with particular problems affecting the PSA alone, rather than the Government as a whole. I should like to outline what we have achieved under each of those headings.

First, as a direct consequence of the financial management initiative, we have introduced for the civil estate a charging system — the property repayment services system. That acknowledges that individual civil Departments should decide what they require by the way of accommodation, and pay, annually, a charge assessed by the PSA for their occupation. Improvements to the system are still needed to ensure that it reflects more accurately the prevailing property market. But the basic

principle of applying market forces through financial pressures promises a more rational and more economic use of property.

A further feature of the PRS system is the transfer of the more routine works responsibilities to Departments. Under standard rules, civil Departments now take charge, within their own vote allocations and without recourse to PSA, of jobs up to £5,000 in value and all internal decorations. The Departments of Employment and of Health and Social Security are experimenting with a more radical option, whereby they take on maintenance up to £100,000 per job and minor new works of up to £150,000 per job.

We are, as I shall explain later, still exploring the question of how departmental and PSA responsibilities for the civil estate are best divided. We can, however, justly claim that we successfully challenged the idea that all accommodation issues should be handled separately, and in isolation from other operational requirements.

On the defence estate, the position is somewhat different in that the Ministry of Defence decides. In the light of its operational requirements, on the accommodation it needs. Here also, however, responsibilities have been transferred from PSA in a number of establishments where local service commanders operate local works maintenance budgets. Under those schemes the commanders are responsible for jobs up to £1,000 in value.

Secondly, on use of the private sector—I am not sure whether the extent to which we use the private sector is generally recognised—100 per cent. of new construction is carried out by private sector contractors. More significantly, 65 per cent. of design and management of major new works is now done by private consultants, with the remaining 35 per cent. or so being done in-house by PSA. This is the exact reverse of the position in 1979, when the vast majority of work was in-house. Moreover, we have now reached the stage where 85 per cent. of maintenance of Government property is carried out by private sector contractors, with the PSA's directly employed labour force carrying out the remaining 15 per cent. That compares with 70 per cent. of maintenance carried out by private contractors and 30 per cent. by the directly employed labour force in 1979.

The switch of work to the private sector has been accompanied by a reduction of the directly employed labour force. Within an overall staff reduction in PSA of 34 per cent. since 1979—from about 36,500 to about 24,000 — DEL has reduced by 50 per cent. — from approximately 19,500 to the present figure of about 9,500.

During the course of the debate a number of concerns about the PSA have been expressed. My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and others raised the issue of fraud and corruption. I must say that there is no sense of complacency about fraud and corruption in the PSA. The Wardale report of 1983 alerted us to the inadequacy of the PSA's defences against fraud and corruption. That was given substance in 1984 when the *News of the World* published allegations about malpractices in certain London local offices, and police inquiries were set in train. The trials that are currently taking place at the Old Bailey give fresh publicity to fraud and corruption. However, all the events that are being referred to in court took place in 1984, or earlier. The current trials are the culmination of a long and difficult police investigation.

Since 1984, the PSA has reorganised and substantially strengthened the management of its district works offices. Improved monitoring and control procedures have been introduced and regular inspections of local offices vet not only the results of their works but the procedural and technical routes that were followed in carrying them out. Detailed contract audits have been held across the organisation and computerised records of all tenders have been set up in key areas so that monitoring for unusual contractual patterns can take place on a continuously updated basis.

A special unit has been set up to help management to undertake investigations of possible irregularities and random inspections of individual offices. That unit has the task of ensuring that lessons learnt in one part of the organisation are applied everywhere else. Ministers and senior management accept that eradication and prevention of recurrence will require continued vigilance and a regular review of the defence mechanisms.

It is worth emphasising that those who are employed by the PSA are probably more concerned than hon. Members about the publicity that has been given to some of those trials and about the lack of emphasis that has been put on the fact that the irregularities date back to 1984 and before. Certainly there is a stain on the character of the PSA as a result of that fraud and corruption. I hope that, without being complacent about the matter, the House will accept that we have taken action to ensure that, so far as possible, there is no repetition of those events.

With regard to disposals, we were not satisfied that the procedures and practices of the PSA met our objective of keeping Government holdings to a minimum. Therefore, we have placed increasing emphasis over the past three years on speeding up the disposal process carried out by the PSA. Disposal receipts, which totalled £43 million in 1984-85, are likely to amount to almost £120 million this year.

Sir Hugh Rossi: Will my hon. Friend confirm whether those proceeds go back to the Treasury or whether they can be used by the PSA for necessary maintenance and other works that may be required?

Mr. Chope: The funds that come from the Ministry of Defence belong to the Ministry of Defence, but the funds that are raised on the civil estate belong to the PSA. The expected amount of receipts is taken into account when the budget is set at the beginning of the year. Therefore, it would not be fair to say that all the receipts can be used by the PSA on maintenance of its stock.

Sir Hugh Rossi: Does that not mean that there is a lack of incentive for the PSA to dispose of properties?

Mr. Chope: Perhaps there is, to some extent, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, in arguing the case for more money to be given for the maintenance budget for the next financial year, was able to secure substantial increases. The Treasury — the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in particular — expects that there will be increased income from the sale of surplus properties. It would not be right to say that the issue of selling properties is completely isolated from the need to find as much money as possible for maintenance. If my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had not been able to satisfy my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that the PSA will be able to increase its receipts from disposals, he might not have been so successful in securing the increased level of funding for maintenance for the coming year—up from £90 million to £105 million—which is a significant improvement over the current year.

My hon. Friends the Members for Gillingham and for Mid-Kent mentioned the Great Lines. As my hon. Friends

[Mr. Chope]

know, I have been to Gillingham to look at the situation, as has my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Armed Forces. We are aware of the concern expressed by local people, the council and our hon. Friends. As a result, we hope that we will be able to convene a meeting soon between representatives of Gillingham borough council, the Ministry of Defence and PSA officials to consider how best to proceed with the disposal of all the MOD's local land holdings, which have been or are expected to be declared surplus. Those arrangements will be set in hand shortly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent seemed to suggest that there was a conspiracy to bring forward individual items of surplus land, secure planning permission on them and then bring forward some more. In order to allay his concerns, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces and I agree that it is important that surplus MOD land holdings in the area should be considered as a whole with the local council. I hope that the discussions I have mentioned will enable that to happen.

I know that one particular planning application that has caused a lot of concern is the disposal of No. 2 Garrison sports ground. I understand that the planning application on that sports ground was rejected by the local council. As with all matters relating to surplus MOD property, the PSA acts under the instructions of the MOD. I am able to tell my hon. Friends that the instruction from the Ministry of Defence is that no appeal should be lodged against the refusal of planning permission in respect of that sports ground.

Mr. Couchman: That is good news and will be well received in the Medway towns.

Mr. Chope: I am pleased with the response. If we can look at all the other outstanding planning applications and the possibility of surplus pieces of land coming from the Ministry of Defence, there will be scope for resolving the matter once and for all, so that the balance between the needs of the local community and the objectives of the Ministry of Defence and the Government of selling the land for the best price can be achieved.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham spoke of the PSA's achievements as well as its problems. I would not like to allow this occasion to pass without mentioning a few of the positive achievements that stand as landmarks to the PSA. My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham referred to the Falklands airport. I was lucky enough to be able to go and look at that in January this year. There is also the restoration of the Temperate house and the new Princess of Wales conservatory at Kew, the concentrated programmes for construction of new prisons and new courts, the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre and the refurbishment of Durbar court. All those are cause for legitimate pride. So, too, for example, is the PSA's record in winning national and international design awards. That was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam. Those numbered 14 last year, and this year there are already over 30. I have also seen, from first-hand experience, that PSA staff are professional in the true sense of the word. The future of the organisation, to which I shall turn shortly, must depend on the quality and dedication of the people who work in it. On that basis, the PSA can face the future with confidence.

I have outlined the main areas with which we have dealt since 1979 and the changes so far made. However, we are not content to rest on our record. Provision of Government accommodation should in essence be a commercial operation with the client able to exercise choice on the grounds of quality, price and delivery time offered.

Subject to the exceptions that I have mentioned, which are so far generally at the lower ranges of expenditure, the distinction between Departments' clients, on the one hand, and a PSA supplier, on the other has not been clear enough. Moreover, the PSA as a supplier, has enjoyed an unchallenged monopoly, which is not healthy. Client Departments must have the freedom, and acquire the skills, to choose between different suppliers and we must develop a PSA whose success depends on its business ability, under competitive pressure. The PSA should not rely in business on its position as a Government Department. This is not a threat to the PSA; rather, it is a challenge that should enable it to exploit its strengths and expertise and demonstrate that it has the capacity to win and retain business on its own merits.

A number of hon. Members asked for the privatisation of the PSA. It is necessary to ask what privatisation would amount to. Would it be appropriate for the whole agency, or only parts of it? Would it be a practicable option without commercial accounts? Those are some of the questions that must be answered.

One of the key issues to be addressed is the civil ownership function. My hon. Friends the Members for Gillingham, for Eastbourne and for Hornsey and Wood Green referred to that. The Secretary of State for the Environment, on behalf of the Government, owns more than 2,600 freeholdings, and leases almost 5,300 holdings — almost 8,000 holdings. The day-to-day task of managing the civil estate has been devolved to the PSA. When the Select Committee looked at this matter it recommended:

"While we are convinced of the need to open up PSA to competition, we are equally certain that a substantial core of its skills needs retaining as one unit, even if this may be on a reduced scale; and that, if central management of the estate as a property resource needs strengthening, as we believe, then PSA is the only candidate for this role. But in carrying out this important strategic task, PSA will need to have its influence strengthened."

The pure civil ownership function is complemented by an estates services function which could be described as maintenance, minor new works and estate services. There is clearly scope for those functions to be done in the private sector. Indeed, that is the policy that we have been pursuing since 1979.

On maintenance and minor new works there are two functions to be performed—the commissioning of work and its execution. Eighty-five per cent. of the maintenance work is executed by private contractors. The commissioning work is for the occupying Department, with PSA acting as managers and the private sector agents carrying out the bulk of the work. But the PSA's role may also be carried out by private sector agents, as in experiments, to which I shall refer, in Southwark and Colchester.

On the estate agency side, most of the purchases and sales of land are conducted by private sector agents commissioned by the PSA, but about half of the sales and purchases are done on behalf of the MOD. In such cases, the PSA operates as a middleman estate agency service on

behalf of the MOD as client. I agree with the points made in the debate to the effect that the issue of whether that relationship is an ideal one needs examining.

The third main function of the PSA is project services — the commissioning and management of major building and civil engineering contracts for other Government Departments. The PSA is the largest client of the construction industry, with 100 per cent. of its construction contracts being carried out by the private sector. The project management is a key function in responsibility and has recently been the subject of a detailed efficiency scrutiny. The recommendations of that scrutiny should lead to much improved performance.

The key developments that are taking place now are several. First, on 1 April, we are about to take the important step of untying, pursuant to the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary last July. That announcement was welcomed by the PSA because it means that the PSA will be able to demonstrate that it can provide good quality services to other Government Departments without having to depend on a monopoly. This development will place a considerable amount of responsibility on Departments to ensure that their requirements are thought through, that changes to agreed briefs are kept to a strict minimum and that they are properly equipped with the necessary skills as project sponsors to oversee translation of requirements into finished products. For the first time, a main area of PSA activity will be exposed to outside competition.

The next issue that we need to address is how far and how rapidly other PSA activities should be similarly treated. The untying of major civil projects has set the pace. We shall need to follow that with a firm programme in other areas.

Then we have a major commission into project management, to which I referred briefly. I expect that when we see the results of that, we shall get demonstrably improved results. We are in the process of setting a timetable for an action plan. As soon as that is done, we want to get quick implementation of the recommendations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham suggested that, as an experiment, we should contract out the management of one of our district works offices. Some months ago, we initiated the start of such a procedure. The hon. Member for Houghton and Washington said that it was not popular within the Property Services Agency. I am not sure that he is right. The experiment will be useful. We shall invite tenders for the management of the Southwark district. We shall compare the results and performance of that district with other district works offices and see whether benefit is to be gained from that type of arrangement.

Mr. Boyes: In a letter dated 30 November 1987, the principal establishments officer of the PSA wrote to Mr. Williams, the vice-chairman of the DWC in Bristol, stating:

"this is an experiment".

He went on to state:

"the cost of the lowest acceptable offer will be compared with PSA's own overhead costs and Ministers have agreed that we should proceed only if we are satisfied that good value is likely to be secured."

On a previous occasion, when the then Secretary of State was the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), an attempt to contract out was defeated by the fact that the PSA was cheaper and better value for money. Will the Minister assure us that, if the PSA's costs are cheaper at the Southwark office, there will be no contracting out? The passage that I have quoted implies that the lowest tender, irrespective of whether it is higher than present costs, will be accepted.

Mr. Chope: The purpose is to get better value for money. If there is no sign that we shall do so, we shall not proceed.

A second experiment relates to the estate management of defence lands in the Colchester area. That has already been contracted out to a private firm of agents. I shall meet them soon to assess the progress that has been made and the lessons that can be learnt from it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green referred to a delayed response to the Select Committee report. I heard what he said. Before Christmas, I discussed with him the relative merits of giving what, in essence, was an interim answer, as against delaying further to provide him with the definitive response once we, as a Government, have decided what to do on the Deloitte report. We have sent an interim response, and we certainly hope soon to be able to reach a conclusion on the Deloitte report. Although the report on the pollution of rivers and estuaries is rather outside my direct responsibility, I can tell my hon. Friend that we hope to be able to publish a response in the form of a memorandum in April.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne said that it had taken a long time to get out such responses. Sometimes, in Government, it takes longer to say yes to recommendations than it does to say no. I hope that he will take some encouragement from that.

This has been a useful debate and I hope that all who have participated will realise that there is no complacency on the part of the Property Services Agency. We face serious challenges, but I believe that the staff and those employed in the PSA will face the challenges and perform even better.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House urges the Government to convert the Property Services Agency as rapidly as possible into a fully commercial organisation whose future would depend upon successful performance at the market place.

MALICIOUS COMMUNICATIONS BILL

Ordered,

That Standing Committee C be discharged from considering the Malicious Communications Bill, and that the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House. *[Mr. Couchman.]*

Committee on Friday 22 April.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 29th February, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments, &c. (negative procedure)), the Motion in the name of Mr. David Steel relating to Education (Scotland) may be proceeded with until half-past Eleven o'clock, or for one and a half hours after it has been entered upon, whichever is the later. *[Mr. Maclean.]*

Orders of the Day

DATA PROTECTION ACT 1984 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Not moved.

CONCESSIONARY TELEVISION LICENCES FOR STATE RETIREMENT PENSIONERS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

HOUSING (WAITING LIST RESTRICTIONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

UNFAIR REPORTING AND RIGHT OF REPLY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 15 April.

Land Registration Bill *[Lords]*

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. *[Sir George Young.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: May I draw the attention of the House to the fact that it is very unusual to take a Committee stage without notice. Is there any objection? Very well.

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, and Prince of Wales's Consent, on behalf of the Duchy of Cornwall, signified.]

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Night Flights

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

2.33 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): The issue that I raise for today's Adjournment debate is in no way political, yet it affects people who live in the constituencies of many hon. Members. It certainly affects the area in which I live and which I represent, in south-west London. I stress that it is a problem that worsens year by year. Indeed, people's complaints increase year by year. While one can complain about day flying and the noise and disturbances from which hundreds and thousands of people suffer, one has to accept that there will be day-time flying. However, I suggest that night flying is another issue, and one on which action could and must be taken.

We hear a great deal about people's rights. That must always be the concern and priority of the House. I put it to the Minister that night aircraft noise is a violation of people's rights, yet many suffer during the day and night. I have sought to keep myself updated on Government policy in statements on this issue. The overwhelming view is that there is a great deal of talk but little reaction to control this problem.

A recent statement on quotas by the Department of Transport says that the number of night flights will be increased. People may say, "Oh yes, but by quieter aircraft." That is little comfort to people who already suffer from aircraft noise. At the airports inquiries in the period 1981-83, the inspector, Mr. Graham Eyre QC, said:

"Because of the dense population under the flight paths at Heathrow a substantial number of people are unjustifiably affected by night noise. I strongly recommend that a total ban, save for emergencies, should be introduced as a matter of urgency."

What was thought necessary then is certainly necessary now, and will be fully reported by residents and many hon. Members. The Minister's reply to me this week on aircraft movements over the past five years clearly makes that point — increases at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted occur year by year.

In recent weeks, we have heard of the near misses by aircraft, and they are causing deep concern. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that issue. The ever-increasing problem we face is the density of air traffic movement in the south of England. I and many other people believe that it will be only a matter of time, because of this issue and its dangers, before a call for more night flying is made. I ask the Minister to give a clear undertaking that any demands along those lines will receive no support from his Department.

It is of increasing concern that talk is getting under way on the need for a fifth terminal at Heathrow. The claim about need can easily be made on the grounds of pressure. Will it be rejected? Again I ask the Minister for a clear statement. Once there were to be only three terminals at Heathrow — we now have four. An article on a statement made within the past few days by Sir Norman Payne, the British Airports Authority chairman, quoted him and said:

"'We are starting to look at the expansion of Heathrow and the need for a fifth terminal.' A new terminal would boost capacity at Heathrow by 15m passengers to around 53m."

I suggest that, if there were to be any allowance for further developments at Heathrow, it would be at the cost of suffering by the residents who live in that area.

What is to be the future development at Gatwick airport? I am aware of the existing 40-year agreement, but we all know that such agreements can be overturned. There is deep concern in the minds of many people that such an agreement could be overturned. Without doubt, the overriding fear is that, on either development, more night flights will be allowed. I ask the Minister for a clear statement on both issues.

Why does there appear to be no clear Government policy on, or indeed encouragement of, much greater development of provincial airports? Several areas would welcome that. Not only would that reduce the air traffic density, but it would reduce the number of night flights in the south. We often hear what I say is an excuse that people would not want to fly to such provincial airports, but that has never been tested. We now have a modern inter-city rail service, and for many people who use Gatwick or Heathrow, travelling expenses would be less if they could use a provincial airport. It would be interesting to hear from the Minister why no further encouragement is given to that type of development.

A recent statement on monitoring night noise is confusing. It states:

"Noise of departing aircraft will continue to be monitored continuously."

Why only departing aircraft? Why is there no monitoring of landing aircraft? The statement continues:

"The night noise climate will be monitored each summer."

Why not all year round? Night noise occurs all year round and causes disturbances all year round. A further issue that has not been fully considered is the noise levels of cargo flights when leaving airports. I hope, if not during this debate then subsequently, to hear from the Department about surveys and its thinking on cargo flight movements.

We hear a great deal in the reports from the Department of Transport about quieter aircraft, and we welcome that, yet over 28 per cent. of the air traffic movements in 1986-87 at Gatwick involved the noisier 111 aircraft. There are still too many air traffic movements by noisy aircraft which cause misery to many people during the day and night. I reject the policy contained in the airports policy White Paper of 1985 which states:

"Policy on night noise is firmly based on research into the relationship between aircraft noise and sleep disturbance and . . . this should continue to be the basis for decisions."

I, and I am sure many others, would say that, once woken, that is it; there is no going back to sleep. Where is the concern for those people? The Minister will be aware of the anxiety about delayed departures. Despite assurances on quotas, they continue to occur. Under pressure from airlines, noisy aircraft are allowed to continue under this grouping. Such actions do nothing to build public confidence in Government policy.

The record is there for everyone to check. The daytime noise climate is undoubtedly worsening in the south as traffic increases, and the Department's predictions on this issue have been wrong. Many think, sadly, that it will be wrong again on noise levels of night flights, and the public will suffer as they have suffered for many years.

I recently asked about noise insulation grants, and there is undoubtedly an urgent need for them. The qualification for eligibility for grant must be updated. The figures that the Minister gave me earlier this week show that traffic has increased considerably, and the criteria based on figures for 1980 are now out of date. It is unbelievable that insulation grants are not given to schools or hospitals.

Aircraft noise has existed for a long time. I am sure that hundreds of thousands of people agree with me that it is getting worse. Flight movements are increasing and there is pressure for more night flights. Many people believe that flights should be monitored in summer and winter. Many believe that the infringement levels must be reviewed and that we need a clear statement from the Department on future development in the south and in relation to regional airports.

What discussion is there in the European Community? If the Minister cannot tell me today, perhaps he will write to me. We need much more joint action on the control of noise, night flying and group limitations. The EC transport and environment committees could play a major role in co-ordinating policy. It would be interesting to hear from the Minister what his Department and the EC are doing.

We live in a modern, scientific age of great development. I refuse to accept that hundreds of thousands of people must continue to suffer such torment if they live near major airports. If the Government acted, they would have overwhelming support in the House and in the country.

Only the Government — not individuals or any Member of the House — can take action to improve the position. The issue is important to many people.

2.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Peter Bottomley): The House will be grateful to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for introducing the debate. Aviation has been on the parliamentary agenda more often than most people expected during the past few weeks, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will regard it as helpful if I give the House some information that the Civil Aviation Authority published today in relation to a recent non-incident at Heathrow.

In a press notice, the CAA said that the captain of an Air Canada aeroplane which was thought to be slightly high and fast abandoned his approach. The CAA considered that to be good airmanship since a pilot should be completely satisfied before completing a landing. Air traffic control at Heathrow confirmed that there was no aircraft on the runway, and that the previous landing aircraft had already cleared it. The Air Canada aeroplane was never lower than 1,000 ft and was a mile out when the go-around was initiated.

The hon. Gentleman spoke mainly about night noise, but he also mentioned daytime disturbance and the development of airports away from London and the south-east. On the latter point, investment in regional airports has grown dramatically, as has their use. The Government want that to continue. There is no purpose in dragging people down to Heathrow or Gatwick unnecessarily when their aviation needs could be met in Birmingham, Manchester, Scotland and elsewhere.

The hon. Gentleman asked some specific questions. Perhaps I can give him some of the answers now, and then, as he kindly suggested, if there are further points to take up, I shall deal with them in correspondence.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the possibility of a fifth terminal at Heathrow. The 1985 White Paper said that the Government could not make a commitment at that stage, but would keep such matters under review. That remains so. A new terminal would need planning

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

permission. The White Paper also said that the release of the Perry Oaks sludge works site for the airport was highly desirable.

The hon. Gentleman asked about delayed departures. I understand that the number of delayed departures allowed for in the summer of 1987 was 60 each at Heathrow and Gatwick. The number of delayed departures that took place was two thirds of that figure, so that was better than people had expected.

The Government have continually taken a deep interest in the subject of night flying. As a Government, we are committed to the expansion of aviation, which is good for jobs in the aviation industry. About 67,000 people are employed at Heathrow and Gatwick. If there was any threat to that employment, hon. Members on both sides of the House would be very concerned.

We must also be prepared to respond to anxieties among the public about aircraft noise. People's anxiety about the effects on sleep of night flying are and will always remain high on the list of priorities. That is why, on 10 February, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced new restrictions on night flights at Heathrow and Gatwick from 1 April 1988, for five years. Those restrictions are broadly in line with the proposals published in November last year for night restrictions at the two airports. My right hon. Friend set out his objectives. The aim is to improve the night noise climate around the two airports without imposing unnecessary restrictions on the airline industry.

I should like to explain the Government's policy on noise control at airports. Local problems are best solved at that level. At all airports, we expect the owners or operators to reduce, as far as is reasonable and practicable, the disturbance caused by their operations. The Government have assumed direct responsibility for noise control at the designated airports—Heathrow, Gatwick and Stanstead. The hon. Gentlman said that the most effective way of tackling aircraft noise is to reduce it at its source. If we had silent aircraft, we should not have a noise problem. We must move within the realms of the possible and practicable.

Successive Governments have recognised that one of the most effective ways of reducing aircraft noise is to encourage airlines to operate the quietest available aircraft. The operation of non-noise-certified aircraft on the United Kingdom register was banned from 1 January 1986, one year ahead of most other European countries. That ban was extended to foreign-registered jets from 1 January this year. That was the first permissible date under the international agreement. The banning of non-noise-certificated aircraft from the United Kingdom has had a dramatic effect on the noise climate around our airports. That is demonstrated best by the improvement in the daytime noise climate around Heathrow, the busiest international airport in the world.

The 35 noise and number index contour is generally accepted to be the onset of annoyance for the average community. The number of people around Heathrow living within that contour has sharply reduced. It was 2 million in 1976 and was less than 700,000 in 1986, the most recent year for which figures are available. I recognise that both the hon. Gentleman's constituency and mine are outside that contour.

Most developed countries with aviation interests agree that the next logical step forward would be to ban the operation of the next noisiest group of jets, the so-called chapter 2 aircraft. Several studies are taking place into the most appropriate way of introducing such a ban, while taking into account the legitimate interests of the aviation industry.

The hon. Gentleman asked that Britain should take a leading role in that. I confirm that we are playing a major role in the studies now being undertaken by the European Civil Aviation Conference, the European Community and the International Civil Aviation Conference.

Unfortunately, noise standards do not themselves solve the problem. People, including some in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, will continue to experience some discomfort. Their discomfort can and must be eased by the implementation of operational measures at Heathrow and Gatwick, including the use of quieter approach and departure procedures, the use of special departure routes, called noise preferential routes, maximum noise limits on departure and, most importantly, restrictions on the type and number of aircraft that can operate during the night period.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the same attention that is given to take-offs should be given to landings. Aircraft make the most noise when they are taking off, so that deserves priority attention, although we should not ignore the noise associated with landing.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's announcement of the new night restrictions policy is the culmination of a long process which was announced in 1981. We then reviewed restrictions at Heathrow and Gatwick and set new quotas which ran until March this year. The Government said that when most of the noisier movements at night had been phased out, there would be a further review. The process of phasing out the noisier movements was completed in March last year.

In 1986, comments were sought on night flights, and reports of research into aircraft noise and sleep disturbance were commissioned by the Department of Transport. The consultation papers, "Night Flights at Heathrow" and "Night Flights at Gatwick", reported the conclusions of the review and announced proposals for future night restrictions at those two airports. More than 250 responses were received.

When announcing his policy, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave all the views that were expressed in the submissions careful consideration. We were, and remain, mindful of people's reasonable expectation of a good night's sleep. I often wish that the party managers in the House had the same regard for our sleep.

At Gatwick, the Secretary of State is determined that night noise should be further reduced during the next five years. The new night quotas will mean a quickly reducing number of flights by the less quiet aircraft in favour of more flights by quieter, modern aircraft. At Heathrow, the number of night flights allowed will be limited to about their present level, thus preventing any increase in disturbance.

Take-offs in the small hours are particularly disturbing so, during that period, except for a few aircraft which are unavoidably delayed, take-offs only by modern, quieter aircraft will be allowed. That should achieve a considerable improvement in the noise climate during the most sensitive period.

These modern, quiet aircraft, which we call night noise group C, will be used more by day than at night, especially at Gatwick. That will help the daytime noise climate as well. That will be welcome news to the hon. Gentleman. The requirements for that category of aircraft are even more stringent than the International Civil Aviation Organisation's so-called chapter 3 standards, which are for aircraft with later and quieter high bypass ratio engines.

We shall continue to monitor the night noise climate and the noise made by individual aircraft against the maximum night noise limit, which is less than the daytime noise limit. We are prepared to consider whether additional monitoring is necessary to verify the reduced disturbance caused by quieter, modern aircraft. We think that it is important that local people have confidence in noise monitoring. We intend to conduct monitoring openly.

In the proposals, we emphasise that we set great store by the process of consultation and the functions of the airport consultative committees. Nominees of local authorities sit on such committees. We shall invite the committees to nominate representatives of local people to sit with representatives of the aviation industry on an advisory committee to consider all aspects of night noise monitoring.

At Gatwick, we expect two years' monitoring to show that the disturbance at night is getting better rather than worse. If that is the case, we shall revise the quotas. That will not be necessary at Heathrow, because we are cutting the quotas there, so the disturbance will be less.

Despite all that has been done to mitigate aircraft noise, there will still be some people close to major airports who continue to be disturbed by aircraft. For such people, noise insulation grants were made available. The first scheme was introduced at Heathrow in 1966 and at Gatwick in 1973. The most recent schemes, which were introduced in 1980, ended in 1985. We understand that several other airports have noise insulation grant schemes.

As was promised in the 1985 airport policy White Paper, the 1980 Heathrow and Gatwick schemes have been reviewed. The review suggested that there were small areas outside the scheme boundary at each airport which should be included in the scheme retrospectively. We are discussing with the British Airports Authority the suggested small adjustments to the scheme boundary, and we shall make an announcement when the discussions are completed. Any additional grants will be paid, as before, by the BAA. There will be no change to the qualification for eligibility, the description of dwellings, the specification of work to be done or the residential qualifications date.

Airport operators are free to purchase properties adjacent or near to the airport boundary that are severely affected by aircraft noise. In January 1987, the BAA's Heathrow and Gatwick airport companies announced voluntary schemes to purchase noise-blighted properties near the two airports. The schemes are still open and have more time to run.

At Stansted, we shall supplement noise abatement measures as the airport develops. In the short term, present night restrictions will continue. A provisional departure route structure will be introduced on 7 April this year. We shall continue to consult on the final route structure. We are also committed to introducing a new noise insulation scheme when the airport throughput reaches 2 million passengers a year. The present throughput is half that number.

As I said, the hon. Gentleman has done the House a service because concerns need to be brought to the attention of the Government and the authorities and information to the attention of those affected, who want to know the prospects for the future. I hope that my remarks will have given them confidence that matters are getting better and will continue to do so — without restricting unnecessarily the growth of aviation. I hope that I have shown that as our airports have become busier we have become more mindful of the needs of those who live near them. The House can rest assured that the Government are most unlikely to take any action that would make life more unpleasant for those who live around our airports.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 29 February 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

European Regional Development Fund

1. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total amount of support which Wales has received from the European regional development fund during each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

3. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total value of grants which Wales has received from the European regional development fund in the past 10 years.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Walker): Net commitments to Wales from the European regional development fund in the years 1978-87 amounted to £419·7 million; during the last five years the amount was £276·3 million.

I will circulate annual figures in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Thomas: I am sure the Secretary of State will agree that the investment in the European regional development fund has been important to Wales in the years that he has mentioned. Does he agree that it becomes more important as we look to 1992 and beyond, in the context of the single market?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the views expressed in a report made to the Commission last year that the regional fund should be expanded, particularly to attract private capital investment into regions, to ensure that the objective of the fund — to cope with the problems arising out of the European market—can be met after 1992?

Mr. Walker: Obviously the fund has had an important role to play, and obviously Wales has a considerable interest in the terms and conditions on which it will be operated. I am anxious that the views of the problems of Wales are fully understood by the Commission when its future plans are decided.

Mr. Knox: Can my right hon. Friend assess the consequences for employment of these not inconsiderable grants?

Mr. Walker: Obviously, they are substantial. Some of them are difficult to measure in employment terms, because they have an indirect effect on employment, but such amounts have had a considerable impact on the improving employment position in Wales.

Mr. Rogers: As the Secretary of State well knows, the European funds are linked to what was the treaty of Paris in regard to the Coal and Steel Community, and are now subsumed within the European Community. In view of that link, does he believe that south Wales will be badly affected and that colliery closures will result from the recently announced electricity privatisation plans?

Mr. Walker: No, Sir.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Given the growing importance of the European regional development fund in providing employment in Wales, will my right hon. Friend accept that great importance attaches to the composition of Welsh representation in the European Parliament, and that it is vital that we send there people who really intend to make a success of it?

Mr. Walker: Yes.

Mr. Roy Hughes: May I revert to the inadequate reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers)? Is the Secretary of State making any calculations about how much European support will be necessary if the south Wales coalfield is forced to close down as a result of the implementation of the Government's proposals for the electricity supply industry? How real and how serious is his opposition to the proposals? Is he prepared to lay his job on the line, as was suggested in yesterday's *Sunday Telegraph*?

Mr. Walker: Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I have had the privilege of being a member of Cabinets for most of the past 18 years. If the hon. Gentleman had ever had that privilege, he would understand that he could put forward whatever views he liked, and I am sure that they would be listened to with the enthusiasm and cordiality with which my views are always received.

Following is the information:

Net commitment to Wales from the European regional development fund was £17·1 million in 1978, £21·7 million in 1979, £32·5 million in 1980, £24·8 million in 1981, £43·7 million in 1982, £45·1 million in 1983, £63 million in 1984, £54·9 million in 1985, £59·5 million in 1986 and £53·8 million in 1987.

Rating Reform

2. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has received from district councils in Wales, and the Committee of Welsh District Councils, on the implementation of the poll tax in Wales.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ian Grist): My right hon. Friend has received no recent representations.

Mr. Murphy: Does the Minister agree that recent proposals which the Association of District Councils in Wales has put before the Government to spread the burden of the poll tax more evenly among the 37 Welsh districts are the only means by which the effect of the tax can be mitigated for the Welsh? Does he agree that his right hon. Friend's most welcome Valley initiative would be to accept the proposal and so ease the burden of this unjust, unfair and unwanted tax?

Mr. Grist: The hon. Gentleman knows very well, as he is on the Local Government Finance Bill Standing Committee with me, that the needs element of the grants

will take care of the differentiation between the different areas in Wales. As for the rest of his questions, I think that time will have to elapse.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I congratulate my hon. Friend on last week's excellent decision to remove caravan parks from community charge and make them non-domestic rated. This will be most welcome in Wales and will help the tourist industry.

Mr. Grist: Indeed, and it proves that it is the Government who are the listening party, not others who make similar claims.

Mr. Barry Jones: Will the Minister and the Secretary of State promise to read carefully today's *Daily Post*, in which a feature article discusses aspects of the poll tax and says that the Duke of Westminster could be £8,000 a year better off, Lady Pilkington could be £2,000 a year better off and Lord Derby could be £7,000 a year better off? Is it not an immoral tax which enables that to happen when ordinary people must contend with increased prescription charges? Is it not time that the Government withdrew the Local Government Finance Bill?

Mr. Grist: Not at all. The vast majority of people will benefit from the Bill, as the hon. Gentleman knows, and the least well off will be able to benefit from rebates.

Mr. Raffan: In view of the serious effect that the community charge could have on religious orders which have taken a vow of poverty and have no income of their own, will my hon. Friend do his utmost to ensure that they are exempted?

Will he also consider issuing an explanatory leaflet on the community charge to every household in Wales to counteract the lies in Labour's leaflet, which misleadingly states that if people do not register they will not be able to vote?

Mr. Grist: As to the first part of my hon. Friend's question, he will know that the Government are looking into the matter most sympathetically. As to the latter part of his question, I hope that my hon. Friend keeps up his good work in putting the right arguments.

Mr. Wigley: Is the "listening Government" listening to the representations being made about sporting facilities, especially non-commercial sporting facilities, such as indoor squash and tennis courts? Will the Minister assure us that the Government will bring forward an amendment to give a statutory exemption to such facilities, bearing in mind that they are exempting commercial fish farms and open-air sporting facilities?

Mr. Grist: I can give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that that matter is being considered sympathetically.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the community charge does not come to pass there will have to be a general revaluation and that the valleys of south Wales will feel the greatest upward effect from it? Is that not a further special reason why we need the community charge as the only practical and fair reform?

Mr. Grist: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is an ironic effect. A revaluation would often hit poorer areas rather surprisingly, not least because the areas which in 1973 had highly rated assets of garages and central heating, for example, have recently been overtaken by much poorer areas which have recently had the same assets installed, so they would find that their rateable values rose fairly rapidly by comparison.

NHS (Funding)

4. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to meet representatives of health authorities in Wales to discuss the funding of the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I met health authority chairmen in November and discussed a range of funding issues. Revenue funding has increased by 9·1 per cent. for 1987-88 over 1986-87.

My next meeting is likely to take place in June.

Mr. Davies: When the Secretary of State meets representatives from the Mid Glamorgan health authority, will he have anything to offer them to help meet their estimated £3·8 million shortfall during the coming financial year? Is he aware that one of the consequences of his cuts is a nursing shortage which is so severe that, in some geriatric hospitals in Mid Glamorgan, terminally ill patients are being left to face their final hours without any nursing care? Does he not think that we should do something about that?

Mr. Walker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will bear in mind the cash increase in revenue funding for Mid Glamorgan health authority this year of £10·5 million, or nearly 9 per cent., over the 1986-87 figure, and the growth in recurrent revenue resources from 1978-79 to date, which has increased by nearly 30 per cent.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: Why is the Secretary of State not funding a single intensive care cot anywhere in Wales?

Mr. Walker: From his interest in this subject, the hon. Gentleman knows about the improvement in care for young babies and that the improvement in the mortality rate has been substantial. I hope that that improvement will continue.

Mr. Forth: In the light of improvements in the number of patients treated and the funding which my right hon. Friend has announced, and which is welcome in Wales, is he surprised that some health authorities claim that a crisis has overtaken them without any warning and that they have not done more to deal with the problems which they claim exist? Will he invite those same authorities to submit their positive plans for improvement of the Health Service as part of the review now being undertaken by the Government?

Mr. Peter Walker: Financial budgeting and financial management reviews are taking place and they are extremely important. My hon. Friend mentioned the number of patients being treated, and that is considerable. The number of in-patients treated is 84,000 a year up on the number treated when we took office, and the number of out-patients treated is 76,000 a year up on the number treated when we took office.

Mr. Geraint Howells: Will the Secretary of State consider giving extra financial aid to the East Dyfed health authority so that it can build the second phase of Bronglais hospital at Aberystwyth?

Mr. Walker: All such matters under the capital investment programme come up for discussion, and obviously they will be given proper consideration.

Mr. Alan Williams: I am sure the Secretary of State will recognise that we are discussing the future spending on health in Wales against a background, not just of shortages of nurses and doctors and the lowest number of hospital beds available since the Health Service was set up, but of unforgivable waiting lists. Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that, on the basis of his published spending plans for the next three years, he could spend £230 million more on health in Wales if he achieved only the average annual increase that was achieved under the last Labour Administration? *[Interruption.]* As the right hon. Gentleman laughs at that, may I put to him a more modest objective? May I point out to him that, astonishingly, he could spend £191 million more if only he——

Mr. Forth: Is this a question?

Mr. Williams: Yes it is. The hon. Gentleman is not a Welsh Member and he should let us ask Welsh questions in our own way.

Does the Secretary of State not realise that he could be spending £191 million more if only he sustained a level achieved by his late, unlamented predecessor? Therefore, does he not appreciate that in Wales——

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This is is not a question.

Mr. Williams: Yes it is. I have asked a series of questions and I want answers.

Mr. Speaker: Order. But please not too many questions.

Mr. Williams: I have no doubt that you, Mr. Speaker, are directing your comments at the Conservative Benches as well.

Does the Secretary of State not recognise that in Welsh eyes it does not take much to do better than Nicholas Edwards, but it takes either sheer incompetence or wilful neglect to do worse?

Mr. Walker: In the long history of shadow Secretaries of State for Wales there cannot have been a worse one than the present incumbent. I leave the right hon. Gentleman to explain how it was that, in the last year of the Labour Government of which he was a Minister and, therefore, had partial responsibility, waiting lists in Wales increased by more than in any other year in history. It is interesting that he said that there are now fewer beds available, but he did not mention that there are now 4,000 more nurses, many more doctors and many more patients being treated.

Hospitals

6. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will ensure that consideration of future hospital plans in the counties of Wales involves adequate opportunities for public comment based on full information on *(a)* the impact on services to patients, *(b)* the relationship to community medical services and general practice and *(c)* detailed financial appraisals.

Mr. Grist: This is already accepted policy.

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Does he share my concern that the financial appraisal that was promised by the South Glamorgan health authority when it launched its plans last October is still not available? That appraisal was promised originally for December, and then for January. In the light of the delay in providing that financial appraisal, it was promised that there would be an extended period for consultation. Will the Minister press the health authority to expedite the provision of that information, without which, as I am sure the Minister will agree, it is impossible to make sense of the health authority's recommendations?

Mr. Grist: As far as I am aware, the consultation process is proceeding normally. If the hon. Gentleman has a point that he would like to make to me afterwards, I shall be willing to listen.

Mr. Morgan: In relation to the problems of South Glamorgan, will the Minister comment on the severe shortage of cardiology facilities, which occasioned last week's extraordinary announcement that the health authority intended to spend more than £500,000 on contracting out operations to a private sector hospital? Will he comment on that issue, in the light of the fact that, before the 1983 general election, the former Secretary of State promised that cardiology facilities in South Glamorgan — intended to serve the whole of south Wales — would be doubled from their existing level and yet, six years later, that promise has still not been made good?

Mr. Grist: I am a little concerned that the hon. Gentleman will not have a supplementary left for his question 21 on this very subject. It is worth pointing out that South Glamorgan was given £385,000 by the Department in the current year to conclude its programme of 600 operations. We shall wait until the year end to see how South Glamorgan achieves that.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: What would my hon. Friend's attitude be to proposals from specialist companies to build and run a new hospital on the waterfront in Cardiff — or, for that matter, anywhere else — so emulating the excellent success already achieved by the new kidney dialysis units in Wales?

Mr. Grist: With interest, but clearly we would have to consider such a proposal when it arrived.

Mr. Coleman: In light of the criticisms voiced about West Glamorgan health authority's proposals to re-site the Neath general hospital, will the Minister undertake to ensure that when representations are made to him regarding the siting of that hospital the fact that there has not been adequate public consultation is borne very much in mind?

Mr. Grist: Clearly, all representations will be borne in mind, and the hon. Gentleman's views on this matter are well known.

Agricultural Services

7. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has any plans to reorganise his Department's agricultural services, in particular in north and mid Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: No, Sir. I consider existing arrangements to be satisfactory for present purposes.

Mr. Jones: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. However, I am sure he is aware that to keep the services at their present level — in north Wales at least — he needs to keep the Ruthin office, open. Employees at that office are very concerned about the future, bearing in

mind that financial input in new building is needed for that office to remain open and continue to provide a service in its area.

Mr. Walker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will make inquiries into who has been so enthusiastic in spreading rumours about the closure of the office. There are no plans to close the Ruthin office and it is a great pity that unfounded rumours continue despite the assurances that have been given.

Mr. Livsey: Will the Secretary of State ensure that there are sufficient farm management advisers — the number will need to be increased — to tackle the financial crisis in Welsh family farms, and will he make extra provision for marketing schemes in Wales?

Mr. Walker: Much can be done on the marketing side. Last Friday I had discussions with the WDA about how we could improve still further the marketing of various products from Wales.

Occupational Health Care

8. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he is planning any initiatives in the field of occupational health care.

Mr. Grist: Initiatives in work place health care are undertaken on my right hon. Friend's behalf by the Welsh Health Promotion Authority.

Mr. Griffiths: No doubt the Minister will be aware of the trade-union inspired scheme of heart health screening undertaken at RAF St. Athan, in the constituency of the hon. Member for the Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower). Several of my constituents were involved in that scheme. At £17 the screening is far cheaper than at a BUPA hospital, where it costs £100. Will the Minister consider supporting and extending such schemes across Wales, given that every year five out of every thousand employees die of a heart attack and 6,000 working days are lost at a cost of £200,000?

Mr. Grist: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this extremely serious matter. We welcome any such initiatives, and I am glad to say that many employers take advantage of these Welsh heart programme schemes for the benefit of their working people. They include major companies such as Parke Davies, Texaco, British Airways, BICC Power Cables, British Gas (Wales) and the Polytechnic of Wales, and we should like involvement to be much more widespread.

Mr. Raffan: Is my hon. Friend aware that many hon. Members share the concern of the Welsh Health Promotion Authority about the proposed minor role of health education in the national curriculum? Surely my hon. Friend must agree that health education in schools is a wise investment and that prevention is preferable to and more cost effective than cure.

Mr. Grist: Certainly, but that should be a part of the curriculum of life, which I hope all decent schools would teach.

Mr. Rowlands: Is the Minister aware of the important high technology wound dressings made in my constituency? Will he assure the House that lack of resources will not prevent these dressings from being made available on prescription and thus ameliorating the condition of a large number of people in my constituency and in Britain as a whole?

Mr. Grist: I think the hon. Gentleman knows that the dressing to which he referred is currently being tested.

Bible Translation (400th Anniversary)

9. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to mark the 400th anniversary of the translation of the Bible into Welsh.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Mr. Wyn Roberts): Arrangements for numerous events throughout Wales to mark this most important anniversary are being co-ordinated by a committee chaired by the former Archbishop of Wales, the Right Reverend G. O. Williams. I am very pleased that the Welsh Office has been able to contribute £25,000 towards the costs of the committee.

Mr. Butler: I welcome my hon. Friend's reply. As the Welsh Office co-operated in the new translation of the Bible into Welsh, I trust that that translation will be better than the modern English versions of some liturgical matters.

Mr. Roberts: I am bound to say that we have not contributed to the translation as such. However, I am sure that it will be a good one. We have given a grant of some £7,500 to the Welsh joint education committee to assist local education authorities with the cost of purchasing copies of the new translation.

Mr. John: Would not the best practical way of celebratong Bishop Morgan's translation be the provision of a specific sum of money to provide textbooks in Welsh for A-level subjects such as economics?

Mr. Roberts: That is certainly one of the many ways in which the translation of the Bible might be celebrated. I hasten to assure the hon. Gentleman that we give considerable support to the provision of textbooks and teaching materials.

Dr. Thomas: Since it was an Act of Parliament of 1563 that ordered the Welsh bishops to produce a translation into Welsh, is it not about time that the Welsh Office responded to the consultation on the new Welsh language Act?

Mr. Roberts: The hon. Gentleman knows that it was about 20 years after that Act before the Bible was translated into Welsh. We are consulting. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is meeting various organisations concerned with the language in Wales. He has set up a group under my chairmanship and we are considering actively the next moves forward with regard to the promotion of the language. Of course, legislation may be one of the options before us.

Labour Statistics

10. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were in employment in 1979 and at the latest available date in *(a)* Cardiff and *(b)* Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: The latest available figure for numbers in employment in Wales is 1,021,000 at September 1987. The figure is derived from a Department

of Employment quarterly series of employees and the annual labour force survey of some 3,000 households in Wales. The corresponding figure for September 1979 was 1,160,000. There is no comparable information on employment in Cardiff.

Mr. Jones: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the numbers in employment are at least as valid as the statistics for unemployment? Can he assure me that the surveys to which he referred are sufficiently accurate and that there are now much better rates for finding jobs for the long-term unemployed and school leavers, which are two important areas?

Mr. Walker: It is difficult to assess accurately. The figures are the result of a survey of 3,000 households, which has been the consistent survey over that period of years. On the matter of employment prospects, one of the most interesting figures is the enormous percentage increase that has taken place over the past 15 months in jobs advertised in the main Welsh newspapers.

I am delighted to tell my hon. Friend that the fall in long-term unemployment in Wales over the past 12 months has been greater than in any other region of the country, as has the fall in Welsh youth unemployment.

Mr. Anderson: Has the Secretary of State noticed that the earnings of those in employment in Wales have sunk to next to bottom of the league table in the United Kingdom because of the loss of high-wage steel and coal jobs and their replacement with low-wage, retail, part-time jobs? Is that worrying the Welsh Office and, if so, what is it doing about it? Is it content to see Wales as a low-wage economy?

Mr. Walker: No, Sir. I am delighted, as, no doubt, is the hon. Gentleman, about the substantial number of manufacturing firms that have been opening in Wales during the last period. There is no doubt that the trend, both in service and manufacturing industries, as many more firms come into Wales and many existing firms expand, is very good for earnings in Wales.

Mrs. Clwyd: Will the Secretary of State tell us what prospects there are for my constituents, who have the highest male unemployment rate in Wales? There are no job vacancies registered at the job centre and closure of Lady Windsor colliery at Ynysybwl will push up male unemployment to 34 per cent. Does the right hon. Gentleman not think that the coal industry and the Government have some responsibility for the social consequences in my area when that closure occurs and unemployment reaches those drastic proportions?

Mr. Walker: That is why I am pleased that the Welsh Development Agency will have much more money to spend on advance factories than before. I am pleased that the British Coal Enterprise company is continuing its activities and I know that it will concentrate its activities on those areas where pit closures are taking place.

Mr. Alan Williams: Does the Secretary of State not realise that the figures that he has just announced show that there were 122,000 more people at work in June 1979 than there were in June last year? Indeed, if one leaves out the self-employed, the figure was 170,000 more. Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree——

Mr. Walker: That figure included the self-employed.

Mr. Williams: The right hon. Gentleman was not listening. I gave a figure including the self-employed, and then gave a figure excluding the self-employed. Does he not agree that last week's Government figures show that between June 1983 and June 1987 — the period covered by those figures — Wales was the only region in the United Kingdom to see a fall in the combined numbers of employed and self-employed?

With regard to the right hon. Gentleman's point about the unemployment figures, I note that he suddenly switched to the long-term unemployed. Will he confirm that the latest unemployment figures show that over the past 12 months Wales has seen its rate of change fall below that of the national average and trail behind that of five other regions of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Walker: The right hon. Gentleman's desire always to depict—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question"]. He really should have the answers. I am delighted to say that the figures for youth unemployment and for long-term unemployment in Wales were the best of any region in the country in the past 12 months. *[Interruption.]* I am also delighted to say that 1987 was a year of record inward investment. The right hon. Gentleman is now becoming the one lonely voice in Wales who thinks that things are going badly for Wales.

Water Rates

11. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the average domestic and industrial water rate bill for 1988-89 is attributable to *(a)* Welsh water authority financial targets having to be above break-even, *(b)* current cost accounting having to be used in place of long-term loans, *(c)* Welsh water having to bear the cost of paying the capital and interest repayments on the debt of £450 million and *(d)* the cost of raising beach bathing cleanliness standards to EEC limits.

Mr. Grist: The assessment of water charges is a matter for the Welsh water authority. The authority estimates that the information asked for is as follows: *(a)* 16 per cent., *(b)* 15 per cent., *(c)* 24 per cent., and *(d)* 4 per cent.

Mr. Flynn: The large sum, almost £20, added to the bills of every ratepayer in Wales as a result of the changes in domestic rate relief means that way over half the total cost of rate bills in Wales is due to Government policy. Will the Minister admit that the Government have imposed on Welsh water ratepayers a financial straitjacket that is entirely artificial and contrived? The figure has increased by more than twice the rate of inflation for many years now. When will the Government stop this long-running confidence trick against the payers of water rates in Wales and introduce a little fairness into the system?

Mr. Grist: I believe that the Welsh water authority, as run at present, is a great success for the people of Wales. In the Welsh water authority we inherited, in many cases, ill-run facilities. Under the Government capital expenditure in the authority has risen by 33 per cent., compared with 11 per cent. under the Labour Government. If one considers why charges have sometimes increased, one finds that it is because that investment was ignored in the past.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Does the Minister agree with the way in which the charges have been levied? There was a whopping increase of over 20 per cent. in standing charges,

as a result of which rich people have a proportionally lower increase, whereas poorer households have a 20 per cent. increase in their water charges this year.

Mr. Grist: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the Welsh water authority is implementing as a policy the raising of the standing charge element until it represents 50 per cent. of the average bill, which reflects the fact that 90 per cent. of all costs are fixed.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Does the Minister appreciate that his answers are unsatisfactory? Does he realise, for instance, that in recent years charges in Newport have increased by 2,500 per cent. and that standing charges in Wales will soon be the highest in Britain—£36 compared with £6 in Yorkshire? Can the hon. Gentleman not see how this is damaging industry, let alone causing hardship for households? When will he get rid of this complacency and do something about this dreadful situation?

Mr. Grist: I do not think that it is a matter of complacency that the Welsh water authority should be run economically and efficiently. That is precisely what the Government have been ensuring.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that the financial targets could be reached with far lower charges for consumers if the Welsh water authority did not have an enormous historic debt around its neck? Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the first thing that the Government will do with privatisation is to write off that debt? Why not do it now, so that consumers can get the benefits?

Mr. Grist: I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman would understand that, if the charges, which are rising this year by 8 per cent., were cut the investment needs of the Welsh water authority would have to be met from further borrowing, which would raise the debt interest that the Welsh water authority has to pay in the future.

Labour Statistics

12. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest unadjusted figures for unemployment in *(a)* Newport, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Wales; and if he will give the equivalent figures for 1979 on the most nearly comparable basis.

Mr. Peter Walker: On 14 January 1988 the numbers of unemployed claimants in Newport district, Gwent and Wales were 8,071, 23,451 and 148,477 respectively. Unadjusted figures for 1979 are not available on a basis that enables a valid comparison to be made.

Mr. Hughes: When will the Secretary of State realise that, despite all the trumpet-blowing and all the massaging of the statistics, these unemployment figures are still appalling? Although we welcome the setting up of the Patent Office in Newport, does the right hon. Gentleman appreciate that that will be of little benefit overall if we lose the Passport Office? When will the right hon. Gentleman sort out the issue of premises for that valuable establishment?

Mr. Walker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his usual optimistic and eager response. The unemployment figures for Wales are still exceedingly bad and great progress needs to be made. I know how the hon. Gentleman will rejoice in the knowledge that in the past 12 months there has been the biggest fall in unemployment in Wales since the war, that the number of WDA lettings and number of inward investment firms have broken all-time records, and that not just the Patent Office but the Trustee Savings bank, with 2,000 jobs, have decided to go to Newport. In the interests of Newport, it is time that the hon. Gentleman cheered up.

Mr. Ray Powell: Does the Secretary of State appreciate that only when he can report to us and the nation that unemployment in Wales is the same level as in 1979, when the right hon. Gentleman and his Government took office, can we start waving our daffodils on St. David's day, which is tomorrow, and the day when we should have our debate instead of on Wednesday?

Mr. Walker: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman. I shall not even be satisfied when unemployment reaches the 1979 figures. As the hon. Gentleman knows, under the Labour Government, unemployment increased substantially too.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Does my right hon. Friend accept that there will be great disappointment if the trend is the same as in 1979—inexorably upwards?

Mr. Walker: Yes. There was an upward trend in unemployment. Unemployment in Wales has increased considerably, so I shall not be content with the 1979 figures with which the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) would be satisfied.

Common Agricultural Policy

13. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the implications for the Welsh farming industry of the decisions of the European Community Brussels summit regarding reform of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Peter Walker: The stabiliser arrangements will have an impact on future trends in agriculture, but the impact on Welsh agriculture will be particularly affected by future negotiations.

Mr. Jones: Is the Secretary of State aware of the considerable anxiety in Wales as a result of the recent Brussels agreement, particularly about the effect of stabilisers on the sheep sector? Will the Secretary of State now make it clear that he will not just consider representing, but will represent, the interests of our farmers in any future talks in Brussels, so that we can ensure that the sheepmeat regime is kept intact? Will he further agree with me that the European regional and social fund must be expanded to ensure that rural areas in Wales can benefit from diversification schemes?

Mr. Walker: It is obvious that the future income for sheep and beef producers is of fundamental importance for Wales, so in all Community and national negotiations I shall play a full and eager part.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that the considerable hardship facing Welsh farmers is due to the disparity in the green pound? When the next farm price review comes round, will he press his right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to bear the special problems of Wales very much in mind?

Mr. Peter Walker: I understand my hon. Friend's concern, and I know that it is a matter that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture is considering carefully.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Rating Reform

25. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, what further representations the commissioners have received from *(a)* clergy and *(b)* tenants or leaseholders of the commissioners regarding the effects of the proposed poll tax.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing Church Commissioners): The commissioners have no responsibility for the rates on properties let to tenants and leaseholders, and have received no representations from them. They continue to receive letters from clergy and church members about the loss of charitable relief on clergy accommodation and the financial implications which the Government's proposals pose for the Churches.

Mr. Allen: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is outrage among the clergy in Nottingham and among the other religious denominations which will be hit very hard by the poll tax? They will have none of the relief on rates currently available, and they will suffer for it. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether there are likely to be concessions or exemptions for Anglican and other clergy? If there are, will he ask for them to be extended to old-age pensioners in my constituency, who will also suffer under the poll tax?

Mr. Alison: I hope that the hon. Member will reassure at least the Anglican clergy whom he represents that it is unlikely that they will have to pay the community charge, any more than at present they pay rates. I am afraid that I cannot speak about the prospects for non-conformist clergy, but I have no doubt that the leaders of the non-conformist denominations will probably follow the pattern of the Church of England.

Mr. Forth: Does my hon. Friend agree that where someone, cleric or otherwise, has the vote, uses local services and receives an income of some kind, it is quite right and proper that he should be asked to pay the same contribution to local government finances as any one else?

Mr. Alison: Yes. There is no question but that the community charge will be paid. At present, under the existing rating system, clergy are internally exempted, in that the Church Commissioners pay the rates. Under the community charge, the likelihood is that it will be paid direct on their behalf.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Why does the hon. Gentleman not have a word with his right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? Why does he not put it to him that he should stop belly-aching and knocking the Church and the bishops, and spend a bit more time meeting the needs of the farmers?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about the poll tax. I do not think that that arises.

Mr. Alison: If I have any communication with my right hon. Friend the Minister of State I shall find myself answering questions about mangel-wurzels. I do not want to have to do that.

Clergymen

26. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the right hon. Member of Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, what has been the number of clergymen in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Alison: The total number of full-time stipendiary clergymen at the end of 1978 was 11,409; at the end of 1987 there were 10,624. In 1987 the first women deacons were ordained, increasing the total of full-time stipendiary clergy to 11,063. I shall arrange for full details to be published in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the vast bulk of the clergy work long and anti-social hours, often with little material reward? Does he agree also that one of the functions of the clergy—and, one hopes, of the bishops—further is to give a moral lead to their congregations? Does he further agree that, as one would not expect a bishop to sponsor adulterers for ordination, one can agree with those bishops who are refusing to sponsor practising homosexuals?

Mr. Alison: The Church Commissioners have no direct responsibility for ordination, selection or training. It is unlikely that an avowedly practising homosexual would be recommended for ordination or ordained by a bishop in the Church of England. It would scarcely be compatible with a clergyman's pastoral duties for the teaching of Christian personal ethics to recommend ordination.

Following is the information:

Full-time stipendiary clergymen

Year	*Number at end of year*
1978	11,409
1979	11,279
1980	11,053
1981	10,882
1982	10,789
1983	10,807
1984	10,749
1985	10,672
1986	10,649
1987	10,624

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Select Committees

27. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what will be the total spending by each Select Committee on overseas visits by the end of financial year 1987-88; and what submissions were made by each committee to justify their journey.

Mr. A. J. Beith (On behalf of the House of Commons Commission): It is anticipated that the gross total outturn for 1987-88 for overseas travel will be the £290,865. I shall arrange for the total for each Committee to be published in the *Official Report*. The Commission has no knowledge of submissions made by individual Committees, as responsibility for deciding on such submissions within the budget determined by the Commission has been delegated to the Liaison Committee.

Mr. Allen: I am not one of those hon. Members who feel that hon. Members should never travel abroad.

Anything that broadens the minds of hon. Members, particularly of Conservative Members, is welcome. However, will the hon. Gentleman concede that for hon. Members to go abroad with no programme of work, but just a desire to go abroad, brings an honourable system into disrepute? It may be seen as being part of a free-trips policy, with which I am sure hon. Members would not wish to be associated. In future, will the hon. Gentleman try to ensure that before hon. Members go abroad on Select Committee visits, the Select Committee has put forward a sensible programme of work to him, which should include the reasons for the visit?

Mr. Beith: Some time ago the Commission took the decision that these matters were best dealt with by the Liaison Committee, to which each Committee must defend its proposed visits. The House has seen fit to set up Select Committees and give them responsibilities, which include considering the overseas activities of Government Departments and the implications for the House of matters that take place overseas. It is now the job of the Liaison Committee to spend appropriately within a budget on that work.

Mr. Holt: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the opposite of broad-mindedness is narrow-mindedness? It would not be in the best interests of Parliament or the Government if the House were to adopt the policies that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Allen) has espoused. Insulting remarks have been directed towards the Chairmen of Committees, but those Chairmen go to a great deal of trouble to ensure that the work is correct for those who go overseas and that reports that the Committees make to the House are in the best interests of everyone.

Mr. Beith: The Liaison Committee is chaired by the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), who takes these considerations into account very carefully when doing his work.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the hon. Gentleman say whether this expenditure on Select Committees is a record? As they were set up so late, they seem to have got through a remarkable amount of money.

Mr. Beith: The total amount budgeted for has increased by roughly no more than the rate of inflation year by year, but the Commission has taken the view that the expenditure for the current year should be underspent in view of the late time in the Session that the Committees were set up. No doubt, when the total outturn is seen, that will be taken into account by the Commission when looking at next year's total.

Following is the information:

The gross total expenditure expected to be incurred by each select committee on overseas travel in financial year 1987-88 is as follows:

Select Committees	*Projected year ending out-turn* £	
Agriculture	34,511	(316)
Defence	26,982	(2,160)
Education Science and Arts	10,043	(10,043)
Employment	31,821	(1,920)
Environment	10,872	—
European Legislation	28,993	(1,730)
Foreign Affairs	42,616	(748)
Home Affairs	15,139	(206)
Procedure	31	(31)
Social Services	2,235	(2,235)
Trade and Industry	49,142	(4,788)
Transport	38,164	(32)
Treasury and Civil Service	316	(316)
	£290,865	(24,525)

Notes:
The figures in brackets show expenditure incurred in respect of visits made prior to 31 March 1987, which has been brought to account in the current financial year. Much of the rest of the projected expenditure comprises estimates of the cost of overseas travel not yet undertaken but planned for the period up to 31 March. Actual expenditures may eventually be somewhat lower, depending on the number of persons travelling.

WALES

Labour Statistics

14. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of unemployed in Wales at the latest date; what it was in May 1979; and what is the total and percentage increase.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Walker): The seasonally adjusted numbers of unemployed claimants in Wales at May 1979 and January 1988 were 73,100 and 137,700 respectively, which I am pleased to say has decreased by 21 per cent. over the past 20 months.

Mr. Jones: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Alyn and Deeside district council is experiencing problems in obtaining control over the site of the redundant Connah's Quay power station? Does the right hon. Gentleman know that it is estimated that £50 million would be needed to recommission this redundant power station? Is he aware that the fixed costs of staying connected to the grid would be prohibitive? Does he agree that this site is very important for my council for economic and social reasons? Will he help that district council?

Mr. Walker: That is a matter for the commercial judgment of the CEGB. I understand that the board will judge all proposals on their merits given its statutory duties. I cannot interfere with those statutory duties.

Sir Raymond Gower: Is it not an advantage that people in Wales are now employed in a wide variety of industry, whereas some years ago they were employed in two or three major industries which were susceptible to a very large decline in manpower?

Mr. Walker: Yes. I believe that the two main industries concerned — coal and steel — are in a position of considerable strength for the future. The decline in manpower in those industries is certainly coming to an end. That will greatly strengthen future trends in the Welsh economy.

Mr. Win Griffiths: As the Secretary of State had to shout previously, will he tell us exactly when unemployment in Wales will be below the figures for 1979? It has been on a downward trend for a long time.

Mr. Walker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, there has been an enormous decline in the numbers employed in the coal and steel industries. I am glad to say that the figures that I have given show an enormous increase in employment during the past 20 months. That trend is

continuing. With the capital investment programme of the WDA and the present inward investment, I hope that that trend will continue.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Televised Proceedings

28. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what representations he has received concerning the proposed televising of the House.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): I have received representations from a number of sources, including right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr. Favell: During the recent debate my right hon. Friend said that he had had preliminary discussions with the broadcasters about editorial control. Have there been any further discussions with broadcasters on that subject? In view of the influence that television is having on the American presidential primaries, is it not clear that television is the most powerful medium of all and that the possibility of it slanting a debate one way or another makes it a powerful tool?

Mr. Wakeham: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. These matters are within the scope of the Select Committee's remit, and obviously the Select Committee will want to address its mind to them. The House will have the opportunity to consider the Select Committee's recommendations in due course.

Mr. Beith: Is it not vital that sufficient time is made available on the air for coverage to enable professional editors fairly to represent the opinions within the House that are presented in debate?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman is right. I do not think that the amount of time the broadcasters choose to use for television broadcasting is a matter for me.

Mr. Stokes: In spite of all the difficulties involved, does my right hon. Friend agree that now is the time for all hon. Members, whether or not they voted for the proposal to televise the House, to make the best they can of the new situation, or at worst to engage in damage limitation?

Mr. Wakeham: As is so often the case, my hon. Friend speaks for the whole House.

Mr. Boyes: The Lord President of the Council will be aware that many hon. Members believe that the absence of photographs in the House is deplorable. Now that television cameras will be let into the Chamber, will he consider allowing photographers into the Chamber to take pictures? If such representations are made, will he or the Select Committee consider them?

Mr. Wakeham: The Committee, in arranging for the conducting of an experiment in public broadcasting, will have quite enough work without considering the hon. Gentleman's point. Perhaps we shall have to consider that matter in some other way.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Has my right hon. Friend watched the televising of the House of Lords, and has he noticed that when controversial Bills are under discussion the commentators do not leave the viewers to decide for themselves, but add such comments as "This is the fifth speaker against the Government."? That is quite unnecessary—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must let the hon. Lady finish her question.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The commentator may well say, "This is the fifth speaker against the Bill.". Is that not editing of the worst order? It should be up to the listeners to judge for themselves.

Mr. Wakeham: I am sure that if the House were to be televised the public would expect there to be a balance for and against the Government in any broadcast. Such matters are highly relevant to the work of the Select Committee.

Strangers' Gallery

29. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many admission orders were issued for entry to the Public Gallery in the most recent Session for which figures are available.

Mr. Wakeham: Since parliamentary Sessions vary in length, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will find it helpful if I give him the average annual figure over the past three calendar years 1985-87, which is 160,201 admission orders.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to the Lord Presient of the Council for his reply. What steps is he taking to encourage more visits to the Strangers' Gallery? Is it not about time that we opened some real public restaurants and facilities in this place? That would encourage people to come here and could, indeed, turn the Palace of Westminster into a real people's palace. Even if televising the House of Commons turned into the most boring show on earth, which I doubt, given the experience in the House of Lords, even one night's broadcast of what goes on in this place would reach more people than could visit the Stangers' Gallery over about four or five years.

Mr. Wakeham: With hon. Members getting tickets in rotation — two orders every nine days — if the hon. Gentleman has any spare tickets, I am happy to make use of them for my constituents. Most hon. Members could deal with more admission orders than they currently get. The Galleries are well used without the attractions that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that hon. Members are responsible for members of the public for whom they obtain tickets for the Strangers' Gallery? It is their responsibility when they misbehave. What action has he taken against hon. Members when it is quite obvious that they have allowed into the Strangers' Gallery people who intend to demonstrate?

Mr. Wakeham: I am sure that the House will expect any hon. Member who facilitates a member of the public going into the Strangers' Gallery to hold himself responsible for the conduct of that person, in so far as he is able to do so. What action should be taken against any hon. Member who, by neglect or other means, lets into the House somebody whom he should not let in is not a matter for me.

Mr. Dalyell: There is desperate pressure for tickets. Has the Lord President of the Council ever looked up to the

Strangers' Gallery, just before 3 o'clock, and seen many empty seats? Our colleagues have to queue from 2 o'clock onwards to get tickets. It is not the case that, too often, with the system of rotational tickets, colleagues on both sides of the House pocket their tickets in case they want to use them, find that they do not need them, and forget to return them to the Admission Order Office, while people who really want tickets cannot get them? Should not the rotational system be looked at?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman has raised this matter in the past. On many days, all admission orders are issued. The time until 3 pm is allowed for those visitors whose arrival has been delayed. At 3 pm, any unoccupied seats are allocated to people waiting in the public queue. That is the general system. It has worked to most people's satisfaction, but if the hon. Gentleman thinks that it should be looked at, I shall see what can be done.

WALES

Job Creation

15. **Sir Anthony Meyer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many jobs have been provided in Wales during the last period of 12 months for which figures are available by firms based outside the United Kingdom.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Walker): Inward investment projects from outside the United Kingdom secured during 1987 are planned to create or safeguard 5,161 jobs. These were 59 projects, which is an all-time record.

Sir Anthony Meyer: From those figures, and the figures for preceding years, is it not clear that Wales was, and remains, exceptionally attractive to inward investors? Will my right hon. Friend continue his extremely successful efforts to attract still further investment in the Principality?

Mr. Walker: I am pleased to say that the available figures for 1987 show that Wales was the leading region in the United Kingdom for attracting inward investment.

Psychiatric Treatment (Powys)

16. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on arrangements for the provision of psychiatric hospital treatment in Powys.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ian Grist): The provision of psychiatric hospital treatment in Powys is a matter for the Powys health authority in the first instance.

Mr. Livsey: Does the Minister agree that because of the present enlightened conditions in psychiatric hospitals patients are far better treated there than in the community? Will he insists that Powys health authority keeps the same number of beds in the Mid Wales hospital at Talgarth as it has now?

Mr. Grist: On the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question, that must be a matter for the local health authority. On the first part, he must await the Welsh Office mental illness strategy, which will be published soon.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons Mr. John Wakeham): With permission Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a short statement about the rearranged business for this week:

TUESDAY 1 MARCH—Until about seven o'clock, motions on a Social Security Order and Regulations. Details are in the *Official Report*.

Resumption of the adjourned debate on the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts 1978 and 1987 (Continuance) Order.

Motion on the Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order.

WEDNESDAY 2 MARCH—There will be a debate on Welsh affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Motions on the Coal Industry (Restructuring Grants) and (Limit on Deficit Grants) Orders.

Motion on the annual report from the European Court of Auditors for 1986. Details are in the *Official Report*.

The business for the remainder of the week remains unchanged.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I thank the Leader of the House for his statement and welcome the opportunity to continue the debate on the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts order, but my colleagues from Scotland and Wales believe that they have not been treated quite as fairly. It appears that the business this week can be changed at the drop of a hat, yet Scottish Members are expected to debate the order on Paisley grammar school at some ungodly hour tonight. If the business for tomorrow could be changed so swiftly to accommodate the needs of Northern Ireland, my right hon. and hon. Friends from Wales believe that it could have been adjusted to enable the debate on Welsh affairs to be held on St. David's day. Apparently it was impossible to make the adjustment last week, but this announcement shows that it would have been possible to make the adjustment this week.

Mr. Wakeham: I thought that I had done pretty well to get the Welsh affairs debate as near to St. David's day as I have done. Before the hon. Gentleman continues in this tone, I suggest that he examines the record of the Labour Government, who often failed to provide time for a debate on Welsh affairs at this time of the year.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Does the Leader of the House agree that, far from giving preferential treatment to Northern Ireland business, the change resulted from a certain amount of bungling by hon. Members on both Front Benches?

Mr. Wakeham: No. The change resulted from an initiative that I took. The House wanted a statement on a major matter, which meant that the time allocated to the Northern Ireland debate, which would otherwise have been satisfactory, was not enough. I thought that the House generally welcomed my action.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): While thanking my right hon. Friend for so promptly and graciously acceding to the wishes of Back-Bench Members on both sides of the House for more time to debate the emergency powers, may I ask whether the necessity to alter the business does not bring out forcefully the unsatisfactory manner in which Northern Ireland business has been handled since the abolition of Stormont?

Mr. Wakeham: I appreciate that hon. Members on both sides of the House believe that our handling of Northern Ireland business is less than ideal, but I have no proposals to change it now.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I assure the Leader of the House that the attachment of Plaid Cymru Members to Wales is not sentimental, so whether the debate takes place on St. David's day, the day before or the day after is immaterial. The important thing is to have regular debates, unlike the position under some Labour Administrations — [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Before Conservative Members cheer too much, may I ask the Leader of the House to confirm that the debate will be wide-ranging and that there will be no problems about ministerial and departmental responsibility for the subjects covered in the debate? Will the debate cover the role of all Government Departments in Wales, and will the Secretary of State for Wales be free to comment on the activities of the Department of Energy?

Mr. Wakeham: The debate will be on the Adjournment, and that is as wide a basis as possible for a debate in the House. Whether what the hon. Gentleman says is in order will be a matter for you, Mr. Speaker, not for me.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): As some compensation for the slight to Welsh Members, will the Leader of the House consider making arrangements so that in future debates in this place and elsewhere we can discuss the affairs of our country in both the languages of our country? Many of the debating chambers throughout the world succeed in debating in two, three, and sometimes as many as 10, languages. Surely it is within the realms of possibility that in this House, perhaps on an experimental basis at first, we can arrange to debate in both the languages of Wales.

Mr. Wakeham: I have no plans for that at the moment, but if the hon. Gentleman is so sensitive that he considers it a slight to have the Welsh debate on 2 March, he must be positively insulted by the record of the previous Labour Government.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): As there are more people living in the west midlands than in Wales, and as more languages are spoken in the west midlands than in Wales, does my right hon. Friend agree that the Welsh get far more time in the House than those representing the west midlands, and that it is high time that that was reversed?

Mr. Wakeham: I have no plans to reverse it next week, but I take my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Perhaps the Leader of the House knows that many of us who were born in Wales would associate ourselves with the views that have been expressed about Wednesday.

As the business of the House for tomorrow is being changed, and as it has been announced that the Secretary of State for Defence is giving a written answer today to a question by the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) about the British commandos sent to their death by Waldheim's unit, is there any chance of a statement being made either before or after tomorrow's business,

[Mr. Greville Janner]

because the matters raised in that written question are immensely important? The families of those commandos are still alive, and one of them wrote to me yesterday. They are extremely concerned. It is now clear that not only Waldheim but his family have been involved in those matters in a way that should be brought before the House in a statement, not in a written answer.

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been forthcoming about the Government's attitude to these matters. I cannot promise a statement, but I shall refer the matter to my right hon. Friend.

National Health Service (Charges)

3.37 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about voucher values for spectacles, blood glucose testing strips, and NHS charges from 1 April 1988.

First, on spectacle voucher values, help with the cost of spectacles through the NHS voucher scheme is available to children under 16, full-time students under 19, people on low incomes and those needing complex lenses. The current voucher values were set when the voucher scheme was introduced on 1 July 1986. We have decided to increase them from 1 April 1988 so that, for example, the lowest voucher value will rise by nearly 9 per cent. from £14·25 to £15·50 and the highest voucher value by 28 per cent. from £66 to £85. In the hospital eye service there will be small increases in the maximum charges, which limit the charges to those requiring expensive lenses but not entitled to vouchers, and no increase in the charge for contact lenses.

In setting the new values we have sought to repond to the representations of the Royal National Institute for the Blind by making particularly large increases in vouchers for the more complex spectacles. We also propose a number of other changes to assist with special needs, on which representations have been made. Over and above standard voucher values, there will be a new supplement in the hospital eye service of up to £4 for people prescribed photochromic lenses for clinical reasons and a new supplement of £30 for those whose particular facial characteristics entail specially made frames. There will also be a new supplement of £30 for children who need exceptionally small glasses, available through the general ophthalmic service and the hospital eye service.

The voucher scheme is at present available for contact lenses only if they are prescribed for clinical reasons by the hospital eye service. We propose to end this restriction and to give complete freedom of choice at to whether vouchers are used for spectacles or for contact lenses.

These changes will increase expenditure on the voucher scheme by about £7 million in 1988-89, to a total of more than £65 million.

Secondly, blood glucose testing strips for diabetics. We announced last November our intention to bring about a further improvement in services for diabetics by making such strips available on general practitioner prescription, following the similar action we took last year in respect of disposable syringes for those who need to inject insulin.

Discussions have now been held with the suppliers of the strips, and I am pleased to be able to tell the House that they will be made available on prescription from 1 June this year. Diabetics are, of course, exempt from prescription charges and will therefore receive their supplies free of charge. The cost of this measure in 1988-89 will be around £8 million.

Thirdly, we propose to increase prescription charges broadly in line with the increased cost of medicines. The item charge will rise by 20p from £2.40 to £2.60, an increase of around 8 per cent. The four-monthly season ticket will increase by £1 to £13.50, and the annual season ticket by £2.50 to £37.50. We estimate that the increases will yield over £10 million in 1988-89.

Over three quarters of all items will, of course, continue to be dispensed free of charge under the wide-ranging

exemption arrangements, which cover children, those on low incomes, and everyone over retirement age. The House will also be glad to know that we propose to extend the exemptions for young people to include those under the age of 19 while they remain in full-time education.

Fourthly, dental charges. As the House knows, we have already announced our intention to move from the present complex and anomalous system of charging for dental treatment to a straightforward system of proportionate charging set at 75 per cent. of the cost, subject to a maximum of £150. This new arrangement will apply to all routine dental treatment and crowns from 1 April 1988, and the charges for dentures and bridges will be set as fixed cash amounts at or about the same 75 per cent. level.

We estimate that the changes will yield additional income of about £17 million in 1988-89. However, as many people now pay the full cost of the more limited courses of routine treatment, the cost of many such courses will, in fact, fall. For example, the charge for a scale and polish and two small fillings will come down from £14.20 to £10.65.

We are retaining all the current exemptions — for children, young people aged 16 and 17, students under 19, expectant and nursing mothers and people on low incomes —which mean that nearly half of all courses of dental treatment attract no charge at all. In addition, we intend to bring forward a Government amendment at the Report stage of the Health and Medicines Bill to end the anomaly whereby some young people of 16 and 17, while exempt from charges for treatment, nevertheless have to pay for dentures and bridges. The effect, if the House agrees, will be to exempt them from all dental charges.

In view of the changes to social security benefits that will come into effect on 11 April, I should make it clear to the House that, for the purposes of exemption from prescription and dental charges, of entitlement to spectacle vouchers and of reimbursement of expenses incurred in travelling to hospital for treatment, receipt of income support or family credit will qualify beneficiaries in the same way as supplementary benefit or family income supplement do now. There will also continue to be arrangements for assisting other people on low incomes, based on the new social security framework. Regulations will be laid before the House in due course to establish a single consolidated scheme, which will be both simpler and speedier than with the present arrangements.

Lastly, charges for private patients and overseas visitors. Increases in the central list of charges for private patients, averaging about 6·5 per cent., have already been announced. Charges for overseas visitors will also be increased for 1988-89, by 8·1 per cent. on average for in-patients and 6·5 per cent for out-patients.

Details of the proposed new spectacles voucher values, the prescription and dental charges and the charges for overseas visitors are available in the Vote Office. Regulations giving them effect will be laid before the House shortly. Equivalent measures will be taken by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I should like to give an unqualified welcome to two items in the statement—for both of which the Opposition have pressed. The first is that blood glucose testing strips will be available on prescription. This will be welcomed in all quarters of the House. The second is the announcement that there will be an additional exemption of dental charges for 16 and 17-year-olds, an issue which, the Minister will agree, my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) and her colleagues have been pressing in Committee.

I should like to give a qualified welcome to the announcement on vouchers for spectacles. It is qualified, first, because, as the Minister knows, we are in this difficulty about more complex spectacles only because the Government privatised the entire optical service and, secondly, because the increase in the lower voucher charge is about £1·25, which, the Minister will admit, is less than the likely increase in the price of spectacles from the imposition of VAT, which is calculated to cost another £2 or £3 per pair of spectacles. If the Government intend to accept that European decision, the least that the House might have expected was that they would protect the poorest purchasers of spectacles from its effect.

The Minister will appreciate that his statement will be judged by the fact that this is the tenth increase in prescription charges since the Government came to office. The Minister attempted to defend the increase by saying that it represented the increase in the cost of medicines. Is he aware that the prescription charge is now 13 times the prescription charge of 1979—an increase wildly in excess of the increase in the cost of medicines in the intervening period?

Is the Minister aware that last year the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee estimated that, after last year's increase, one third of the items available on prescription cost less than the face value of the prescription charge? Will the Minister confirm that, as a result of the increase, many drugs will be cheaper to obtain at the retail price than on an NHS prescription? Does he agree that the exemptions to which he referred do not include chronic conditions, such as cystic fibrosis, asthma, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and schizophrenia, and that it is wholly wrong that people who suffer from chronic conditions which require significant medication should have to pay for their presccription charges?

I remind the Minister of the statement of the chairman of the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee that 2,000 people forgo part of their prescriptions every week because they cannot afford the charges. Is that not what the Minister would have expected, as an advocate of the law of supply and demand? Is it not precisely the effect that he would have predicted—people responding to an increase in prices by taking up fewer treatments? Is it not entirely wrong that they should be priced out of the treatment that they need?

The Minister concluded by referring to the 6·5 per cent. increase in charges for pay beds. Will he admit that the Government's policy on pay beds has been a commercial disaster? Is he aware that since 1979 the Government have increased the number of pay beds by one fifth—in sharp contrast to the cut in the number of NHS beds—and that the number of patients in pay beds has gone down by one third, while the bad debts from private pay bed patients last year alone reached £800,000? Against that background, is it not entirely fanciful for the Minister to suggest that the NHS can generate income from an activity that is a net loss to the service?

On the subject of charges to patients, will the Minister comment on the recent practice in Merton and Sutton district health authority, which has introduced charges for mentally handicapped patients for music and speech

[Mr. Robin Cook]

therapy? Will he say whether he regards it as reasonable that long-stay mentally handicapped patients should generate income for their own treatment?

The whole House will be aware of the background to the statement. There is a massive surplus revenue in the Treasury which the Chancellor intends to give away in tax handouts in a couple of weeks' time. The money is there to fund a decent Health Service without charging the sick another £10 million for their prescriptions. The increases are unnecessary, unjustified and undesirable. When the orders are tabled, the Opposition will demand a debate on them and an opportunity to vote against them.

Mr. Newton: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcoming words about some aspects of the statement. I readily note that in Committee his hon. Friends raised the issue of 16 and 17-year-olds, and I am glad that we have been able to respond in the way that we have.

I believe that the hon. Gentleman's remarks about prescription charges are exaggerated, especially when one considers that last year's increase of 20p was followed by the largest increase in the number of prescriptions dispensed for some years. There is no serious evidence of the deterrent effect to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

With regard to exemptions, the hon. Gentleman will know that my predecessor made it clear that the Government did not think it right to reopen the general list of exemptions, but rather to focus especially on ensuring that effective arrangements were available to those on low incomes. We have consistently sought to do that.

I believe that the hon. Gentleman is labouring under some misapprehension with regard to pay beds. It should be clear to the House that such beds are pay beds only when they are occupied by a paying patient. It other times they are available to, and are used by, the NHS. I readily accept that not as much income has been made from such beds as we would like. Indeed, one of the aims of the Health and Medicines Bill is to increase the capacity of the Health Service to raise additional sums from such beds, for the benefit of NHS patients. I see nothing wrong or foolish about that.

I shall look into the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised about Merton and Sutton, which is new to me, and write to him if necessary.

With regard to the hon. Gentleman's comments about revenue available to the Treasury, it should be remembered that the background to this statement is an increase of no less than 43 per cent., in real terms, in expenditure since 1978-79 on our primary care services and plans for substantial additional real spending over the next two to three years.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am bound to have regard to the fact that this is an Opposition day, on which there are two important debates, and some heavy business after that. I shall allow questions to go on until 20 minutes past 4. I am sure that we shall return to this matter, and therefore I ask hon. Members to ask one question rather than several.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement will be warmly welcomed on the Conservative Benches, especially in respect of spectacles and diabetic prescriptions? Is he aware that, every day, people pay, and expect to pay, enormous sums of money for toothpaste, ointments and a whole range of proprietary medicaments for which no prescriptions are required? Does that not put into perspective the reaction to charges for those items for which prescriptions are required? Indeed, as my right hon. Friend said, prescriptions are paid for by only a quarter of those for whom they are written.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. I agree that more than 75 per cent. of items are dispensed without charge, and indeed approaching half the population are exempt from prescription charges. I believe that that puts the matter into perspective.

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): We welcome the initiatives on eye-testing, dental charges and blood glucose testing about which we are keen. Will the Minister clarify what he means by the increase in prescription charges of 8·3 per cent., which is above the rate of inflation? The phrase "the cost of medicines" is rather bogus, because 20p is way above what the pharmaceutical people believe the increase should be. Will pharmacists be advised to give the people the right formula; in other words, will they be told that they should be using the cheapest, but best, forms of medicine?

Mr. Newton: We would always hope that that principle would apply. Equally, if pharmacists are aware that an item that has been prescribed is available without prescription at a lower price, it is entirely reasonable to draw that to their customers' attention. Prescription charges are, necessarily, an averaging process, and I do not make any great apology for that.

It is true that the increase in prescription charges is greater than the general rate of inflation, but the price of medicines — partly because of advances — is rising somewhat faster, and the increase is in line with the rise in the cost of medicines.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's enlightened statement on charges. However, will he accept that while the increase in the value of the spectacles voucher is also welcome it will not be of much benefit if, in a few months' time, he announces the abolition of the free eyesight check, because that will simply deter many people from getting their eyesight checked in the first place?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend and I discussed this matter at some length in Committee. I made the point then that nearly three quarters of those entitled to spectacle vouchers spend sums well in excess of £10 over and above the value of the spectacle voucher when purchasing their spectacles. As far as we can judge, they do that voluntarily, and that must cast some doubts on my hon. Friend's proposition about the alleged deterrent effect of our sight testing proposals.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): As my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said, there is a general welcome for parts of the Minister's statement. However, many members of the public will be extremely angry that the Minister has seen fit to increase prescription charges for the 13th time since the Government came into office, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer is sitting on a mountain of money. Does the Minister not recognise that on this occasion he could have announced that there

was to be no increase in prescription charges? That would have been very welcome at a time when the vast majority of people want to make Budget day National Health Service day. Will the right hon. Gentleman give a clear undertaking that, as he has found it impossible to halt the increase in prescription charges, he has no intention of increasing any NHS charges for the remainder of the year?

Mr. Newton: We have made it clear that we have no plans of the kind that the hon. Gentleman adumbrated in the latter part of his remarks.

Prescription charges need to be considered against the background of the cost of drugs. These charges still raise a good deal less than 10 per cent. of the total cost of drugs, which has been increasing very rapidly. It is not an unreasonable policy to increase charges at least in line with the rise in the price of drugs.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): Will my right hon. Friend accept that some of us who make no secret of our wish for additional funding for the National Health Service will nevertheless find it possible to accept the increase in prescription charges that he has announced? Whereas there are some things that only Governments can do — for example, authorising the building of new hospitals and meeting increased payments to nurses — there are some ways in which we can help ourselves. Therefore, for those of us able to afford it the additional 20p on prescription charges is quite acceptable.

Mr. Newton: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for his supportive remarks.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Opposition Members are concerned with those who cannot meet the additional 20p. The Minister said that his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland would make a similar announcement. Will that take into account the remarks of the Secretary of State in his commentary on public expenditure in Scotland the week before last, in which he showed clearly that Scotland still has the largest number of deaths from heart disease and cancer in the United Kingdom? Does the Minister honestly believe that increasing prescription charges will do anything to solve that very serious problem?

Mr. Newton: The generality of our plans for the primary health care services — which go much wider, although in some ways they are related to today's announcement — is directed at improving preventive measures, the early detection of ill health and early action to stop it getting worse. That entails the sort of moves that we plan for the development of general medical services, to which some of the proposals that I have announced will contribute.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that his proposals provide a welcome opportunity for diabetics to look after their own health more effectively and so improve the quality of their lives?

Mr. Newton: One of the purposes of last year's move on syringes and this year's move on blood glucose testing strips is to encourage diabetics to have more regular contact with their general practitioners, many of whom now run diabetic clinics. We are anxious to encourage that, and I am sure that that is in the general long-term interest of good health care for diabetics in this country.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): If the Minister is serious about preventing worsening health, surely he must think again about the charges for eye testing. May I press him for clarification on what he said about the transition from supplementary benefit to income support and family credit? Will there be any groups that could lose on benefit and be sustained by the guarantee that has been given by the Government? If that is the case, will that guarantee also operate on passporting for prescriptions?

Mr. Newton: There are two separate points. One concerns the move from supplementary benefit to income support and from family income supplement to family credit, where passporting will have the same effect as the transition itself. Of course, many more families will be in receipt of family credit than are currently in receipt of family income supplement. On the low-income scheme above those levels, the effect is more complicated. That is partly because it is extremely complex now and the scheme does not work very well. As I said in my statement, we shall try to bring forward a simpler and speedier scheme. It would be right for the hon. Gentleman to look at the details of that when my hon. Friends are able to bring it forward.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the cost of the blood testing strips was a burden on a considerable number of diabetic patients and that they will greatly welcome his statement? Will the availability of blood testing strips on prescription apply to all strips, or just to a proprietary few? If the blood-testing strips are improved by advancing medical technology, will my right hon. Friend consider allowing those to be available on prescription without any delay?

Mr. Newton: I shall consider the point raised by my hon. Friend in the latter part of his question.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does the Minister agree that it is totally immoral to increase the tax on the sick, including those with multiple sclerosis and asthmatic diseases, just a fortnight before the Chancellor is planning a decrease in taxes on the very rich and often able-bodied people? When the Minister talked about an increase of 43 per cent. in real terms in spending on the NHS, is that in terms of the retail prices index, or of the actual cost to the NHS?

Mr. Newton: The figure is related, not to the NHS as whole, but to the family practitioner services, which are the primary focus of the statement. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's moral strictures. Indeed, they are absurd, when about half the population are exempt from prescription charges, over three quarters of all items dispensed are dispensed free, when there are expensive exemptions on medical grounds and when there are important season ticket arrangements, which help many of those who need regular prescriptions.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): My right hon. Friend's £8 million announcement on glucose strips is as welcome as the statement last year on free syringes for diabetics. It will help to make their lives more liveable. So that we are not awash with crocodile tears when the orders are laid before the House, will my right hon. Friend reiterate that 75 per cent. of prescriptions are free, and that when the Labour party was propped up in power by the Liberals there was a charge, or as the Opposition put it, a tax, on sickness under that regime?

Mr. Newton: Yes. I can readily agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Will the Minister accept that the deterrent effect of charges on primary health care is likely only to put pressure on the acute services, which are already under-funded? Will he accept that the future of health care will look very grim until we stop charging for primary health care and do something about getting the nation's health into proper repair?

Mr. Newton: The whole programme put forward in the Government's White Paper on primary care and the generality of the measures being debated currently on the Health and Medicines Bill are designed to achieve precisely the significant further improvement in the primary care service that the hon. Gentleman wishes to see. We obviously disagree about whether it will bring about improvement, but my judgment is that it will, and the proof of the pudding will be in the eating.

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): My right hon. Friend will be aware that general practitioners and pharmacists often do not recommend to their patients that they can buy over the counter more cheaply than they can obtain some things on prescription. Will he consider encouraging pharmacists to issue a receipt showing the cost of the drugs dispensed to patients, so that they are able to make the decision themselves, and, in other cases, to enable them to adjudge the great value for money that they receive from the massive cost of the drugs that can be dispensed?

Mr. Newton: That is an interesting suggestion and I shall consider it. I would hesitate to go nap on it at the moment, in view of the possible administrative costs entailed.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): Bearing in mind that a vast number of people are caught in the poverty trap and cannot afford today's prescription charges, what provision does the Minister intend to make to ensure that they receive adequate medicine free?

Mr. Newton: I have already referred to the Government's intention to bring forward proposals for a simpler and quicker low-income scheme for those above the direct passporting from income support or family credit, as it will be. We share the aim of avoiding the difficulty to which the hon. Gentleman referred, and I am hopeful that our proposals will do just that.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that much of the indignation from Opposition Members is bogus and synthetic, as the increase is less than the cost of a bar of chocolate, and as Labour Governments promised to abolish the prescription charge but have failed to do so? Is my right hon. Friend aware that many Conservative Members would contribute to a season ticket for the cure of verbal diarrhoea for the Leader of the Opposition?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that I would care to go down precisely the track advocated by my hon. Friend in the last part of his remarks. However, I endorse the first part of his question and would add that I am advised—this is against the background of the wide range of exemptions—that the average spending in this country on alcohol is now £8 per adult per week.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Is it not unjust to put up prescription charges when the Government are putting through Parliament a measure such as the poll tax? Does the Minister know that under that tax as envisaged his grace the Duke of Westminster will be £7,000 per annum better off? Is it not unjust to announce higher prescription charges when the duke will not have any problem in paying the higher charges?

Mr. Newton: I have enough problems of my own, without getting into the poll tax.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I welcome what the Minister said about blood strips for diabetics, but how does he justify the increase in prescription charges for others who are chronically sick? This is perhaps one thing in life that I share with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, who is sitting alongside the Minister. Many British holidaymakers have found that if they forget their inhalers they can obtain them more cheaply over the counter in France than they would in this country, with all the benefits of the NHS. With the latest increase in prescription charges, will the Minister tell the House how many countries in the EEC sell items such as asthma inhalers over the counter at a cost lower than they can be obtained on prescription in this country?

Mr. Newton: I am afraid that I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the information he seeks. However, I have said already that the prescription charge scheme is almost inescapably an averaging arrangement, and that implies that some people will receive their drugs more cheaply than they could in other ways, but others may find that they are a shade more expensive. I accept that.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the Minister tell the House why the price of medicines has gone up so much? He announced an 8 per cent. increase in prescription charges, which is twice the rate of inflation, and he said that that was because of the increase in the price of medicines. Is that not indicative of the excessive profits being made by the pharmaceutical industry? Is it not true that if he took steps to prevent that industry from creaming off money from British taxpayers he would have more money at his disposal to devote to primary health care?

Mr. Newton: I have to say that, following the introduction of the new pharmaceutical price regulations scheme, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's perception would be shared by the industry. Great sums of money are invested in drugs, but the cost of producing them does rise. We are anxious to keep costs under maximum control, but the price has risen by 8 per cent. and that is the background against which I have made the announcement.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does not the Minister's argument contain a curious logic? He said that when prescription charges are increased it will not be a deterrent to the sick who have to purchase various commodities. However, he uses the alternative argument—as his right hon. and hon. Friends will on Budget day—of saying that there is a deterrent for those in the higher income bracket who have to pay tax of 60p in the pound and that we should remove that deterrent so that they will work harder. The truth is that that curious logic has meant that the Minister has had to make this statement today so that

it is not made on Budget day, because the Government do not want the Budget to look really bad by increasing prescription charges while giving high rate taxpayers probably hundreds and hundreds of pounds per week.

Mr. Newton: I do not see any connection between the two lines of argument. The Government's taxation policies have contributed to the substantial increase in economic resources that are enabling us to sustain the services that we are discussing today. I do not believe that a charge of £2·60, levied, at most, on only half the population, will have a deterrent effect when people are ill, as the hon. Gentleman suggested.

Following are the charges:

Optical voucher values and charges from 1 April 1988

		New values £	*Percentage increase*
(1) Single vision spectacles			
Voucher-type	A £14·25	15·50	8·8
	B £22·00	25·50	15·9
	C £33·00	42·00	27·3
(2) Bifocal spectacles			
Voucher type	D £27·00	29·50	9·3
	E £42·00	50·00	19·0
	F £66·00	85·00	28·8
(HES only)	G £66·00	85·00	28·8
(3) Amounts added to voucher value for clinically necessary:			
Prisms £3 per lens (single vision)		3·50	16·7
	£4 per lens (bifocal)	4·50	12·5
Tints	£3 per pair (single vision)	3·50	16·7
	£4 per pair (bifocal)	4·50	12·5
(4) Complex lens vouchers for those not entitled to standard vouchers:			
Single vision	£2·00	3·00	50
Bifocal	£14·00	17·00	21
(5) Hospital Eye Service Maximum Charges:			
Single vision	£29·00	32·00	10
Complex lenses	£50·00	52·00	4
Contact lenses: charge per lens	£25·00	25·00	—
New Supplements			
Supplement for children needing very small glasses		30·00	—
Hospital Eye Service only:			
(a) Supplement for people needing specially-made frames		30·00	—
(b) Supplements for people prescribed photocromic lenses for clinical reasons:			
(i) single vision		3·00	—
(ii) complex lenses		4·00	—

Prescription charges from 1 April 1988

Charges proposed	*Present charge* £	*New charge* £	*Percentage increase*
Charge per item	2·40	2·60	8·3
Season tickets:			
4 monthly	12·50	13·50	8·0
Annual	35·00	37·50	7·1

Dental charges from 1 April 1988

	Present charge £	*New charge* £	*Percentage increase*
Dentures			
Metal based dentures having:			
1-3 teeth	50	64	28
4-8	42	69	33
more than 8 teeth	55	71	29
Synthetic resin based dentures having:			
1-3 teeth	26	26	—
4-8 teeth	28	34	21
more than 8 teeth	30	40	33
Maximum charges for more than one synthetic resin denture			
Synthetic resin based full upper and full lower dentures	47	59	26
Any other combination of synthetic resin based dentures	47	62	32
Bridges			
An acid-etched retained bridge	50	65	30
Any other bridge	50	150	200
Crowns			
High gold alloy	63	[1]51 to 55	−19 to −13
Other alloy	33	[1]26 to 42	−22 to +27

[1] Charges will vary depending on type of crown and materials used.

			Percentage
Other treatment	Full cost up to £17: 40 per cent. of cost above £17	75 per cent. of cost	−25 to about +50 depending on cost
Maximum charge for course of treatment	£115	£150	30

Daily charges for services provided for overseas visitors as in-patients as at 1 April 1988

	Class of hospital in which services are provided	*Single room* £	*Shared accommodation* £
Class A	Long-stay hospitals	93	84
Class B	Psychiatric hospitals	85	77
Class C1	Mainly acute and other hospitals in non-teaching districts	149	136
Class C2	Acute and other hospitals in non-teaching districts	170	154
Class D	Hospitals in London teaching districts (other than hospitals in Classes A and B)	231	210
Class E	Hospitals in provincial teaching districts (other than hospitals in Classes A and B)	185	168
Class F	London Postgraduate Teaching Hospitals managed by Special Health Authorities except the Hospitals for Sick Children and the National Heart and Chest Hospitals	253	230
Class G	The Hospitals for Sick Children and the National Heart and Chest Hospitals	392	357

Charges for services provided for overseas visitors otherwise than as in-patients as at 1 April 1988

Services provided	*Hospital class A to E* £	*Hospital class F and G* £
1. For a patient on each attendance at a hospital other than attendances directly associated with the procedures listed in paragraphs 4-12 following.	14·50	21·50
Day Cases[1]		
2. Charges per day exclusive of charges for procedures listed in paragraphs 4-12 following.	28·50	29·50
Day Patients[2]		
3. Charges per day exclusive of charges for procedures listed in paragraphs 4-12 following.	34·00	35·00
Pathology		
4. For each request.	7·50	15·00
Radiodiagnosis, Nuclear Medicine and Ultrasound		
5. (i) For each procedure listed in Appendix D (charge per Korner unit value).	6·50 per unit for the first 6 units, 1·00 per unit thereafter	9·00 per unit for the first 6 units, 1·25 per unit thereafter
(ii) CT Scanning. For all scans	96·00	115·00
Radiotherapy		
6. For treatment in any one day	18·00	45·00
Physiotherapy and Remedial Gymnastics		
7. Per attendance	5·50	11·50
Occupational Therapy		
8. For treatment in any one day	8·50	10·00
Other Diagnostic Procedures		
9. (i) Audiometry	5·00	5·00
(ii) Electrocardiography. For each testing session.	9·50	17·50
(iii) Electroencephalography. For each testing session	38·50	83·50
(iv) Electromyography. For each testing session	24·00	50·50
Use of Operating Theatre Facilities		
10. Operating theatre facilities booked as required:		
(i) For less than 10 minutes	22·50	28·00
(ii) For 10 minutes to 30 minutes	44·00	56·00
(iii) For more than 30 minutes	67·00	84·00
Dialysis		
11. For haemodialysis or intermittent peritoneal dialysis:		
(i) With training or routine at a hospital per session	111·00	111·00
(ii) Routine, at home — per session	70·50	70·50
(iii) Minimal Care Unit—per session	90·50	90·50
For continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis (including continuous cycling peritoneal dialysis)—per day.	33·50	33·50
Supply of Drugs and Medicines		
12. For the supply of a drug or medicine which is designed to eliminate, prevent the replication of, or in any way inhibit the mode of action of any Human Immunodeficiency Virus — for each quantity sufficient for one day's treatment.	14·50	14·50

[1] For the purpose of this item a day case is a patient who attends as a non-resident patient for investigation, treatment or operation and who occupies a bed without staying overnight.

[2] For the purpose of this item a day patient is someone who attends regularly for a course of treatment without necessarily occupying a bed or staying overnight.

Points of Order

4.10 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise a point of order, of which I gave you notice, in as succinct and gentle fashion as possible. On the front page of the *Mail on Sunday* yesterday, there appeared the banner headline "Fines for Hooligan MPs."

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Oh, dear.

Mr. Dalyell: Yes, it is "Oh, dear." I am as quiet as a church mouse. Those who sit next to me know that I never open my mouth, shout, bawl or do any of the things about which that article complains. However, the article raises issues for the House because it states that Government business chiefs are considering drastic action before television is introduced and that the Commons Procedure Committee is considering making recommendations. The article states:

"Last week a group of senior Tories met behind closed doors and criticised Mr. Weatherill for being too soft on Labour Left-wingers. And with Mrs. Thatcher worried about Parliaments increasingly tarnished image, the committee's recommendations are sure to be pushed through by the Tory majority."

We wish to be clear about those recommendations. It is open to argument whether those Members of Parliament suspended by the House should be fined. Speaking as one who has been in that position, I am not necessarily against a deduction of salary. There are arguments on both sides of the issue, but, before any proposals are introduced, there should at least be a debate.

We should also debate what should happen to Ministers who are less than candid with the House and, therefore, provoke some hon. Members to behave in that way. It is a question of sauce for the goose being sauce for the gander. By all means, let these matters be considered, but let us see the issue as a whole.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. A number of matters appear to be being trailed on the back of the introduction of television cameras into the Chamber. There are rumours of recommendations for a glass screen above the Strangers' Gallery and for the number of seats in the Strangers' Gallery to be greatly reduced. If it has been proposed that those who are suspended should be fined by losing their salary for the duration of their suspension, have you, Mr. Speaker, received any suggestions that there should be loss of pay for those hon. Members who deliberately absent themselves from this House for days and, in some cases, for weeks and months?

Have there been any suggestions that there should be loss of pay for those hon. Members who see fit to visit South Africa and other unsavoury regimes for weeks on end? Will there be loss of pay for those hon. Members who are away from this House for long periods on non-parliamentary official business? We should know whether any such suggestions have been made by those who are trying to gag hon. Members and thus prevent them making a legitimate protest in this Chamber.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Has any suggestion been made to you that we should take a leaf out of the books of the other courts of this land and not permit those who have been suspended to return until they have apologised? It is not sufficient merely to deprive them of their salaries.

Mr. Skinner *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not need any more help.

Mr. Skinner: This is an important point.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know that it is and I take it seriously, but this is an Opposition Supply day, on which there are two debates.

I saw the article to which the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) referred. It was grossly overdone. I know nothing about meetings behind closed doors. If the House wishes to change its procedures in any way, whether in respect of pay or the introduction of screens, the matter should be debated on the Floor of the House and have the agreement of the House. We have controversy politics in this Chamber and I hope that we shall always have a robust Parliament and not be mealy-mouthed.

Ministerial Statements

4.15 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon, you have twice referred to the fact that this is an Opposition Supply day. The first occasion was when the Minister of State was making his statement on prescription charges and associated items. It is noticeable that, through the years and under all Governments, statements are frequently made during Opposition Supply days, but, with great respect, the cure for that is in your hands because, when a Minister asks permission to make a statement, you can say, "No, it is an Opposition Supply day and, therefore, you must make it on a Government day." I would support that approach, even if a Labour Government were in power.

Mr. Speaker: I do not have that authority. Perhaps the House should also debate that issue.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is important that Members of Parliament, especially those who are new, understand why hon. Members who are expelled from this place receive their pay. It may come as a notable surprise to many people that, just before the general election in 1983, the Government changed procedures in Parliament so that hon. Members expelled from the Chamber, regardless of the length of their suspension, should receive their pay.

I have more news which will help you, Mr. Speaker. The Government introduced that rule, but I made a speech in the Chamber late that night, when the measure was being debated, opposing the idea that the Tories were putting forward, as I was prepared to pay the fine. However, the Government got their troops to march through the Lobby in support of the measure. It is ironic that some Tories now wish to return to the previous procedure. If that is reintroduced, we should make it apply to those hon. Members who come in here drunk or half sober.

Mr. Speaker: I need make no further comment on that.

Opposition Day

[9TH ALLOTTED DAY]

South Africa (Apartheid)

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister, and not the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook).

4.18 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I beg to move,

That this House strongly condemns the action of the Government of South Africa in effectively banning all peaceful opposition to apartheid by its restriction on the United Democratic Front, Confederation of South African Trade Unions and 16 other organisations dedicated to the ending of apartheid; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to participate constructively in urgent international and Commonwealth action against South Africa including comprehensive economic sanctions.

Every day seems to bring its fresh instalment of outrage by the Government of South Africa. Already today we have heard of the arrest of Archbishop Desmond Tutu and of other Church leaders who were bundled into a police car, having been arrested while on the steps of St. George's cathedral and while praying on the pavement after a gathering of Church leaders inside the cathedral. They were later released, but it is clear that not even senior Church men in South Africa are safe from that apartheid Government.

The debate arises from events of last Wednesday, when issue No. 11,157 of the "South African Government Gazette", published in Pretoria, gave the text of Order No. 334, signed by the Minister of Law and Order. That order stated that banning orders had been placed on 17 organisations, ranging from the Azanian People's Organisation to the Western Cape Civic Association and including the largest organisation in which black people in South Africa associate peacefully to oppose apartheid, the United Democratic Front. No one has alleged that any of those organisations stands for violence or has been involved in violence. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and his Minister of State have pointed out that they are all non-violent, and that is repeated in the Government's amendment to our motion.

To take one example, the Detainees Parents Support Committee has the purely humanitarian objective of monitoring detention without trial. It has specialised in publicising the detention of children under the state of emergency and, as we know, thousands of children — some as young as nine — have been detained by the South African apartheid Government. Under last week's banning order, all these organisations are prohibited

"from carrying on or performing any activities or acts whatsoever."

George Orwell himself could not have put it more chillingly. Furthermore, Order No. 335 from the Ministry of Law and Order places a series of prohibitions on the other South African black organisation that has mass support, the Congress of South African Trade Unions. These prohibitions include a ban on

"appeals or demands for the release from detention of a prisoner or prisoners belonging to a category of prisoners"

and

"encouraging or inciting among members of the public . . . to commemorate the death of a person or persons belonging to a category of persons".

Those are both now illegitimate acts by CSATU.

Restriction orders have been served on a number of persons. Who they are is not known officially, since a spokesman of the Ministry of Law and Order announced that the names of those sought would not be made public. He did reveal that 18 restriction orders had been signed by President P. W. Botha. However, it is known that those affected include Mrs. Albertina Sisulu, co-president of the UDF. It seems that she is confined to her home between the hours of 6pm and 5am and may not leave the district of Johannesburg without police permission. Also the subject of a restriction order is Mr. Archie Gumede, another co-president of the UDF, who is specifically prohibited from talking to the news media and from preparing, compiling or transmitting any matter for publication. It is reported that recently the main activities or Mrs. Sisulu and Mr. Gumede have been to try to negotiate an end to violence. They are both now prevented from seeking a peaceful solution to South Africa's problems.

Already South Africa is not only a racially discriminatory and authoritarian society, but a gagged society. It is illegal in that benighted country not only to call for the release of detainees, but even to publish the names of detainees or to state that anyone has been detained.

The Ministry of Law and Order orders of 24 February put an end to the activities of all organisations that oppose apartheid in a non-violent way. The Prime Minister, in her statement to the House after the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting at Vancouver, said:

"the momentum for change must come from within South Africa itself."—[*Official Report*, 22 October 1987; Vol. 120, c. 921.]

How is such a momentum possible when the Government's amendment points out that advocates of a peaceful change have been suppressed?

So far, only the Churches have escaped banning orders. Only clergymen have still been able to speak out in South Africa, as they did courageously in special services yesterday and as they sought to do today. How far they will be able to go in speaking out is in doubt, following today's outrageous arrest of Archbishop Tutu, Dr. Allan Boesak and the Rev. Peter Storey, leader of the Methodist Church, among others. It is significant that those senior Church leaders were arrested for taking part in a march whereas on Saturday South African police stood by when the Nazi anti-semitic and anti-black resistance movement breached the emergency regulations with a march through Pretoria and when those conducting the march handed over a petition, the police helpfully accepted it. That is the contrast that we now see.

Dr. Allan Boesak, the Coloured Reform Church leader, has said of these latest Government restrictions:

"Every single peaceful action we can take has now been criminalised."

His arrest today proves the accuracy of his words. Frank Chikane, the general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, has said:

"If more and more people resort to violence, we are going to find difficulty in saying, 'You must not do it because there is still space for protest', while that space is being closed daily."

It was closed even further today. As the voices of non-violence are silenced, it must be said that the Government of South Africa have set the stage for bloodshed and that any bloodshed from now on will be entirely the responsibility of P. W. Botha and his gang.

This latest twist in the spiral of totalitarianism in South Africa has been greeted with revulsion. Members of this Government have joined in. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has said that he is "shocked and saddened" and, no doubt, in a little while he will favour us with further verbs of outrage accompanied possibly by various eleemosynary adverbs. The Minister of State, in a somewhat incoherent interview on "Newsnight" last Wednesday, said that she was worried out of her mind. I have no doubt that both are absolutely sincere in their condemnation of these bannings. The question is: what is to be done in response to them?

On "Newsnight" the Minister of State said:

"The international community is going to be more harsh in their actions towards South Africa than they've been in the past."

Mr. Peter Snow responded:

"Really? And what are you proposing to do yourselves?"—

meaning this Government. The right hon. Lady replied:

"We shall talk with our partners about what can be done"

and then, at a loss for any ideas, she simply retreated into saying that apartheid was repugnant and detestable. Mr. Snow rather cruelly went on:

"Oh, you've made that very clear, but what are you going to do about it? . . . Are you going to take harsh measures?"

The right hon. Lady then cleared the situation up. She said:

"I didn't mention harsh measures in that sense".

Instead she said that people must be brought round a table. Who should go round the table is not very clear, since anyone from the South African side who might be of any use round a table is either in prison or under a restriction order.

As for the Minister of State, it is true that she spent 10 minutes with the South African ambassador last week, but it is difficult to be sure for which of them it was a bigger waste of time. The fact is that, whatever the decent intentions of Foreign and Commonwealth Ministers and however much they semi-coherently splutter their indignation, any action by Britain against apartheid is effectively sabotaged by the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister is the world's most effective and enthusiastic accomplice of apartheid. If hon. Members doubt my word they should accept that of a South African National party Member of Parliament, Mr. André Fourie, who yesterday went on television to defend the latest Government measures in South Africa and, in the course of doing so, stated:

"We have appreciated the stand taken by the Thatcher Government."

That at any rate was both sincere and accurate, for the stand taken by the Prime Minister has been at great pains to obstruct international action against South Africa.

The predicament that we face was summed up starkly in the report published in 1986 by the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group on its mission to South Africa. One of that group was Lord Barber, who was nominated by the Prime Minister. The eminent persons said:

"We have been forced to conclude that at present there is no genuine intention on the part of the South African Government to dismantle apartheid."

What would they have said after last week's grim developments?

They went on:

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

"We are convinced that the South African Government is concerned about the adoption of effective economic measures against it . . . The question is not whether such measures will compel change: it is already the case that their absence, and Pretoria's belief that they need not be feared, defers change".

If anyone doubts the fear of sanctions by the South African Government he has only to look at the terms of the prohibition order on the Confederation of South African Trade Unions. This, among other things, bans COSATU from

"the making of calls on or inciting (i) a person doing business in the Republic, or with persons in the Republic, to disinvest in the Republic or to otherwise cease doing business in the Republic or with persons in the Republic; (ii) the government of another country to institute or apply trade, economic or other punitive measures against the Republic or to sever or restrict diplomatic or other relations with the Republic".

If the apartheid Government of President Botha were so unworried about sanctions, they would not ban COSATU from even advocating them or trying to persuade others to be involved in them. If, as the Prime Minister claims, sanctions would have such little effect on apartheid, why do the South African Government go to such trouble to prevent COSATU from even advocating them?

Every time the international community, and especially the Commonwealth, seeks to take action to end apartheid, the Prime Minister takes delight in impeding that action and, by doing so, casts herself in the role of handmaiden of apartheid. She came back from the Commonwealth conference in Nassau in 1985, her eyes bright with exultation as she rejoiced at the way in which she had obstructed sanctions. She was asked whether she had moved. "Just a tiny little bit," she replied, holding her fingers about half an inch apart.

At last year's Commonwealth conference, not only did she obstruct discussion of action against South Africa so that the statement on the programme of action on southern Africa was littered with the humiliating litany "with the exception of Britain", but she put her Press Secretary up to spreading untruths about Canada's trade with South Africa, deliberately based on false and outdated figures, to the extent that the Prime Minister of Australia accused the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of propagating "an abominable lie".

When the African National Congress held a conference against apartheid in Arusha last December, Britain alone of the European Community countries was not officially represented. Even President Reagean sent a representative to the opening ceremony. The conference was filled with contemptuous gossip about the humiliation of the first secretary at the British High Commission in Dar-es-Salaam who, having travelled more than 300 miles to Arusha, was kept hanging round the Mount Meru hotel, waiting for the telephone call that would have allowed him to attend that opening ceremony. He never received that call and had to go back, humiliated, to Dar-es-Salaam while other Western countries were properly represented at ministerial or ambassador level. I myself sat next to the representative of the Finnish embassy, for example, and the Danish ambassador gave an outstanding description of the sanctions that Denmark was imposing.

When, at the beginning of this month, the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers met in Lusaka to discuss not simply sanctions but the next steps against apartheid, Britain's chair was empty.

The Prime Minister claims that she is playing her part by assistance to the front line states. Even if that assistance were substantial, it would not meet the problem. At Arusha, the Minister of Information in the Mozambique Government stated that no amount of aid for the front line states was a substitute for direct action against South Africa, since the latter's aggressive actions made the aid for the front line states necessary in the first place. His opinion was echoed this weekend by Colonel van Dunen, a senior Minister in the Angolan Government, who, I understand, met the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of State while he was here. He said, speaking for Angola,

"Our main problem is the root cause of destabilisation —South Africa".

Since South Africa's aggressive actions make the aid for the front line states necessary, it must be pointed out, for example, that aid to Angola is £222,000. Statistics, when analysed, show that bilateral British aid to Angola between 1980 and 1986 had risen to that pitiful level. It had also risen to Mozambique and Zambia, but British aid to Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zimbabwe has fallen in real terms during this decade.

What is more, Britain's assistance is noticeably less than that of other, much smaller countries. Norway has contributed to Mozambique twice as much aid as Britain since 1980. In 1986 Sweden contributed nearly twice as much aid to the front line states as did Britain. In the period since the front line states formed the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference, the contributions from the Nordic countries have far exceeded that of Britain — nearly double, in fact — and our aggregate contribution since 1980 of £819 million compares with British investment in apartheid South Africa of £6 billion.

That British economic stake in South Africa counts for more with P. W. Botha than all the Foreign Secretary's ineffectual reprimands. We all remember the pointless trip of the Foreign Secretary to South Africa in 1986. When he set off, it was reported that

"British officials said that Sir Geoffrey was in determined mood, and was ready for plain speaking".

I am afraid that the plain speaking was rather like Bottom's unsuccessful efforts to be cast as Thisbe in "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Bottom promised that he would speak in a "monstrous little voice". Thisbe Howe's monstrous little voice failed to charm the South Africans. He was kept hanging around, waiting for a gap in P.W. Botha's diary. He was publicly insulted by Botha and was sent away with a flea in his ear, reduced to admitting,

"The responses which I have received have not yet enabled me to claim that I have made progress that I would have liked."

He can say that again.

It is about time that the Government realised that soft words to the South African Government will be treated with contempt. The only thing to which they pay attention is strong action. This Government's lack of commitment to fighting apartheid is illustrated by the strong line that they take on other issues.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The right hon. Gentleman talks about strong action, and says that the South African Government only react to strong action. If he is going to advocate sanctions to the House, as the motion suggests, he owes it to us and to the people of South Africa to spell out exactly how he believes that they would work, and whether he believes that they will have

an effect in doing what I want to see, which is, bringing the Government of South Africa and their apartheid regime to an end. He has not said anything about that. If he will not do so, he ought to be quiet.

Mr. Kaufman: The South African Government believe that sanctions would work, which is why they have prohibited CSATU from advocating them. Sanctions will have an effect on the South African Government, and I shall be coming to that—*[Interruption.]* One effect the absence of sanctions does not have on Britain is to give us a reputable name throughout the continent of South Africa.

The Government's lack of commitment to fighting apartheid is illustrated by the strong line that they take on other issues. Last month, the Minister of State, the hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), created a stir when he visited the Gaza strip. When will a Minister stand outside Soweto and tell television cameras,

"Conditions here are an affront to civilised values . . . a blot on the face of civilisation"?

Last week, all of us who have been involved in the efforts to secure the release from gaol in Iraq of the British prisoner, John Smith, were delighted when he was released after the Prime Minister sent a personal letter to President Sadam Hussein. When will the Prime Minister send a Minister with a personal letter to President Botha pleading for the release of Nelson Mandela?

The Prime Minister has given boosts to Soviet dissidents by receiving Irina Ratushinskaya and Anatol Shcharansky at 10, Downing street. When will she invite Albertina Sisulu and Winnie Mandela to No. 10, Downing street? Such actions would have an enormous impact. They would show the Prime Minister's commitment to the destruction of apartheid. Her failure to take action, either materially through sanctions or symbolically through public moral support for the opponents and victims of apartheid, shows her complete lack of concern at the abomination of apartheid.

In a pathetic interview on "Newsnight", the Minister of State forlornly quoted the pop song, "Give me hope, Joanna, give me hope." It is pointless for the oppressed black people of South Africa to call out, "Give me hope, Margaret Thatcher, give me hope". There is no hope of justice for them from that bleak countenance or from that cold heart. The failure of this Government and that of the United States to take action has allowed the South African Government to feel free to take these latest steps.

We all know why those steps have been taken—a fear of setbacks in this week's two by-elections in the Transvaal and the fear of an organised boycott of the local elections later this year. That is why the prohibition order on CSATU specifically forbids it campaigning.

"To boycott or not to take part in an election of a local authority or to commit any other act preventing, frustrating or impeding such an election."

Apartheid has become tougher than ever because the South African Government are responding defensively to internal pressure from the far Right. The problem is that there is insufficient countervailing pressure from outside South Africa, and the Prime Minister of this country bears a heavy burden of personal responsibility for that. She decries sanctions against South Africa, but that did not prevent her from taking part in sanctions against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The deciding factor for the Prime Minister is not whether sanctions would work, but her attitude to the regime against whom she has been urged to take sanctions.

Last week's banning orders proved conclusively that a policy of no sanctions has abjectly failed. A policy of sanctions by Britain has not even been tried. It is time to try it, and that must be the message that goes out from this country.

Apartheid is doomed. Black majority rule in South Africa is certain. The real questions are whether apartheid goes sooner or later and whether black majority rule in South Africa is to be achieved by peaceful negotiation or through bloodshed. The Eminent Persons Group warned that only effective action,

"may offer the last opportunity to avoid what could be the worst blood bath since the 2nd World War."

This Government's policies, through the blocking of effective action, make it more likely that that change will come late and that it will come violently. That is a very heavy burden for the Prime Minister to carry.

History is on the side of freedom in South Africa. This Government seek to spit into the wind of change. The Labour party welcomes the inevitable historical process, the culmination of which will bring long-delayed justice to those suffering millions. We speak for all who care about freedom and justice and who hate discrimination. That is why we ask the House to vote for our motion.

4.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'deplores the restrictions announced by the South African Government on 24th February against 18 extra-parliamentary organisations and certain leading opposition figures; calls for the repeal of these measures, which suppress legitimate, peaceful political activity; reaffirms its opposition to punitive economic sanctions and its support for Her Majesty's Government's policy of practical and constructive action in Southern Africa; and calls on the South African Government to take urgent steps to enter into dialogue with free and freely chosen representatives of the black community, with the aim of bringing the repugnant apartheid system to an end and establishing a non-racial, representative system of government.'.

I begin by expressing my dismay—it is worse than dismay—at the arrogant assumption of a monopoly of virtue by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) when addressing himself to this question. The entire fabric of his speech was founded on the presumption that he, and he alone, and those who think like him, have any insight into the horrors that must be corrected in South Africa. It is founded on a premise of simplicity and injustice to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that will not withstand examination. [HON. MEMBERS: "What will the Government do about it?"] The question of what to do about it is one that vexes us all. I only wish that it was half as simple as Labour Members make it seem.

We must start from the firm proposition that all hon. Members share the view expressed by the right hon. Member for Gorton about the mischief that underlies apartheid. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House on Thursday last week that we condemn the restrictions that were announced by the South African Government last Wednesday against most of the leading extra-parliamentary political groups in South Africa and

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

against certain leading political figures. The Government, through my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, have put their views clearly and forcefully to the South African Government. This debate should start from that premise.

As soon as I heard the news I issued a statement condemning what was happening in South Africa. Last Thursday my right hon. Friend the Minister of State summoned the South African ambassador for the same purpose. Our ambassador in Cape Town has made plain our views to the Government there. However, I should make it plain again that these measures are swingeing and wholly unjustified. They amount to a ban on legitimate peaceful activity by most of those, both black and white, who are working by peaceful means for an end to apartheid—the very apartheid that President Botha has described as outmoded.

The measures follow the imposition of a country wide state of emergency, widespread detention without charge, continued evictions and forced removals and unprecedented curbs on the freedom of the press. They are a step away from dialogue and negotiation. They are a step towards further polarisation and conflict.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I should like to develop my argument for a moment.

As yet we have not received full reports about the incident in which Archbishop Tutu, Dr. Boesak and others were involved this morning, but it seems that that peaceful protest was broken up by police action. In that regard, I should emphasise that we are completely opposed to the suppression of peaceful political activity of that kind.

The measures that have been taken — the House should be clear about the extent of the agreement on this matter — are a recipe for despair among black South Africans, who may well ask what peaceful channels of expression are to be left for the legitimate political aspirations of the black community. The South African Government should think again and move to repeal these measures, not only because they are unjust, but because despair breeds violence. Suppressing the symptoms of a problem does not solve that problem; it only makes it much worse in the longer term.

Opposition Members do not have a monopoly of virtue in their denunciation of apartheid. Let it be absolutely clear that on both sides of the House our judgment is the same. At the heart of all these problems lies the system of apartheid. Our position on that is clear. Apartheid is repugnant. It is a blatant abuse of human rights. *[Interruption.]* I cannot understand why Opposition Members should be affronted by my statement of the simple facts on which the House is agreed. South Africa is not the only country where there is racial discrimination, but South Africa claims to be a part of Western society and to share Western democratic values. Yet, tragically, South Africa is the only country which has institutionalised racial discrimination at almost every level of society.

It must be acknowledged that until a few months ago we could detect some encouraging signs of reforms by the South African Government. *[Interruption.]* We must face the facts both ways. Those changes included the ending of job reservation, the recognition of black trade unions, the scrapping of the pass laws and influx controls, increasing provision for black education and the abolition of legislation for petty apartheid. We acknowledged and welcomed those reforms, and we were criticised for that. The tragedy — this view should be supported on both sides of the House—is that we are no longer seeing such progress.

Instead of moving forward, the South African Government now seem to be moving backwards. The basic institutionalised structures of apartheid remain intact. It is that fundamental discrimination that hon. Members on both sides of the House find so abhorrent. That is why we argue so strongly that apartheid must go. It must be replaced by a non-racial, representative system of government.

Mr. Winnick: The right hon. and learned Gentleman was absolutely right to say that Opposition Members do not have a monopoly of emotional concern about apartheid. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends agree that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is equally opposed to the system of apartheid. I do not question that. However, the Foreign Secretary has not said what effective action Britain is to take. Words will not stop, and have not stopped, Botha from doing what he has done.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall come to that directly, and clearly, provided that I am able to do so on the basis of the premise conceded by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), that the feeling of anger against apartheid is shared on both sides of the House.

Let us start honestly. We want to get rid of apartheid. That objective is shared by everyone in the House. Our clear objective is to end apartheid by peaceful means. The question is how we are to do that. We are right to react with feeling to unacceptable acts by the South African Government, but we must temper our response with the realism that will help us to find an answer.

The truth is that only South Africans themselves—all South Africans—can find a solution to their country's problems. Change will come only when South Africans with the power to act are persuaded of the need for action.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): There seems to be a certain amount of scepticism among Opposition Members as to whether Conservative Members agree with the remarks that my right hon. and learned Friend has just made, expressing his abhorrence of the policy of apartheid. It might be appropriate for my right hon. and learned Friend to invite any Conservative Member who does not share his views to stand up and say so.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall come back to the central issue. The House and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister do not need the sneering and patronising advice unjustly offered from the Dispatch Box by the right hon. Member for Gorton. We do not need the unjust attack that he launched on my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Now is the time for the South African Government to give full weight to the fact that last Thursday my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, from the Dispatch Box, presented the Government's forceful condemnation of the latest folly of the South African Government.

It cannot be for outsiders to prescribe solutions. It is not the special responsibility of the British Government to end injustice in South Africa. This is not a colonial

problem. It is not comparable with Rhodesia. South Africa is an independent, sovereign country. It has been so for many years. But we are right to try to help South Africans meet the challenge. That is why we have made clear the approach that we would commend. All sides must come to understand the need for negotiations. What is needed as a first step is a genuine national dialogue between the South African Government and free and freely chosen leaders of the black community.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Gorton that the most hopeful key so far identified to getting such a process started remains the negotiating concept proposed by the Eminent Persons Group set up at the Nassau Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. That concept is based on initial reciprocal and matching commitments by both sides. One of the things that it calls for is the unbanning of the ANC and other political parties. That is the irony—indeed the tragedy—of last week's news, that we are now seeing intensified proscription even of peaceful activity. The proscription of peaceful activity is tantamount to the prescription of violence.

That violence must be our fear: that despair breeds violence. New restrictions can only add to to the seething frustration of the black community. They may well now say that the channels of peaceful opposition are being closed to them, but I have to say that violence is no alternative. Violent struggle would lead only to enormous loss of life on both sides, and it would strengthen support in the white community for repression of this sort. Violence strengthens only those who wish to turn their backs on progress, change and justice.

That is the message that we continue to put to the ANC when we meet it. Of course, we see the ANC as one of the main representative voices of black opposition. It will have to be involved in any negotiations, but I repeat: violence will not advance its cause.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): At a time when Archbishop Tutu has shown his condemnation of violence and has been arrested, is this not the moment when the British Government ought to show their condemnation, not just in words, but in actions? If the Foreign Secretary wishes to influence white opinion, why will he not agree at least to the suggestion by the Eminent Persons Group that there should be a mandatory ban on all direct flights to and from South Africa? That, more than any other measure, would bring home to white South Africans how much we condemn the recent action.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I know that the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) has been attached to that approach for some time. However, it cannot be distinguished from the general case against punitive economic sanctions. I shall come back to the right hon. Gentleman's point in a moment.

I understand why the events of last week will bring from the House and from elsewhere new calls for punitive economic sanctions. Of course I understand the frustration of those calls for sanctions, but I do not accept that judgment.

Of course these harsh new measures increase our outrage, but the Government's strong and sincere views of sanctions are unchanged. There is no satisfaction or utility in striking out at South Africa unless in doing so we bring the end of apartheid nearer. It is no answer to respond by taking measures that only make things worse.

That is precisely what punitive economic sanctions would do. They would make things worse. Many leading South African opponents of apartheid agree with us on this, and there is independent evidence to support it. The major study produced by the Economist Intelligence Unit is a particularly convincing recent example.

We must not forget — the right hon. Member for Gorton mentioned this—that the black opposition is not the only opposition in South Africa. The rising popularity of the extremists of the extra-parliamentary right is already worrying. They are people who regard President Botha as a dangerous liberal. We have seen them on our television screens in the past couple of days. No one who remembers the 1930s in Germany will have any difficulty in recognising what they portend. Isolation and fear feed that creed of hatred. Nobody should lightly adopt policies that would give it leeway.

Let me look at sanctions as they have been imposed so far. The implementation by some countries of punitive sanctions has had no beneficial effect. Attitudes in South Africa towards genuine negotiations have hardened as a result. The result of the general election on 6 May last year showed that. The latest measures taken last week bear that out. If South Africa is determined to defy the rest of the world, that determination springs in part from the pressure of sanctions.

One other equally unfortunate consequence of sanctions has been the withdrawal from South Africa of about half the American companies that had interests there. What has been the result of that? It has been bargain basement takeovers by South African management, now free from external pressure. Many of the progressive programmes of liberal employment practice in which foreign countries have taken a lead have been discontinued. How has that helped? It has not helped the blacks of South Africa at all. What would be the effect of general punitive sanctions?

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn) *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I wish that the right hon. Gentleman would contain himself and listen to the case that is being made against him. I wish that he would give us credit for the sincerity of our position also.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North conceded that he does not doubt the sincerity of my commitment against apartheid. Let us start from that and consider the effect of general punitive sanctions. Let me tell the House our judgment. General punitive sanctions would stiffen the resistance of the South African Government and the majority of the white population to change. They would worsen the cycle of frustration, violence and repression. They would undermine the South African economy. It would become more difficult to keep pace with the rapidly increasing population, never mind improve the living standards of disadvantaged communities. The people who would suffer most would be those whom we are trying to help. Sanctions would undermine further the stability of the region. Many of South Africa's neighbours have precarious economies closely linked to that of South Africa. The losses inflicted on them in economic confrontation would far exceed the capacity of outsiders to help.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East) *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall give way in a moment.

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

Those are the reasons why we oppose, and will continue to oppose, punitive sanctions. Punitive sanctions will make it harder for South Africans to come together to work out a more just future. They will prolong apartheid, not destroy it.

Mr. Kinnock: My hon. Friends and I do not doubt the sincerity of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's attitudes. We doubt the continuity of his logic. He is saying that tighter, more direct action against South Africa would block the possibility of change. Does he recall that last week unprecedented draconian powers were taken to exclude peaceful organisations, not as evidence of the South African Government's responsiveness to his reasonability, but in response to the neo-Nazi Transvaalers whom they are trying to appease to win a couple of by-elections. In the wildest stretch of his imagination, does the right hon. and learned Gentleman think that his words of condemnation will induce any form of reasonability in the Botha regime? What will he do?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There are two answers to the right hon. Gentleman's question. First, because of the position that the right hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members have sought to condemn, condemnation from this Government is likely to be met with more conviction than condemnation from almost any other Government. The right hon. Gentleman cannot have his case both ways. Denunciation and condemnation by this Government make an important impact. In the fullness of time they will make a more important one.

Secondly, how can the right hon. Gentleman argue that the sanctions that have been imposed by many other countries are having any effect at all if the South African Government are responding in such a way? The fact is that —this is the entire burden of the experience that we all share—additional measures of that kind being taken in that way will only fortify the resistance of the South African Government and entrench the attitudes that the right hon. Gentleman wishes to oppose. They will prolong apartheid, not replace it.

Mr. Kaufman: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman is right in saying that sanctions and actions of that kind will only fortify the South African Government and their present policies, why have the South African Government banned the Confederation of South African Trade Unions from advocating sanctions? If sanctions did not bother them, surely it would not bother them if sanctions were advocated. They fear sanctions, provided that they are imposed effectively.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman made that point in his speech. Quite frankly, it was not one of his better points. Of course the South African Government would rather live a life free from sanctions, because they represent a range of attitudes to which they have to react. When I was there two years ago, one of the lessons that impressed itself most clearly upon my mind was the determination with which they would react to additional sanctions by strengthening their regime and not doing the opposite. The fact that they do not like them does not mean that they would react as the right hon. Gentleman would wish—far from it.

The regrettable fact that the House and the world have to face is that there is no panacea, no quick fix, and no easy way through. The argument that I have used many times is that there is no place in this immensely difficult, tragic problem for what I call the Jericho school of diplomacy. If it were possible, by blowing a loud trumpet and by taking some dramatic world action, to transform the situation, it might be effective. There is no place for quick action. *[Interruption.]* It is naive and simplistic for the Opposition to give themselves the luxury of baying at me from the Opposition Front Bench, believing that by so doing they are solving the matter. The latest measures will make the process of change more difficult, but our approach must remain specific and positive.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Surely the Government remember what happened in Austria, Czechoslovakia and other countries, where Governments washed their hands of the matter, believing that by giving way to Hitler they would help to keep the peace. It helped to bring Czechoslovakia, Austria and other countries under Hitler's control. If the Government had stood firm at that time, and not given way, we might not have had the second world war, and the Hitler regime might not have taken control of most of Europe. Is there not a parallel today? If the Government were prepared to stand firm with most other nations and apply sanctions, we would get a different situation in South Africa.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman has made, I hope, the greater part of the speech that he was otherwise going to make. I do not find myself impressed by it. The parallel is in no sense relevant. In the 1930s, between the wars, the United Kingdom were one of many Governments who would have been able, by taking effective action in the face of military advance, to check that threat. If we look at the prospect in South Africa now, the question is not whether we should mobilise worldwide military action. The case has been made that, by mobilising punitive economic sanctions, we can have an effect on what happens there. All the experience so far shows that that will not happen. I only wish that we could find something that would provide the quick answer that the hon. Gentleman wants.

Mr. Dykes: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall not give way. I must try to bring my speech to a conclusion.

Instead of punishing ordinary South Africans for the sins of a Government in whom they have no say, we shall continue with our major programme of direct assistance to the black community. We are taking a lead in helping to educate black South Africans to leave behind the difficult present and to progress towards a better future.

Despite what the right hon. Member for Gorton said, Britain is among the leaders in its programmes of economic and security assistance to the neighbouring states. We are working effectively to reduce the economic and transport dependence of the region on South Africa. Our activity in this area is widely recognised and welcomed elsewhere in Africa and, in the long run, it will be crucial.

Above all, we must keep working to help political progress in South Africa. Whatever the South African Government may do—this is the important fact—even today many South Africans on all sides are showing themselves more receptive to new ideas. We have a role in pressing the case for change——

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not wish to give way again.

Mr. Boateng *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am sorry. I said not now.

We have a role in urging a case for co-operation among the communities. We do that through the important work of our embassy and our ambassador in South Africa. We shall continue to press our case direct with the South African Government. We shall continue to stress the urgent need for fundamental change. We shall denounce actions that serve only to make things worse. Last week's measures are only the latest example of the South African Government's folly.

In all those ways, there is an important job to be done, not only in London, but by our ambassador on the spot in South Africa. We shall continue to take every opportunity to make known our opposition to actions that infringe the sovereignty of neighbouring countries or further destabilise the region. We shall certainly call for a peaceful settlement in Angola and Namibia, through the withdrawal of all foreign forces in the region. Above all, we shall continue to press for the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners and for an end to the ban on the African National Congress and other political parties, in the context of a suspension of violence on all sides.

I invite the House to reject and condemn the latest restrictions imposed by the South African Government. I certainly invite the House to join Her Majesty's Government in urging the South African Government to repeal the measures before further harm is done. I invite the House to accept that the task of promoting peaceful change is a long and arduous one. There is no simple shortcut such as is commended by the Opposition. We will not shirk that task, nor will we make it more difficult by imposing punitive sanctions that can only make matters worse. We shall continue our constructive, practical policies, which are designed to help, not hinder, black South Africans, and to bring apartheid to an end as soon as possible.

5.12 pm

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): The Foreign Secretary asked the House to accept the sincerity of his commitment against apartheid. I certainly accept it, but we are entitled to ask him to accept that many of us are increasingly worried—he should be, as the person charged with the conduct of our foreign policy—about the tarnished reputation of Britain, not just in the House and in black Africa but round the world, at the appearance of a lackadaisical, do-nothing approach by this Administration to the apartheid regime. Everyone knows that the policy is dictated not by the right hon. and learned Gentleman or his colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office but by the Prime Minister. We must bring our condemnation to the attention of the House this afternoon.

The Government devote twice as much energy to denouncing sanctions as they do to denouncing apartheid, and it is noticeable that the most vehement sections of the Prime Minister's statements on the subject are reserved for sanctions rather than apartheid.

The Foreign Secretary came nowhere near to answering the question asked by the Eminent Persons Group in the penultimate paragraph of its trenchant report. It said:

"The question in front of Heads of government is in our view clear. It is not whether such measures"—

sanctions—

"will compel change; it is already the case that their absence and Pretoria's belief that they need not be feared, defers change. Is the Commonwealth to stand by and allow the cycle of violence to spiral? Or will it take concerted action of an effective kind?"

The British Government have persistently declined to answer that question.

At this year's Commonwealth conference, President Kaunda of Zambia, speaking on behalf of 48 of the 49 members of the Commonwealth, said that they had to accept Britain's right to be wrong. The House regards it as humiliating that other members of the Commonwealth must accept Britain's right to be wrong. Why cannot Britain join other countries in being right on this issue and in being willing to take effective action?

Sources other than those quoted by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) have praised the Prime Minister's stance on apartheid. After the Vancouver conference, the pro-Government Johannesburg daily newspaper *The Citizen* devoted an entire page to an editorial on the Prime Minister's stand at Vancouver and applauded her publicly. The Government, and especially the Prime Minister, stand charged and convicted of giving aid and comfort to the Botha regime at every turn.

This weekend, I met the Norwegian Prime Minister in Oslo. I discovered that when the Prime Minister visited Norway a little time ago she spent much of her time lecturing — again with vehemence — members of the Norwegian Government on the wrongheadedness of their approach to South Africa. Everywhere she goes, she uses that argument, and everywhere she goes, she is in the wrong.

We should examine carefully the measures that have been promulgated by the South African Government. Some of them, which were published on 24 February in the *Government Gazette* by the Ministry of Law and Order, would be laughable if they were not so serious. The Congress of South African Trade Unions is banned from

"the stirring-up, by way of publicity campaigns, of opposition among members of the public . . . to . . . the detention of a person, or of persons belonging to a category of persons."

That is a sweeping promulgation. It is forbidden

"to commemorate or celebrate an event in the history of an organisation . . . which is of some importance or other to such organisation."

It is also forbidden to engage in

"any interference in or meddling with . . . the affairs or functions of a local authority."

Our Prime Minister would stand to be convicted under that item if she lived in South Africa. That shows the flavour of the sweeping measures that have been taken against organisations that were trying to do what the Foreign Secretary so approves of: to secure change in South Africa by peaceful means.

The Government amendment talks about

"practical and constructive action in Southern Africa."

That was the thinnest part of the Secretary of State's speech. I pay tribute to the work of the aid and education programmes, but what practical constructive action are the Government taking to help to end apartheid? The answer is none. Earlier this month, the other

[Mr. David Steel]

Commonwealth Foreign Ministers set up a committee and met in Lusaka. Sadly, Britain was not represented because the Prime Minister decided that we should not take part in the work of the committee. The Foreign Ministers of Canada and Australia were there, together with representatives of some front-line states. They decided to commission a study on the effect of targeted, intensified sanctions—a phrase that I prefer to the one contained in the Opposition motion of "comprehensive sanctions", because I believe that targeted, selective, effective sanctions would be better than generalised, ineffective sanctions, which is what we might get.

At their next meeting, the Foreign Ministers will consider a specific list of sanctions on which some of the items in the EPG report may feature. Their communiqué also said that they would take steps to counter the effects of censorship in South Africa and make sure that the outside world knew what was going on. Will Britain play a part in that? Our absence from those meetings suggests that we are not prepared even to do that.

We should re-examine the list of items in the Nassau communiqué which is republished in the EPG report. On top of that list is the suggestion made a few minutes ago by my right hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) of ending direct flights to South Africa. If we look at that item alone, it does not meet with the condemnation or criticism that has been levelled at other sanctions. It would not cause mass unemployment in South Africa itself. Moreover, it would have a direct beneficial effect on the economies of the neighbouring front-line states. If every business person and every politician travelling to and from South Africa had to go through one of the front-line states, and international flights were diverted to those states, that could only be beneficial, and would at least be a specific sign of the condemnation of the rest of the world, including this country, of the regime in South Africa.

What has happened instead? There has been the piecemeal withdrawal of airline facilities by individual countries — the Scandinavians have withdrawn theirs, and so have the Americans. What have the British Government done? Not only have we not withdrawn our air services, but British Airways mounted an advertising campaign in South Africa to get business to connect people to American airlines in London. Far from joining in effective sanctions, we are prepared to undermine the efforts of other Governments, who are trying to bring pressure to bear on the South African Government. The Government should look at that again.

Are we proud of the fact that in this country we have already been manufacturing the plastic cards or seals that are to go on the identity passes, to enable the apartheid system to be administered? The Group Areas Act will be made more effective by the fact that those passes are manufactured here.

Many Ministers have lectured the Church on creating a climate of morality in recent times, but the Government have a duty to create a climate of morality on the apartheid issue. What has happened to the Victorian values, when cotton workers in Lancashire were prepared to go without work rather than handle the products of the slave trade? Why do the Government not resurrect such morality and say to firms that they should turn down orders for goods that are directly related to the implementation of the apartheid system? The House is entitled to ask the Government to take that step.

The Lusaka Ministers' meeting set a tone and a trend that we should follow. One of the other items mentioned in their communiqué was tightening up the implementation of the arms embargo and the arms-related materials embargo, to which the Government are bound under the United Nations Security Council resolution. But the Government must also accept some responsibility for the loopholes in that measure that have been allowed. I draw the Government's attention to the fact that as far back as 1983, the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, was saying that there was no conclusive evidence that the South African embassy in London was involved directly in the breaches of the arms trade embargo, yet subsequently the Foreign Office was made aware of an invoice from a firm in London, which carries on it the official stamp of the South African embassy—it is rubber-stamped. I have a copy of it in my hand. What was done about that? Did the Government summon the ambassador and make it clear that such conduct would not be allowed, or did they say, "Well, we'll let the matter go"—I think that that is the attitude that they took — "the people in the embassy who were engaged in this have been recalled to Pretoria, so nothing more need be done about it."? Again, the Government's attitude was to let issues slide.

A report to the United States Congress by the State Department, which was published in April last year, listed seven countries that are in breach of the arms embargo. Chief among them was the state of Israel, but sadly the United Kingdom is another of the seven countries listed. The report states:

> "Companies in Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Switzerland have on occasion exported articles covered by the embargo without government permission or have engaged in sales to South Africa in the gray area between civilian and military applications."

The report was published in April, as I said. In November I asked a series of written questions of the Foreign Office about what had been done on specific allegations of breaches of the embargo on items such as radar equipment. The Minister of State said in reply to three of my questions, on 10 November and 6 November, that the Government were investigating certain allegations that had been made in this connection.

Since then we have heard nothing. It would be nice to hear tonight that action has been taken on those issues. As the United States report says, there is a grey area between military and civilian equipment. On our television screens we used to see Land Rovers, in the days when it was allowed, being used by the South African police and military against civilians. Such items will obviously be used for repressive purposes. It is no use shrugging and saying, "We thought that they were for civilian purposes."

If the Government do not wish to go down the road of extending sanctions in other areas, let them be forthright with the House and report that they are implementing those embargos, as we are duty bound to do, under the United Nations resolution. If the Government fail to do that, they will stand condemned yet again of paying lip service to their opposition to apartheid. What we want is some action.

5.26 pm

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me so early in the debate. I apologise to my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench that I shall not be here for the wind-up speeches because I have a speaking engagement in Portsmouth, when I shall speak to a school about South Africa. Opposition Members will be interested to learn that a ballot was taken among the pupils on whom they would like to speak, and I came top.

We have just been treated to a short diatribe from the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel), who gave the usual Liberal view and called for somewhat cosy sanctions. I am surprised that he did not endorse the call this weekend by his right hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), that the Union Jack should be removed from the South African flag. Only the Liberal party will go along with such petty sanctions. They directly conflict with the views of his trusted and personal friend in South Africa, Mr. Colin Eglin, the leader of the Progressive Federal party, who has called consistently for the Opposition parties in Britain to withdraw their call for sanctions.

We were also treated, inevitably, to the hypocrisy and humbug of the official Opposition Front Bench, for which it has become well noted. Should not the Opposition's words of condemnation of South Africa be voiced at the same time as condemnation of other countries where the basis of human rights is undermined by varied violent means, be it in the Punjab, Sri Lanka or anywhere else? The House might be a little more sympathetic to their arguments if the Opposition did that.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) is content, as is his party, to flirt with terrorist organisations such as the African National Congress, to support those who are demonstrating outside the South African embassy in Trafalgar Square, on the basis of intimidation of innocent people walking by, and to put the policy that the Labour party espouses behind violent regimes that are trying to overturn the South African Government. The Opposition have allies in the British Broadcasting Corporation, which never ceases to take any chance——

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlisle: I do not have time to give way.

The BBC never ceases to take any opportunity of putting forward anti-South African propaganda. I feel, and I think many people in this country feel, that the debate is only on the basis of the Opposition trying to wear their heart on their sleeve and take some high moral ground.

I endorse the words of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, who said that the House is sick of hearing such things as the Opposition say, as if they and they only had a conscience or moral obligation——

Mr. Wareing *rose*——

Mr. Carlisle: I am sorry, but I do not have time to give way.

The Opposition speak as if they had some sort of moral responsibility for the matter. There are Conservative Members, with many varied views on this subject, who care deeply about the future of South Africa, but understand the situation far more than Opposition Members, with their simplistic view.

The state of affairs is always changing in South Africa, not least because the sanction argument has now been lost. The fact that the Prime Minister's stand has been seen to be right and to be working has been borne out in the past few months. Many of the front-line states that were calling for sanctions against South Africa have now muted that policy. Zimbabwe alone increased its trade with South Africa by some 14 per cent. last year. That is some indication of the dependence of that and other countries on the South African economy, and of how devastating sanctions would be for them—as well as for the people of South Africa for whom those who misguidedly advocate sanctions wish the benefit.

That was brought home recently when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister visited Kenya and Nigeria, where, despite the attempts by parts of the media to suggest that the entire trip would involve the sanctions argument, it seemed to be hardly mentioned. We begin to suspect that even the people in those countries understand that the argument is worthless. Whatever the rhetoric, and whatever measures are taken, the House must understand that—as my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said—the problem will be resolved only by the South Africans themselves. We do not help by condemning as we have done.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Before the hon. Gentleman ends his remarks, will he make any whisper of criticism of the measures?

Mr. Carlisle: I am coming to that.

The position is certainly changing, and I should like to make two small points about it. First, let me refer to the speech made by the state President when he opened Parliament a couple of weeks ago in Cape Town. A certain amount of disappointment was expressed that he had made virtually no reference to the reform process. Those of us who were present perhaps shared that disappointment——

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlisle: No, I will not give way.

If the reforms are to take place, and we all desire that they should, they can take place only on the basis of economic prosperity. That is where the sanctions argument undermines the very principle that it seeks to support. The idea that change can take place in revolutionary circumstances is nonsense. The fact that the South African economy is now suffering, as other western economies have done, means that the country must get its economy right.

The dismantling of apartheid — which I support — costs money. If we want to see the same amount of money spent on the education of black children as is spent on that of white children — and I want to see that — we must understand that that can only come about if the economy is there to support it. It is a fallacy to think otherwise.

The other matter that I wish to discuss is the basis of the latest clampdown. I must say to my right hon. and learned Friend that, were I to be here, I would find it rather difficult to support him in the Lobby tonight on the basis of the Government's amendment. It assumes, as, of

[Mr. Carlisle]

course, do the Opposition, that the peaceful protest — the word "peaceful" is in the motion; it is certainly not my word — by the various groups was indeed peaceful, and was indeed political.

Perhaps the House needs to be reminded from time to time that elements in the Opposition parties in South Africa are violent. The ANC has declared that it wishes to see South Africa ungovernable. It wishes to see a military force bring the so-called legitimate regime to its knees. Not all those organisations — hiding, in many instances, behind the respectability of the United Democratic Front — have put forward their protests in a peaceful way. However unpalatable that may be, the House must accept it. The violence, particularly recently, has been in black townships, particularly in the Natal region. It has been black violence. If that is allowed to continue, the structure of even those societies, fragile though they are, is bound to be undermined.

In such circumstances, any Government are bound to discuss possible measures. I am not necessarily saying that the South African Government, heavy-handed though they are, have taken the right action in this case. What we must ask in the House, and what the South Africans are asking, is for the understanding that if we in this country were in the same position, whatever the colour of our Government, we could be faced with a similar policy. It is all too easy to condemn the authorities for placing a ban on those organisations on the assumption, contained in both the motion and the amendment, that they are peaceful organisations.

As my right hon. and learned Friend said, we do not know the full facts of the arrest of Archbishop Tutu, the Rev. Allan Boesak and others today, but they knew the position when they marched from the cathedral towards the Parliament building. They knew full well that they were liable to be arrested. I suggest that Archbishop Tutu, glutton that he is for publicity and for any opportunity to put forward his point of view, probably got himself arrested deliberately, along with several others. We must understand how any other Government must react in such circumstances.

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): What about the children?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Our debate is not enhanced by bawling remarks from a sedentary position.

Mr. Carlisle: I am drawing my remarks to a conclusion, but I should like to take up the hon. Lady's point. I think that a misnomer is being used in the House. The right hon. Member for Gorton said that thousands of children had been detained under the state of emergency provisions. In fact, no child under the age of 15 has so far been detained. A lot of nonsense has been talked by the Opposition about the number of children who are detained.

We should remember that the crimes committed by those children in the black townships would not have been accepted in this country. Let me tell the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) that one 15-year-old is being held after arson was committed at a school—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Lady would listen, although she may not want to hear the facts.

The arson was started by a group of children at the school. When one of the children decided that she wished to have nothing to do with the burning down of her classroom, she was hacked to death by the others outside the school. If that is the sort of action that the hon. Lady and her friends wish to support, so be it, but any Government in that position are bound to react by detaining those who perpetrate such crimes.

There is no simplistic solution to the awful problems in South Africa. The country is in a state of emergency, and will remain so while people cannot get to work or to school, cannot play sport and cannot live in relative peace and harmony within the black townships. Hon. Members on both sides of the House who have been there should agree that the state of emergency has brought a relative calm to the areas concerned.

These immense problems need understanding, and — as my right hon. and learned Friend has said — they need time. The simplistic and heartrending arguments from the Opposition are spurious and entirely unhelpful. We must understand the position as if we were in it ourselves, and hope that the South Africans will sort out the problems for themselves.

5.38 pm

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): The Botha regime once again stands condemned for this latest in a series of atrocities committed against the majority black population in South Africa, and against the black people in Africa generally. We have seen a two-year state of emergency and attacks on the front-line states second to none. In Angola, even now, white South African troops are fighting the Angolan army. In Namibia the South African forces continue to occupy the country illegally. We have seen the general destabilisation of southern Africa by the Botha regime.

This latest action is extremely serious. I am surprised that the Government, who are fond of taking hard action, cannot bring themselves to take any action against the South African Government. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) mentioned some of the 17 organisations that have been banned by this latest decree. They include the Detainees' Parents Support Committee, which looks after the interests of children and detainees and monitors how the South African Government deals with them. It issued a press release on 24 February, which said:

"This attempt to silence the legitimate voices of opposition to apartheid is yet another example of the Government's aggressively confrontational attitude and their refusal to attempt to negotiate with the leaders and organisations which represent the majority of South Africans. Furthermore the DPSC believes that the restrictions placed on 17 organisations are ultra vires and that the Government is not empowered to issue these restrictions. The DPSC is a welfare and service organisation. We are baffled as to how we can be a threat to public safety. We are however proud of our record in exposing state repression and bringing to public scrutiny the excesses and abuses of the security police."

In a Radio 4 interview late last week, a person whom I believe to be the deputy ambassador at the South African embassy, when asked about the support committee, said that it was giving wrong information to the Western world and distorting the South African Government's position. Presumably that is enough of a crime for the committee to be stopped from taking any political action. Indeed, it is presumably enough to stop it from taking any action. That is not on. It is a disgrace. The Botha regime is attempting to emasculate such organisations. It is

attempting to stop them from taking any meaningful political action. It is trying to turn them into merely administrative organisations.

We must reflect on the fact that some organisations have not been banned. I am not, of course, suggesting that they should be banned. I refer to the white-led civil rights organisation, Black Sash. White anti-apartheid groups are not banned.

Mr. Winnick: Inkatha was not banned.

Mr. Grant: My hon. Friend is right. Why has Inkatha not been banned? The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) talked about black on black violence. He regularly throws that example in the face of the opponents of apartheid. He is effectively arguing that black people are fighting among themselves so we cannot really give them any position of authority. The argument is clearly nonsense.

Mr. John Carlisle: I did not say that.

Mr. Grant: The so-called black on black violence is really black on white violence, because behind Inkatha are the police and the Botha regime. The Botha regime needs people such as Chief Buthelezi to ensure that its racist and apartheid regime continues. It is a fact that when about 430 black people have been killed, the majority by Inkatha, the police have stood aside and let it happen. They have taken no action against Buthelezi and Inkatha because they know that Inkatha is doing a job for the regime.

The United Democratic Front has been banned. It is well known that Archie Gumede and Albertina Sisulu were negotiating about violence in Natal province. It was rumoured that people were beginning to reach some sort of accommodation. We are not a million miles away from the truth if we believe that the violence against black people in Pietermaritzburg could have been stopped. By banning the UDF, the South African Government have automatically removed half the components of the peace negotiations. Because Inkatha has not been banned, it can continue its terrorism on people in the area. We must get behind the so-called black on black violence and find out who is responsible and who stands to gain. The only people who stand to gain are in the Botha regime.

Other things have happened. In response to the recent banning orders, Desmond Tutu, who was arrested today, said that he would not be surprised if the black majority turned to violence. He said:

"We have nothing to show for our non-violent approaches . . . if violence erupts what will be surprising is that it has taken so long."

There is much in that. His sentiments are similar to those of the Eminent Persons Group. I am therefore surprised when the Foreign Secretary comes here and still talks about the peaceful road. The peaceful road leads nowhere. Everybody knows that. Even Gavin Relly, the chairman of the Anglo American Corporation of South Africa, has had something to say about the South African Government's decision. He said that any threats that were posed by the 17 groups should have been dealt with by the courts and that

"Yesterday's actions are steps away from the rule of law."

When we consider the present situation and the British Government's stance, we must ask a few questions. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell me what the Government will do with regard to South Africa. The Foreign Secretary says that external pressure does not work. He says that it only makes South Africa dig its heels in even deeper. I am surprised that he should say that, because the boycott on sport has forced the South African Government to open up to multiracial sport, even if only to a small extent. The consistent refusal to send sporting teams has forced the South African Government to make sport multiracial at least superficially. It is nonsense to say that external pressure has no effect.

The Foreign Secretary said that sanctions would undermine the stability of the region, but the South African regime has undermined the stability of the region for many years. During two years, 140 villages, 840 schools, 900 rural shops and 200 public health installations in Mozambique have been destroyed by the South African Government or their surrogate forces. Is that not destabilisation? Is it not destabilisation when South African troops use G5 and G6 cannon, which have been supplied from the United States of America through the back door, against troops in Angola? That weapon can hit a target the size of a badminton court from 45 km. Is it not destabilisation when the South African Government and their agents bomb the Limpopo railway line? Is it not destabilisation when the South African Government, contrary to contracts made with the front-line states, refuse, at key intervals, to transport goods?

When the Secretary of State says that sanctions would undermine the stability of the region, he is not being as frank as he should be with the House. He has talked about giving direct assistance to the black community. The Prime Minister has spoken about the great education programme that the British Government have undertaken to help black South Africans. Presumably the right hon. Lady is not aware that the key organisation in South Africa for education, the National Education Crisis Committee, has been banned for some time. Therefore, any minuscule effect that the British Government may have in South Africa is negated because the people who know what sort of education is needed are unable to play a full part in the necessary negotiations.

The Prime Minister has said that the ANC is a terrorist organisation, but she seems to have changed her tune. During the Kenya-Nigeria tour she was reported as saying that the ANC did not represent all black people in South Africa. It appears that there has been a shift in the Prime Minister's opinion. When she came back from Vancouver she was extremely keen on the idea that the ANC was a terrorist organisation: now she says that it does not represent all the black people, but presumably she now accepts that it represents some.

We believe that, without question, the ANC is the major organisation that looks after the interests of black people. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton has said that the ANC's standing has been recognised by other Western Governments. We are aware that it has not been fully recognised by the British Government, but we know that the Foreign Office has been speaking to the ANC for some time now, despite what the Prime Minister may say.

I believe that sanctions are important. The black people of South Africa have asked us to impose sanctions, and there can be no greater recommendation for them than that, because those are the people—the residents of the front-line states and of South Africa—who will suffer. Those people have said that they do not mind suffering a bit more if it will assist them, in due course, to get their freedom. If the Government do not accept the view of the

[Mr. Grant]

majority of black people in South Africa, they are being callous and are not recognising the rights of those people or their ability to speak for themselves. If that is the case, it would appear that the Prime Minister is saying, "I know what is good for you, never mind what you think, and I am going to follow my own path." The Prime Minister has taken such a stand on many other occasions.

When the Minister replies, she must say whether she will recall the British ambassador from Pretoria and seek the withdrawal of European Community ambassadors. In July 1985, after the first state of emergency was declared by the Botha regime, EC ambassadors were recalled. The latest development is much more serious than the 1985 emergency. Therefore, will the right hon. Lady press for the recall of the British and EC ambassadors?

5.54 pm

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): This debate is a charade because our party games mean that our essential unity on this matter is obscured. Indeed, I agree with the Opposition motion apart from the last four words and the Government's amendment is not so dissimilar.

I should draw my right hon. and learned Friend's attention to the fact that the Government amendment makes no mention of the word "Commonwealth", yet it appears in the Opposition motion. I believe that it is a sad and significant thing that, when discussing Africa, the interests of the Commonwealth should be mentioned only in the Labour party motion and be absent from the Conservative Government amendment. Indeed, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary made no mention of that word in his speech. One would have thought that the interests of nearly one third of the world's sovereign states would cause the British Foreign Secretary to have regard to them before discussing South Africa, a country whose policies have serious implications for the Commonwealth.

Today's debate is rather like the debate that we had a year ago when the Government's amendment to the Opposition's motion was distinguished by the fact that the Government used the word "measures" and the Opposition used the word "sanctions". There is no difference in principle between the major parties in the House. We all detest apartheid and we all want to see the emergence of representative government in South Africa, within a democratic system. The only difference is how to secure that objective and what is meant by sanctions as a means of securing it.

Unfortunately, the difference between us appears to be wider because the Government place their emphasis on opposing what are called in the amendment "punitive economic sanctions", and the Opposition place emphasis on "comprehensive economic sanctions." The result of the semantic difference in the wording of the motion and the amendment is that the Government of South Africa believe that the United Kingdom Government support their policies. They do not, but the British Government cannot complain if the world is given such an impression and if, as a result, damage is done to the Commonwealth. The Government do far too little to give the true impression—that we and the British Government detest apartheid and will do all that we practically can to bring it to an end as soon as possible.

What do we mean by sanctions? If, by opposing punitive sanctions, the Government mean only those measures that punish South Africa and their people in a negative way and might defer fundamental constitutional change in South Africa, I agree with them. Comprehensive economic sanctions, as advocated by the Opposition, could be regarded as similarly negative and destructive.

Some sanctions of a symbolic and economic nature already exist. The European Community, the Commonwealth, the United States, other countries and even the British Government have applied a variety of sanctions designed, at one end of the scale, to refrain from assisting the South African Government's policies and, at the other end of the scale, to force the South African Government to come to terms with the majority of their subjects. I must confess that I am in favour of measures at the latter end of the scale. We should consider extending measures, sanctions, initiatives or whatever one may call them that might induce the South African Government to come to terms with the majority of their people. We should consider sanctions that might not do so much economic harm but would be of great significance, nevertheless. For example, we could ban direct flights between South Africa and this country and we could withdraw ambassadors.

The Government cannot maintain their present mild policy towards the South African Government indefinitely. The violence is increasing daily and it has been made worse by internal repression. A doctrine based on the inferiority of one race and enforced by law is bound to result in cruelty, injustice, the use of brute force and misery in all contacts between authority and subjects. Furthermore, the brutality of apartheid at a personal level is bound to sicken people who live in a free society such as ours so that they demand that action be taken to destroy it.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): My hon. Friend suggests a ban on flights between Britain and South Africa. Is not that rather self-defeating? Do we not want to encourage more contact? How can we have contact without flights? We want to encourage British people to go to South Africa and seek to influence people in South Africa and equally we want South Africans to come here and perhaps be influenced. That is sensible and we have flights to Russia for exactly the same reason.

Mr. Stanbrook: My hon. Friend shares a point of view that is sincerely held by a great many Conservative Members. Indeed, 20, 30 or 40 years ago I shared that view. However, as time has passed, I have realised that that is no solution. The South Africans do not want to change. They have no intention of changing. They can be induced to change only by pressure. They will not admire our system or want to share our impressions of the world. To a certain extent, I agree with my hon. Friend, because if Afrikaners could see Africans in a natural free habitat, such as is possible elsewhere in Africa, they would appreciate that it is possible to regard Africans as capable and worthy of taking a share in their government. However, there is a struggle for power in South Africa and I do not believe that those who run the South African Government have any intention of giving way even to the influence that shared communications and an outsider's view of the world might bring.

Apartheid is an affront to civilisation and no African Commonwealth state worth its salt would tolerate

indefinitely British inactivity on this issue. Extra sanctions, measures, persuasions and influences are needed to induce the white population of South Africa, which has the vote, to accept fundamental constitutional reforms. Such inducements can include symbolic measures that do not cause grievous economic damage but show that we mean business.

Those who support the Government of South Africa are clearly themselves supported by people with detestable ideas about government and democracy, as has been exhibited by the Nazi-style movements that have grown in strength recently. Such people must not be allowed to think that they have an ally in the United Kingdom. Britain must progressively increase the pressure on South Africa. What is being done at the moment is quite insufficient and will not bring about reform at the pace necessary for that reform to be realistic and successful. If we are to be true to ourselves and our historic role in Africa, we British have no option but to reject the wickedness of the South African Government's policies and do all that we can to change them.

6.4 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The brave speech of the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) was a welcome relief from the weasel words that we heard from the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) who acts as an apologist for the South African Government. I have never doubted or denied that some Conservative Members believe that what is happening in South Africa is monstrous and should be ended, but I do not know whether they are in a minority or a majority. It was for those Conservative Members that the hon. Member for Orpington spoke.

I considered the Foreign Secretary's speech pathetic. When I intervened during it, I said that I did not question the fact that the Foreign Secretary was against apartheid. I am sure that he is as much against that system of racial tyranny as are Opposition Members but that is not the issue. We expected, not just condemnation—although that is welcome—of the latest measures in South Africa but to hear what effective action the Government propose to take.

From the Foreign Secretary's speech we could conclude only that the British Government do not intend to take any measures whatever. The Foreign Secretary was pathetic, not because of any personal inadequacies, but simply because he is the Foreign Secretary in a Government headed by a Prime Minister who is determined that under no circumstances should effective economic measures be taken against the South African regime. The real culprit is the Prime Minister.

It is no coincidence that this debate is taking place in Opposition time. I find it difficult to believe that the Government would have found time for a debate following the events in South Africa last week. The Labour party has strenuously opposed the system operating in South Africa. We did so from the very beginning, when the Nationalists took office in 1948. We do not deny or apologise for the fact that we feel strongly and passionately about this subject. It is difficult to think of any subject about which we feel more strongly: just as our predecessors felt as strongly about the slave trade and its awful happenings or the tyranny of Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy in the 1930s.

It was a Labour Government who banned the arms sales to South Africa in the 1960s. In 1967 some members of the Cabinet, particularly the then Foreign Secretary, the late George Brown, wanted to reverse that policy. It quickly became public knowledge. It is said that Cabinet meetings are confidential, but the subject of the meeting in question was soon leaked. Labour Members in their hundreds tabled a motion making it perfectly clear that any reversal of the Government's policy was totally unacceptable. If the Cabinet had gone ahead, we should have voted against the Government in the Lobby, because we considered that to be our responsibility.

On 18 June 1970 Labour lost office. I should remember that election date, as I lost my seat, where I had had a majority of 81. On 6 July the Foreign Secretary, now Lord Home, announced that the Labour Government's ban on arms sales was to be reversed. The Conservative Government could hardly wait to declare that change of policy. It is a good job that the ban on arms sales to South Africa is now the subject of a United Nations Security Council mandatory resolution, and has been since 1977. If it were not, I could almost believe that the Prime Minister would be arguing—as Conservative politicians, including the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who was the Leader of the Opposition, argued in the debate on arms sales in 1967—that it was right and proper to sell arms to South Africa because other countries would do so if we did not. There is not the slightest evidence to show that the South African authorities take any notice of the criticism levelled at them by Western Governments, including the United Kingdom. It is not words that will shift the rulers in that country.

As we know, at this moment the South African Government are concerned about the challenge from the even more Right-wing in South Africa, such as the Conservative party and the Nazi-inspired Afrikaner Resistance Movement. Botha is concerned that some by-election may be lost. He is far more concerned with appeasing the ultra-nationalists, the Right-wing or the Nazi-inspired movements such as we have seen on the television news, than with international opinion. That is what we have to recognise today.

I accept entirely that sanctions—I want to see them applied—would not bring down the South African Government in a matter of days, weeks or months. I do not challenge that. However, it would weaken and isolate the South African authorities. They are desperately frightened of international sanctions. They do not want them at any price.

Sanctions, moreover, would be a signal to the regime that at long last the international community is taking action and will continue to do so until substantial changes occur in South Africa leading to majority rule. There would also be a second signal to all those in South Africa who oppose the regime, such as the African National Congress and the people it represents, and those in the white and coloured communities who are just as opposed to the system as we are, that at long last Western countries, Britain included, and the EEC are determined to support their campaign and struggle against racial tyranny. No longer would it be simply a matter of words. No longer would it be a matter of condemning the South African Government's actions, as the Foreign Secretary did today, and then washing one's hands of it.

[Mr. David Winnick]

Whenever we debate South Africa, everyone here, with one or two exceptions, such as the hon. Member for Luton, North and one or two others who have not spoken, criticises the apartheid regime. In the main there is condemnation of apartheid. The real divide in the House — this is what I would say to the Foreign Secretary, who has now returned to the Chamber — is between those who criticise what is happening in South Africa but rule out any action against the regime, and Opposition Members, who argue that the South African system is a monstrous racial tyranny modelled on the lines of Hitler's Germany which should be penalised and punished for as long as it refuses to change its ways.

The report of the Eminent Persons Group referred to sanctions. That group was made up of a number of people, including Lord Barber, whose political opinions would be somewhat different from ours on the Labour Benches. The report said:

"If it comes to the conclusion"—

that is the South African authorities—

"that it would always remain protected from such measures, the process of change in South Africa is unlikely to increase . . . and the descent into violence would be accelerated."

The report went to speak about the Africans and said:

"If it also comes to believe that the world community will never exercise sufficient effective pressure through other measures in support of their cause, they will have only one option remaining: that of ever-increasing violence."

If people are denied their basic rights, have no part to play in the government of their country, are refused the vote and basic civil and democratic rights for one reason only — the colour of their skin — is it surprising that some have come to the conclusion in South Africa that violence should occur?

The Prime Minister said that the ANC is a terrorist organisation almost on the lines of the IRA. That only helps the IRA. No one in Northern Ireland is denied the right to put forward a point of view, however Republican he or she may be. There is no reason and no excuse for terrorism in Northern Ireland. In South Africa it is not terrorism, but violent struggle by people who are denied their rights. Therefore, to slander the ANC is to help the IRA and other terrorist organisations. It is to slander an organisation which came into being in 1912 and which until 1960 said that under no circumstances would violence be used. It was only at the time of Sharpeville that it came to the conclusion that there was no alternative.

We are right to have this debate. I saw the remarkable film "Cry Freedom", as I am sure did some of my hon. Friends. It was moving in many ways. In my view—I am not a professional critic—the most effective moment was the end, when the credits went up and we saw the names of all the people who over the past 10 or 15 years had been murdered in detention. That is an illustration of what is happening in South Africa today. I trust that this debate will be one of many to come.

The message from Labour Members—not from the Conservative Government—to all those in South Africa opposed to the regime, whether black, white or coloured, is, "We are on your side. Everything we can do, we will do. Your struggle is a just one. You are right to demand freedom and we want to do everything in our power to ensure that freedom and liberation come to South Africa."

6.16 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Many of us share the passion that was displayed at the end of the speech of the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). My remarks will be brief because many other hon. Members want to speak in this short debate.

I am sure that the support that the ANC receives in South Africa is considerably higher than that which can be claimed by the South African Government — the Pretoria regime. In fact, the measurement of election figures in recent elections shows that the Pretoria regime governs on the basis of support from about 7 or 8 per cent. of the population. Of course, artificially that is a large percentage of the electorate because the electorate is so small. However, if anyone were to ask which of all the panoply of political forces in South Africa has the greatest legitimacy, I would unequivocally and unhesitatingly say that the ANC has greater legitimacy as a political force and as a component in the future government of South Africa, along with other entities and components that negotiations may bring about.

The ANC is a constructive force for future peace but it is trapped by the vicious and evil nature of the Pretoria regime. Some people, rightly excluding my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook), who knows so much about South Africa, are tempted to think that the Pretoria regime is prepared to compromise and indulge in real reforms. I hope that they will allow those illusions and naive beliefs to be dispelled. There have been no reforms beyond the wholly artificial and transparent idea of racial mixing and sexual relations between peoples. The Act preventing that has been repealed. However, there have been no other reforms. Even the old passes have been replaced with new ones. They may look more modern, more acceptable and more sophisticated but the intention behind them is the same: to keep the population separated.

In all measurements of world history it is a detestable and wicked regime that has to be removed. I am glad that Opposition Members have acknowledged that they have no monopoly of virtue on the matter. Conservative Members also feel that that has to be done. Inevitably, because South Africa is a sovereign country, it has to be done by the population concerned, however hopeless we may feel the position is after having seen the latest incredible and stupid measures of that totally evil Government who are trying once again to clamp down on legitimate and peaceful political protests and actions. We have to ask ourselves how things will work out.

I share the genuine, honest and sincere reservations about sanctions held by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. I believe that Pretoria is the sort of regime that will be forced further and further into isolation. There is the defiant laager mentality. This is a sad thing to say and I wish I did not have to say it, but even with concerted international action from all the Governments involved, out of the woodwork throughout the world—it is a wicked old world—would come all the middle men, the intermediaries, the traders and the entrepreneurs. They would go to Pretoria and say, "We will find every conceivable way of getting over the sanctions problems, do not worry." Therefore, there would be a combination of increasing isolation and political defiance, further measures of repression against the hapless and long-suffering majority black population, the Indians, coloureds and the whites who are courageous

enough to stand up against the evil, as well as the mechanisms and entrepreneurial decisions that would allow the South African Government to overcome the problems.

The solution must come from inside. Conservative Members need not apologise for saying that we are not sure how that will happen. I am worried about the situation, as was my right hon. Friend the Minister of State when she referred to the matter in the media during the weekend, after the latest measures had been announced.

An ominous situation is developing. I wonder what the next step will be with this crazy regime which is sufficiently defiant to ignore even rational and sensible opinion in its own country. It ignores the advice of even sensible, pragmatic business men such as Tony Bloom who are now leaving the country. I and other hon. Members regret that very much.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will comment on this, if time allows. Since the latest emergency began in 1984, how many people have been detained and how many murdered in detention by the South African regime? From my vague impression, the figure must be at least several thousand. We do not know, because no figures are published by this lying regime, which never tells the truth, so we have to guess about what is happening, but the total includes children, teenagers and women. How many people have been murdered in detention since the latest emergency began in 1984, let alone since 1976, the period with which Richard Attenborough's film deals? Almost 1,000 schoolchildren were shot in the back as they ran away from the police. That shows the kind of regime which we are discussing. It will use any excuse.

The regime is imposing itself more by its latest series of insane measures. At present, it spared Black Sash, perhaps because it consists of powerful, rich, white ladies who do a wonderful job. I am not grumbling about that, but what will happen when the extra violence which results from the measures ensues? What happens when the regime begins to kill hapless, defenceless black citizens in large numbers? If we are against sanctions, how do we in the Western world and elsewhere react to what is happening, if we are unable to learn about it? The press shackles are so complete. The press have not even tried to bring out the truth of what is happening in the unrest areas. We have the vague impression that things have quietened down. To some extent, that is true, but there is also much more trouble going on, not just in Natal.

When the regime starts to murder large numbers of defenceless black people, how should we react? We may have serious reservations about sanctions. They can be empty gesture politics, although I respect the sincerity of Opposition Members. The Western world and the United Nations will have to decide how to react. In the meantime, allowing for the inherently unsatisfactory nature of this appalling situation, the Government, the European Community, the United Nations and the Commonwealth must do everything in their limited grasp in respect of this sovereign country which will make its own decision and will be defiant unto us all, if it so decides. So far, that has been its indication, almost without exception.

We must decide what we can do and I hope that that will mean, in a limited way, another EC initiative and the sending of yet another mission. Hon. Members may claim that it has not worked before, so why bother to do it again, but attempts must be made to encourage Pretoria to listen to outside suggestions. I am pessimistic about whether the regime will respond, but we must try. In so trying, we continue our constructive policies rather than doing what I now fear we shall do, if we say that sanctions are not practical, cannot be implemented and are not a good idea because they would cause unemployment. I fear that we shall say that we can now do nothing. That is the worst of all our options.

I understand the anxiety of Labour Members. They are entitled to complain about that danger. If we do not do anything the situation will deteriorate into genocide unless the Pretoria regime is checked by internal reforms.

6.24 pm

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): The last two contributions from the Government Benches have been well thought out speeches and have been taken seriously by a number of Labour Members.

I challenge the basis of the Foreign Secretary's argument. He put to the House his reasons for not taking action. He asked Opposition Members to accept his sincerity about changes in South Africa and the eventual removal of apartheid. I hope, therefore, that he will accept the words of the Eminent Persons Group, of which his noble Friend Lord Barber was a member, when it went to South Africa to assess the position. That is the base line from which we start. The way in which we deal with the mentality inside the institutions of South Africa is important.

Page 132 of the Eminent Persons Group report refers to the group's discussions with the South African Government and says:

"In the Government's thinking, there were a number of non-negotiables; for example, the concept of group rights—the very basis of the apartheid system—was sacrosanct; the 'homelands' created in furtherance of that concept would not disappear, . . . the principle of one man one vote in a unitary state was beyond the realm of possibility; the Population Registration Act would continue; and the present Tricameral Constitution which institutionalises racism must be the vehicle for future constitutional reform. From these and other recent developments, we draw the conclusion that while the Government claims to be ready to negotiate, it is in truth not yet prepared to negotiate fundamental change, not to countenance the creation of genuine democratic structures, nor to face the prospect of the end of white domination and white power in the foreseeable future. Its programme of reform does not end apartheid, but seeks to give it a less inhuman face. Its quest is power-sharing, but without surrendering overall white control."

I ask the Foreign Secretary to contrast that with the freedom charter and the principles embodied in that charter, which was the product of a delegation of some 3,000 people in 1955. That charter embodies all that any democrat would want in a multiracial society.

That leaves us with two options. The first option is to bring further pressure to bear on South Africa. The measures that the Government agreed to take have not been carried out as was agreed at Nassau. People both inside and outside South Africa call upon us to take that course of action. Every major organisation in South Africa which supports the removal of apartheid is asking for sanctions to be applied to South Africa. Change will come only from within South Africa.

The second option was put forward by the Foreign Secretary this afternoon — to pursue dialogue and constructive engagement. Since the Commonwealth meeting at Nassau in October 1985, a number of actions

[Mr. Richard Caborn]

have flown in the face of international opinion and in the face of the Eminent Persons Group, which was in South Africa when there were incursions and bombing raids into Commonwealth countries.

There has been the imposition of another state of emergency. Media coverage has been banned and a number of journalists expelled. Violence has increased and now includes violence towards children. Any country that tortures or puts its children into prison must be asked whether it has a human Administration. There have been mass arrests of young people. A conference called "Children under apartheid", held in Harare not long ago, referred to the horrific treatment of children. The accounts came not only from young people but from psychiatrists and teachers.

There have been incursions into the front-line states. Only last week there was a further incursion into Angola. Namibia continues to be illegally occupied, in direct opposition to United Nations resolution 435. Just last week 17 organisations, which were clearly non-violent campaigners against the apartheid regime, were banned.

Every step taken by the South African regime is against the type of constructive engagement that the British Government have continued to pursue. It was unfortunate that the Prime Minister in a Government who were a party to an agreement like the Nassau accord tried to rubbish that conference as she came away from it. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said, the right hon. Lady said that Britain had moved a teeny weeny bit. But we have not moved even a teeny weeny bit. In those areas covered by the Nassau accord, we are still supplying Land Rovers, which are patrolling the townships and from which South African police shoot to kill. We are supplying British ICL computers to the South African police and the arms industry. British military radar, provided by Plessey and Marconi, is used to control South African air attacks into neighbouring African states. British oil companies, such as Shell and BP, continue to fuel the apartheid war machine. The Department of Trade and Industry has stepped up its promotion of trade. I have documentation to show that action is being taken in direct contradiction of section 6(c) of the Nassau accord. A letter of 5 January 1988 from the west midlands regional office of the British Overseas Trade Board said:

"Dear exporter,

Forthcoming trade mission to South Africa.

1. Following the success of its trade mission in South Africa in November 1987 the United Kingdom-South Africa Trade Association has announced its intentions to mount a second trade mission there in April 1988. Full details are available from Mr. Tim Bird, 45 Great Peter Street, London SW1.

2. In addition, management and training specialists will lead a mission to South Africa starting on 23 February 1988."

Details are given. The letter continued:

"3. In accordance with the United Kingdom's international commitment neither mission will receive any Government financial support, with an exception; the full range of DTI services is being made available.

4. South Africa continues to present many opportunities for British firms especially those in construction and engineering sectors."

I do not know whether that is following the Nassau accord to the letter.

Barry Harding, a senior civil servant in the Department of Trade and Industry, writes:

"South Africa: export assistance available. I fear that the message which my colleagues in the market branch here have endeavoured to put across by visits to regional offices etc has not reached everyone. I would be grateful if you will remind your staff that the Minister for Trade is content for officials to continue with the present policy of offering exports for a normal range of assistance apart from those specifically banned. In practice, this simply means that no financial contribution is presently made towards outward missions or joint ventures to South Africa. All other assistance continues to be available including a useful background briefing note which is updated quarterly and a range of market reports."

Those are the words of a leading DTI civil servant, yet we are supposed to be banning trade missions.

I shall pose a series of questions to the Minister. First, will the British Government recall the British ambassador to Pretoria and seek the withdrawal of all European Community ambassadors? Secondly, will the British support the convening of the United Nations Security Council, since it is likely that an emergency debate will take place, probably this week? Will the Government undertake not to use their veto powers if there is a package of sanction measures before the Security Council that are acceptable to other Western countries? Thirdly, will the Government seek from the United Nations Security Council mandatory action to enforce the measures to which they have already agreed — for example, the oil embargo and an embargo on computer exports? It makes no sense for Britain to adopt such measures and then block their universal application.

Fourthly, will the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary go to the meeting of European Community Foreign Ministers this weekend with a positive approach to reach agreement on additional European Community measures? In particular, will he use his influence with the West German and Portuguese Foreign Ministers to get agreement on a ban on coal imports? Fifthly, will the Government follow up the Minister's statement, to which reference has been made many times, on 24 February on "Newsnight"? Will they consult their Commonwealth partners by meeting the Commonwealth Secretary-General and support the convening of a meeting of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers or a meeting of the Commonwealth southern African committee to reach agreement on further measures? There are many other measures that the Government should take to send out the correct signals to South Africa. If the Government are to fulfil the words of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, those words must be backed up by action. Convening meetings of these international institutions is an important step to ensure that the right vibes are sent out to the regime in South Africa.

A number of us have called for the removal of the Union Jack from the South African flag. Someone said that that was fairly symbolic. Because of what we have seen on our television screens this weekend — with the AWB and actions similar to the Nuremberg fiascos when the Fascists were coming to power — many of us are afraid that, unless action is brought by external powers to liberate South Africa, the Nazi symbol of 1988 may be seen clearly at the side of the Union Jack, flying over the South African embassy in this nation. That is unacceptable. History has repeatedly taught us that we cannot run away from the Fascist tendencies. They must be confronted. We do not want to come back in a few years and say, "We told you so." As the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) said, there could be genocide in South Africa. We want positive action and that is what the motion is about.

If we let time pass, the predictions in the report of the Eminent Persons Group will come true. We could see the biggest bloodbath since the second world war.

6.38 pm

Mr. Michael Knowles (Nottingham, East): I share the fears of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), yet I believe that in part we have trapped ourselves into our present position. Our mistake has been to keep only to a stick policy. We have not had a stick and carrot policy towards South Africa; we have just kept on trying to use the stick. I have said, as have other hon. Members, that we should have offered investment in southern Africa as a whole, especially in education, on the basis of a second Marshall plan, yet that has not happened. All that we have sought to use is the stick as a policy to try to drive the South African Government in the direction that we want them to go.

The hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) made a point about black against black violence. One could say that that is perhaps a good sign, because people are starting to move towards a realisation that apartheid, in the way that it has been known, is passing and forces are starting to move to fresh positions in search of power. There is a power struggle between the African National Congress and the United Democratic Front and Inkatha, and that is not surprising. If one takes the UDF and the ANC as being roughly lined up with the Xhosa nation it is hardly surprising at all, but it could be taken as a sign that things are advancing rather than going backward.

It is probably true of us all in all situations that we are trapped in our own beliefs and what we want to come true we work backwards towards. The thing that worries me is that South Africa is the regional superpower. It dominates southern Africa in a way that we in the United Kingdom seem not to understand. If we take South Africa in relation to Africa as a whole, with 4 per cent. of Africa's territory, South Africa consumes 60 per cent. of the continent's electricity, produces 66 per cent. of its steel, is responsible for 40 per cent, of industrial production, and so on. It is a massive regional superpower and dominates the area. This must be taken into account.

It means that if sanctions become really effective they will hit not only South Africa but every neighbouring state as well, and probably with interest. South Africa will make sure that it passes the effect on.

Another worrying suggestion made earlier in the debate was that we should end direct flights to South Africa. This is fine as a gesture, and one takes it on board, but the net effect will be that Swissair will do very well, because all that people will do is fly to Switzerland and trans-ship. The same has happened in the United States. People fly to London. Unless one can be certain of the outcome, it is a dangerous game to play.

The whole sanctions argument is riddled with hypocrisy. For example, 46 out of the 50 members of the Organisation for African Unity trade with South Africa. France suddenly advocated a ban on trading in nuclear power with South Africa—after it had sold a power station to Johannesburg, of course. Australia is in favour of a sanction on coal exports from South Africa. What a surprise. It is in the business itself.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): The hon. Gentleman was speaking a little while ago about the problems of travel to South Africa. Will he tell the House what method of travel he used to go to South Africa when he went out on trips spondored by the South African Government?

Mr. Knowles: A flight from London to Johannesburg.

Mr. Rogers: Who paid?

Mr. Knowles: Bophuthatswana. It is all in the declaration. I am not quite sure of the point of the question, because all that hon. Members need do is look up the Register of Members' Interests and they will find it all declared there.

A point was made about the oil embargo——

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is better to have gone there and seen for oneself than to sit sometimes on the Opposition Benches, never having been within 10,000 miles of the place?

Mr. Knowles: Yes.

A point was made about the oil embargo. The truth is that the oil embargo does not work. When I was in Durban I saw that it was a case of wall-to-wall tankers, and petrol was half the price that it is in this country. And that is supposed to be with an oil embargo. The arms embargo merely served to create a South African arms industry. The point was made earlier—again by the hon. Member for Tottenham, I think — about long-range guns. He thought that they were American. They were not. They were indigenous South African guns. They were G6 and G7 long-range guns using the special steels that had to be made to give them that range. That is the nature of the economy that one is dealing with.

We must also understand the nature of the people that we are dealing with, the Afrikaners. It is not easy to push them around. We should know; we have tried. We fought two wars with them, and eventually won, but we must remember the cost of our winning. We put their people in concentration camps and slaughtered one third of them. We had to do that to beat them. We then spent 40 years trying to crush them as a people, and we failed.

It is a serious situation and there is a danger of massive bloodshed. Let us not kid ourselves that there is a quick, easy solution, because there is not. We must look at it with a cold, hard eye.

6.46 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): There have been two major themes in the debate, one an analysis of the events of the past weeks in South Africa and the other the appropriate response, if any, from Her Majesty's Government.

On the analysis of the events of the past week there has, with the exception of the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle), been a substantial degree of consensus on both sides of the House. As regards the response from the Government side, I notice that the Prime Minister last Thursday called the action a setback for the possibility of peaceful negotiations. The very idea of a setback is an illusion. It implies there has been steady progress, marred only by this step backwards with the events of the past week. Had the Prime Minister listened to what must come from her own people in Pretoria, she must surely have been aware of not only the emergency and the detentions over the past two years, but the well trailed restrictions on universities, the proposals for trade union reform and the increasing pressure on the United Democratic Front since

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

its formation in 1983, which has meant that only three members of the executive of the UDF were at large—neither on the run nor in detention—last week. It can hardly be designated as a setback, therefore, but as something which has been well trailed and which is very consistent with the recent trend of South African policy: the United Democratic Front and the Congress of South African Trade Unions are seen as key barriers to the maintenance of white minority rule, which is what Botha and his Government are all about.

Yet the Prime Minister persists in calling it a setback as if she could claim, against the evidence, that it is a process of reform, and that constructive engagement, more trade being pushed by the Government—as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) said earlier—and more contact with the South Africans can somehow bring them into the 20th century and the real world.

Mr. Colvin *rose*—

Mr. Anderson: I know a number of those directly concerned in the repressive measures last week, and a number are known to the Minister of State. I think of Archie Gumede, whom I first met when he sought sanctuary in our consulate in Durban. He is co-president of the United Democratic Front. I had several lengthy discussions with him at that time and I gained a pretty good view of his judgment and political disposition. I was amazed at his moderation. I certainly would not have been as moderate, given the repression to which his people have been subjected. It is well known that in the past weeks he has been involved in a search for reconciliation, in Pietermaritzburg, of the conflicts between the UDF and Inkatha. That man's voice is temporarily stilled.

I spoke from the same platform in Durban as Albertina Sisulu. Her husband is on Robben Island. Her son, Zwelakhe, is a fearless journalist, but he has been in detention for over a year. Albertina Sisulu has been a force for peace and reconciliation not only in the Ford dispute but during the recent troubles in the Cape, but now she has been banned.

With regard to the white population we think of Max and Audrey Coleman from the white business community in South Africa. They became politicised when their sons were detained by the South African Government. They formed, with others, the detainees' parents' support committee. That committee, to some extent, has been funded by the European Community and other worthy organisations in the west. It is the equivalent of the Sakharovs and other groups within the Soviet Union. The Prime Minister would be keen to see Sakharov, but she would not deign to see the Colemans or others in South Africa.

Who is left to talk to when the voices of moderation are stilled? The people who have sought the ways of avoiding violence have been pushed to one side by Botha and his henchmen. Surely the message from Mr. Botha is that he has no serious interest in fundamental change. His only interest is in winning by-elections by the votes of the minority white electorate. He is ready to ignore outside opinion—the special relationship that he has with our Prime Minister.

What should be the appropriate response of the British Government to the new measures of repression that have stifled the voices of peaceful people and leaders within South Africa? We believe that—this was shown by the Foreign Secretary earlier—the likely response will be the same as before. All the signals given by the Government will be of comfort to Pretoria and of despair to world opinion, the Commonwealth and the United Nations. Among such signals we have already excluded ourselves from the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers, which was set up at the Vancouver conference. We were not represented at the meeting in Lusaka at the beginning of this month, even though the terms of reference of that committee were much wider than mere sanctions. The Foreign Secretary looks glum. We know that he was under orders from she who must be obeyed. The Foreign Secretary is a man of more liberal instincts. However, we must pose the question: is there anything that would induce the Foreign Secretary to resign? Perhaps the question answers itself.

As the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) said, there is no mention of the Commonwealth in the Government's amendment, despite the suggestions that were made at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings at Nassau and Vancouver. Was that a mere slip, or is it another illustration that the Commonwealth has been marginalised in foreign policy formulation?

At Nassau we agreed on an oil embargo. Yet at the end of last year the Government refused to co-operate with the United Nations committee that was inquiring into violations of the oil embargo. That was another signal of support to Pretoria. It was a signal that the Government ignores world opinion. The Government have not sent the Minister of State, the hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), to the townships to make the same sort of remarks that he made in the Gaza strip.

In response to criticism, the Government merely dig more deeply into their bran tub of words of disapproval. The Prime Minister has said that she "condemns" the moves. The Foreign Secretary has said that he is "shocked and saddened." The Minister of State is "dismayed." Words are cheap.

I hope that when the Minister of State replies to the debate she will answer the question that has been asked by Labour Members—have the new measures of repression that the South African Government have taken in the past week led to any reassessment of policy by the Government? Will they change their policy as a result of those events?

The Labour party's policy on sanctions is well known. We believe that under the United Nations and in co-operation with our Commonwealth and EEC partners, comprehensive sanctions should be taken against South Africa. For a start, there should be airline sanctions and a coal boycott, which the Government, in co-operation with the German Government, prevented at the EEC summit.

Even if the Government rule out economic sanctions, there are a series of what the Prime Minister might call "measures" available to them. Without incurring any great cost she can still give clear signals to the white minority Government of South Africa and their supporters that we disapprove of what they are doing. Why do we still have a no-visa agreement with South Africa, which is a relic of the old Commonwealth relationship? Would not the abrogation of that agreement be a clear signal to South Africa of our position? Will we still treat South Africa diplomatically as if it were any other country? Mr. Birt,

who is the deputy director-general of the BBC, gave the South African ambassador a guided tour of the BBC last week. No doubt he told him about intimidation from the Government. Will we act in concert with our other European Community partners by downgrading our mission and possibly by removing the ambassador for some time? Even if we claim that our embassy in South Africa is playing a positive role, why cannot our ambassador show solidarity with those individuals and groups that have been banned by going to the UDF offices, by visiting Albertina Sisulu, or by meeting Archie Gumede and others? We believe that such shock treatment may disabuse those in South Africa who believe that they can get away with it because they have the support of the Prime Minister and the Government.

The Prime Minister is in a unique position.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding) *rose*——

Mr. Anderson: The Prime Minister is trusted in white South Africa. If she were to carry out some of the measures that have been suggested it would thus have a disproportionate effect on white opinion — those who currently hold the power in South Africa. The Prime Minister's gestures have given the impression to white South Africans that she is on their side, not that of the majority in that country.

Generations of blacks and progressive people in South Africa will look back with pride at those brave men and women whose voices have been temporarily stilled by the actions of the past week. Equally, generations of British people will look back with shame at a British Government, who at this critical time of test have only confirmed their policy of business as usual with apartheid.

6.58 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): No one with any understanding of the need for particiption in society by all races and creeds can suggest that the South African Government's latest actions are anything but a serious further step in the tragic chronicle of repressive action in South Africa. The House, and indeed the whole international community, is at one in roundly condemning these South African actions.

There is no doubt about Britain's position. The House heard my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last Thursday deplore the South African Government's actions. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary issued an immediate condemnation which left no room for doubt about the Government's rejection of repression of whatever kind, but particularly on this scale and of this latest severity.

The action of the South African Government has been condemned here in Britain and all over the world. It has been condemned by business men in South Africa such as Gavin Relly who have been doing their best to bring social and economic reform to black South Africa. Jan Steyn, the chairman of the urban foundation, said only a few days ago that

"the ability of organisations with strong community support to function is a key factor in determining whether such progress is possible."

Referring to the restrictions of last Thursday, 25 February he said:

"These restrictions will severely hamper this progress."

No one is in any doubt that the action of the South African Government is totally repressive.

The British Government's views have been put over most forcibly, in public and in private, to the South African Government, here and in South Africa. We shall see whether they will be effective because there is more to be said. I continue to urge the House to back the Government in our efforts to get the South African Government to withdraw all the restrictions forthwith.

The House can be assured that the South African Government have been left in no doubt of Britain's views on the lasting damage caused by these measures to the prospects for peaceful change.

What then is the way ahead that can bring about the end of apartheid, to which we are committed, and the transition to genuinely non-racial representative government in South Africa? First, let me say that I have not heard a single argument today from the Opposition which suggests that their policies will do anything to improve the tragic situation in South Africa. Maybe their rhetoric assuages their consciences.

Mr. Nellist: Will the Minister give way instead of reading her speech?

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman will be well aware that some of his colleagues type some of their remarks. As he can see, I have been sitting here typing.

Opposition Members have used rhetoric to assuage their consciences, but that does nothing whatsoever to bring about the major changes necessary to help the black majority into governing in their own country.

Mr. Nellist: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The Minister clearly is not giving way.

Mr. Nellist: She has not seen me yet.

Mrs. Chalker: It is impossible not to see the hon. Gentleman with one's eyes, even if one does not intend to give way to him. I particularly regret the narrow interpretation of our responsibilities put forward by the Opposition—

Mr. Nellist: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that he must not persist.

Mrs. Chalker: For the Opposition, opposing apartheid seems to mean one thing only—sanctions and yet more sanctions. As my right hon. and learned Friend said to the House, punitive economic sanctions are not the answer.

There are more effective ways of contributing to progress and to peaceful change in South Africa than blighting the country's economic development. We can make that contribution at the same time as expressing our total revulsion and rejection of apartheid.

I say to the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) that I do not believe that the events of the past weeks have done anything whatsoever to take us forward with the awful problems of South Africa. The hon. Gentleman may ask for immediate judgments and for changes of course. He may ask for clear signals to the white minority Government. Those signals have been given and will continue to be given. I shall examine all that he said, as I shall examine all reports mentioned in the debate, and no voice will be stilled in condemnation.

Mr. Nellist: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Chalker: No. I am not giving way.

[Mrs. Chalker]

There are more effective ways, and indeed we shall consider them. I believe that, above all else, we have to maintain the effective contact with all cross-sections of the people of all colours and creeds in South Africa.

Opposition Members have called for the withdrawal of Her Majesty's ambassador and EC ambassadors. That idea may be superficially attractive but would do no good to those in South Africa who are oppressed by the actions of the South African Government, and with whom we must keep in contact.

Mr. Nellist: Some minutes ago, the Minister asked for constructive suggestions to improve the lot of those who are oppressed in South Africa. She also spoke about relationships between people. Given the mounting evidence of the murder and death squads operated by Chief Buthelezi and Inkatha, will she now announce that the Inkatha office opened last autumn in St. John's Wood will be closed by the Government as a clear signal that when they see terrorist activity they do something about it?

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Member's point did not relate to what I was saying. If the hon. Gentleman expects sudden snap judgments such as that to be answered, he is asking the wrong person.

There is an important job to be done on the spot by our ambassador in South Africa. I believe that those who have argued that he should come home have no idea of the range, depth and breadth of the contacts that he makes, nor indeed of what he is doing.

I must say to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) that I shall look at the letters which he cited. The way in which he expressed his speech was interesting and I shall certainly examine the letters.

The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) raised the question of what could be done. I am sad that the right hon. Member is not in his place at the moment, because it is important that we take seriously suggestions made by all hon. Members, if they warrant it. As for the cutting of air links, it would be extremely difficult to achieve an effective ban as it would only give away the air traffic to other nations. To be effective, such a ban would have to be universal and that would be impossible to achieve in today's air transport market. If we are to take up other suggestions, they must do something to affect the awful situation in South Africa and not be impossible to achieve.

I must say to the right hon. Member for Devonport, through *Hansard*, that those who would be most hurt by such a ban would be those who fly backwards and forwards between Europe and South Africa trying to bring about change. The hard-line Afrikaners who went to that despicable rally on Saturday hardly ever travel outside South Africa. Perhaps if they had travelled outside South Africa they might understand something about the way in which the rest of the world works together and would be in a better position to back up what they say. I doubt whether they would continue to hold such outdated views if they did travel. The people that the House would wish to harm by cutting air links would not be harmed.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) spoke of alleged breaches in arms control that he put to the Foreign Office, and he asked when he would get a reply. I agree that these matters have been extremely difficult to research. We are consulting other Government Departments. I regret that I cannot give him an answer this afternoon, but I insist that those investigations shall be the most thorough possible. I shall reply to the allegations that he sent to my right hon. and learned Friend as soon as possible when I have some assurance of the validity or otherwise of the claims that have been made and of the evidence on which we shall base our reply. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will accept that.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me also about plastic covers for identity cards—the seals for identity cards. The export of transparent plastic covers is not a breach of any British restrictive measure. Uniform identity cards are issued to all South Africans. They are not the equivalent of pass books. The pass laws and the influx control have been abolished.

I was asked further about destabilisation. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary condemned destabilisation by South Africa of neighbouring countries. I reiterate that condemnation. We reject violence from whatever quarter it may come. There is no justification for cross-border violence in the front-line states or in any others. In no way does that detract from out argument that punitive economic sanctions would have a destablising effect in the region. They would have considerable cost for all South Africa's neighbours. We call on the South African Government to desist from destabilisation. For those reasons, we aim to support the front-line states in defence of their borders and, indeed, the transport links that are necessary for them to become economically independent of South Africa.

One of the most positive things that the British Government have done has been to provide aid, aid for black South Africans. I understand what my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles) said.

The students whom we sponsor and will go on sponsoring go alongside the help that we have given to trade unionists. All such aid is designed to assist those in South Africa who can have an influence on the future. We have said many times that the only way in which the problems of apartheid in South Africa will be solved is through dialogue. That dialogue can occur only if people are equipped to combat the false dialogue of members of the South African Government. That is why we wish to support leaders of the black community in our programmes in South Africa and in the front-line states. We are determined not to see the undermining of the economies of front-line states by attacks from over the border. It is in that context that we give £819 million in bilateral aid to the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference states together with the multilateral aid from which they benefit.

Without doubt, the steps of recent days are a massive further setback in the search for dialogue. To determine the best way ahead, one must consider most carefully what is happening on the ground in South Africa—another good reason for the efforts of Her Majesty's ambassador in Pretoria. When considering what is to be done, we need to be sure that we take into account the legitimate interests of all concerned—black, white and coloured—in South Africa. That is why informal contacts between South Africans of all races must continue. That is why we shall not influence the South African Government unless we can get them into dialogue. We shall continue to press them to resume the process of legislative reform. We shall

continue to implement the restrictive measures against South Africa that we previously agreed to take as a political signal of our earnest determination for progress. There has been, and will be, no let-up in our representations against human rights abuses, in particular —I was asked about this by hon. Members on both sides of the House—detention without charge, torture, and imprisonment of children.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin) *rose*——

Mrs. Chalker: I shall not give way. I have only a couple of minutes left. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

We shall continue to press for the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners and an end to the ban on the ANC and other political parties in the context of the suspension of violence on all sides. We shall continue our practical and financial assistance to black South Africans. We shall continue to oppose the destabilisation that has been conducted by the South African Government.

The positive approach of the Government has no alternative. There is no alternative to patient, determined advocacy and pressure. We shall do all that we can to find an opportunity for constructive mediation whenever it may occur. We shall indeed, with our Commonwealth and European partners, be ready for the time when we might take external initiatives, but for the moment there is none to take.

Sanctions will only worsen the existing situation. Punitive economic sanctions will not improve it. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have united in condemning the latest repressive measures. We share the universally expressed sense of frustration. But thoroughly negative as the developments are, we shall not be forced into action for action's sake, nor into imposing measures that cannot improve an already almost impossible situation.

The end of apartheid will, as one Opposition Member was honest enough to say, take a long time—longer than any of us would wish—but it will come about only from within, by negotiation and dialogue. The Government are determined to help wherever we can. We shall continue to do so until the last vestiges of apartheid have gone and repressive measures are totally repealed.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 209, Noes 265.

Division No. 197] **[7.15 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James

Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alun Michael and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'th's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Raffan, Keith
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Roe, Peter
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alan Howarth and
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the Main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House deplores the restrictions announced by the South African Government on 24th February against 18 extra-parliamentary organisations and certain leading opposition figures; calls for the repeal of these measures, which suppress legitimate, peaceful activity; reaffirms its

opposition to punitive economic sanctions and its support for Her Majesty's Government's policy of practical and constructive action in Southern Africa; and calls on the South African Government to take urgent steps to enter into dialogue with free and freely chosen representatives of the black community, with the aim of bringing the repugnant apartheid system to an end and establishing a non-racial, representative system of government.

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Given the hollow and unsatisfactory answer by the Minister of State to the question about the Inkatha office in St. John's Wood, and also because of the unfortunate shortness of the previous debate, I give notice that I shall table early-day motions this week naming those who lead the death squads of Inkatha in Natal. I shall raise on the Adjournment of the House the Government's support for that organisation, through continuing to tolerate that office in St. John's Wood.

British Science

7.30 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I beg to move,

That this House, noting with great anxiety the serious crisis which now affects this country's scientific base, and further noting the profound disappointment of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils that public expenditure plans for the science budget are insufficient to avert a reduction in the volume of scientific activity, or to allow for the strategic reshaping of the scientific base, condemns the complacent and regressive attitude of Her Majesty's Government; and calls for a real commitment to proper Government support for scientific, medical and technological research and development in higher education, research institutions and industry, so that this country's intellectual, industrial and social future may be secured.

The Government's furtiveness about their science record is well illustrated by the fact that they have refused many demands for a debate on science by both sides of the House. Therefore, the Opposition have had to devote one of their precious half-day Supply debates to that important issue. The last Government debate on science, according to the best researches of the Library, was on 14 June 1985, two and three quarter years ago.

Britain now faces a crisis in science more serious than at any time since the war. There is virtually no one in the universities, the research councils or industry who disagrees with that diagnosis, except the Government. Their mood is one of complacent self-congratulation, with back-slapping for an acclaimed 15 per cent. real terms increase in the science budget since 1979, but that claim is confounded both by former Ministers and by the Government's own hand-picked Advisory Board for the Research Councils. That board consists of the country's leading academic scientists, senior science advisers to the Government and captains of industry such as Sir Francis Tombs, the chairman of Rolls-Royce, and Dr. Roberts, the joint managing director of GEC. In a letter to the Secretary of State that was published recently, the board, giving its advice on the science budget allocation for 1988-91, welcomed the increases in the science budget that the Secretary of State announced on 3 November, but was "profoundly disappointed that these are insufficient either to avert a reduction in the volume of scientific activity or to allow for the necessary strategic reshaping of the science base."

Anybody who has read through that document will be clear that it is a damning indictment of the Government's record. The board says that even

"Without any allowance for further cost increases above average inflation, the amount of research which the Science Budget buys will . . . be between 2 per cent. and 3 per cent. lower in 1990-91 than was planned for this year."

The board continues:

"That reduction compares starkly with the cumulative 8 per cent. growth in the UK's national wealth . . . which the Government is forecasting over the same period."

The board describes the science budget as a dismal background against which it had to make its decisions. It concludes:

"In our expenditure advice to the Secretary of State in June, we stated that the UK science base was at a watershed. The Government's revised expenditure plans for the Science Budget do not provide the means to move our nation's scientific capability towards the twenty-first century. We remain precariously poised at the great divide and are beginning to slip in the wrong direction. A great opportunity has, sadly, been missed."

Recognising the force of that criticism, the Government seek, as they do in their amendment, to evade

[Mr. Jack Straw]

responsibility for what is happening to science, in two ways. First, they tell us to look at the total Government spend on research and development and to compare it as a share of gross domestic product with that of other countries. But our share of expenditure compared with that of other countries is respectable only when full account is taken of our expenditure on defence-related research and development. The former Minister for Information Technology, who resigned partly because of his argument with the Government over the lack of expenditure for civil research on space, said in *The Times* on 16 December:

"There is a bit of sophistry in what the Government's saying about this because everybody knows that half of the Government R & D is defence and this is still a problem really."

That was underlined by a fascinating study of research policy in the *British Medical Journal* on 6 February 1988 by Richard Smith, who says that if we leave out defence, Britain does poorly, and that

"As a percentage of gross domestic product it already spends less on civil research than all the other countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development . . . —and is spending less as the other countries spend more."

The figures given in that study not only spell that out, but spell out the fact that most other major industrialised countries and some that are not, including Spain and Iceland, have increased their GDP expenditure on research since 1978 far faster than this country.

Secondly, the Government claim that there has been a 15 per cent. increase in real terms in the science budget since 1979. However, that is a reference only to the amount that is spent on research councils and other minor expenditures. That is almost entirely offset by the decay of the dual support system by which research is funded by University Grants Committee block grant, a matter to which I shall return, and is also offset by higher than general inflation, which has been accepted as affecting the Health Service, but not, as far as I can judge, research.

The cries of anguish about the state of science are widespread. Everybody is aware of the cry that came from Dr. Max Perutz, the former director of the laboratory of molecular biology at Cambridge, who said:

"The brilliance of British science is one of the country's greatest cultural achievements, if not the greatest, but it is a fragile flower as I know from Austria, my country of birth. Once destroyed by bad politics it cannot be restored."

The Secretary of State may wish to dismiss Dr. Perutz as a self-serving academic——

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Baker): No.

Mr. Straw: I am glad to hear that.

The *Daily Telegraph*, of all papers, and during the election campaign, published a searing indictment of the Government's commitment to research. It quoted Sir David Phillips FRS, the chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, as saying:

"A British scientist can hardly travel anywhere without being subjected to pity by others".

Sir George Porter, president of the Royal Society, was quoted as saying:

"The morale of the scientific community has fallen to its lowest point this century".

That understanding is also shared by those in industry, as anyone who talks to those who are involved in scientific-based industries knows only too well. That was underlined by the article in the *Financial Times* last Monday, which quoted Dr. Alan White, research director at the United Kingdom subsidiary of Ciba-Geigy, as saying that he was

"concerned about the pressures on universities to put more effort on short-term contract research rather than basic medical studies."

Dr. John Griffin, director of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry, is reported as saying that

"the problems in academic research mean fewer young people want to pursue a career in the scientific aspects of medicine."

Dr. Griffin says:

"I am worried about the effects this will have on the pharmaceutical industry in the 1990s."

There are many other symptoms of the crisis. There is the reduction in the success rate of applications to the research councils, which have fallen to a point where, according to the head of one major research institute,

"application is discouraged and too large a proportion of creative time is spent on grant proposals."

Alpha-rated applications are those which are judged as being of outstanding merit by the relevant research council committee. For the Medical Research Council, the proportion of alpha-rated applications that were accepted for funding was down to 63 per cent. last year compared with 83 per cent. two years before. For the Science and Engineering Research Council, it is now down to 50 per cent. One illustration of the distortions that are now arising in the science budget because of the squeeze is the fact that today we are spending as much money on high energy particle physics as on the whole of the rest of physics, biology, chemistry and mathematics research combined. That balance cannot be right.

A key factor is the expenditure on CERN. I hope that the Secretary of State will say something about the Government's approach to the continued funding of CERN, given its international importance—indeed, its symbolism—in terms of European collaboration. There is a clear case for continuing funding, but, as the ABRC said in paragraph 11 of its latest advice, there is also a strong case for treating it separately. Indeed, some people have urged that it should be treated partly as a charge against the FCO budget, but I shall not pursue that line. What I want to know from the Secretary of State is whether he is willing to accept the ABRC's advice that CERN cannot continue to eat into research funds for other aspects of the pure sciences.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Will the hon. Gentleman make his point a little clearer? I have received representations from people in this country who are working on high energy particle physics, particularly from Oxford university. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that we should reduce our contribution to that to help the other sciences? What exactly is he asking the Government to do?

Mr. Straw: I am not saying that, but I am happy to make my point again. I am saying that the Government ought to earmark funding for CERN, so as not to undermine research in biology, chemistry, maths and physics, whose funding is now only equal to that on CERN.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Does my hon. Friend agree that not only CERN but every one of the research councils must pay a very large amount to join the international organisations? In fact, the amount

is so large that it plays quite a role in the amount available. Should not the Government consider the matter seriously, with a view to helping the research councils to pay for their affiliation to international organisations?

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend is right. There is the general problem of a squeeze, which is accentuated by the continuing commitments to international organisations and institutions such as CERN—which it is right that we should continue to have.

Above all, as I said earlier, there has been the erosion of the system of dual support, by which research at universities has been supported partly by research council grants direct, and partly indirectly by the University Grants Committee block grant, over which the universities have had much more discretion and latitude. That erosion is compounded by the Government's refusal, when contracting for research, to bear the overhead costs of much research, and by an undermining of the infrastructure. Alongside that, the squeeze has led to an unbalanced aid structure in our universities, offset only inadequately by new blood money.

Judging by his amendment, the Secretary of State may well talk about the additional funding that is going to universities following his great success with the Chief Secretary. But, for example, £156 million of that is being held back over the next three years simply to pay for the costs of redundancy and restructuring, and will not be used to fund research or teaching.

If our first charge against the Government is that of inadequate funding, the second is of the creation of a major skill shortage. The facts are startling. The numbers of students registering for A-level courses in physics, biology and chemistry dropped by nearly 10 per cent. in the two years between 1985 and 1987, compared with a decrease in the age group of only 3·8 per cent. Universities and polytechnics face increasing difficulty in recruiting suitable entrants for most science and technology courses, and in keeping the best people doing doctoral or post-doctoral research. A 1984 survey by the Department of Education and Science showed that about half of physics and maths teachers did not follow the subject that they were teaching as one of the main subjects in their own degree level courses.

Despite the Government's bursary scheme, the latest figures show an 11 per cent. drop in the number of people going forward for additional teacher training in maths, and a 14 per cent. drop in those going forward for initial teacher training in physics. There are serious deficiencies in the provision of laboratories' equipment and books, which have been highlighted by Her Majesty's inspectors' reports year by year, and today by the survey by the National Union of Teachers. The Government could find £80 million to pay for a few city technology colleges, but they cannot find the money to establish and improve a science base in our schools.

Besides that, there is the simple fact of the brain drain. Science is international, and we accept that there should be a great interchange of people and ideas. However, there is now serious anxiety about the quality of people who leave this country. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals made the point when commenting on the Royal Society's report, which was published at the end of June. Sir Mark Richmond, the chairman of the committee, said:

"Counting heads to prove that roughly the same number of scientists come to Britain as leave is meaningless when those who go are among our brightest young people, leaving to take up permanent posts; while those who come here do so only for a short time, to broaden their experience . . . the report demonstrates that salary is not the main reason why our people go. There is an urgent need for security in academic appointments, for better facilities in universities and for the research councils to be funded at a level where they can support a much higher proportion of the best research proposals they receive."

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Is my hon. Friend aware that the cutbacks have affected bodies outside the universities as well? Cutbacks in employment in the Natural Environment Research Council have led to many scientists — geologists, geophysicists, geomorphologists and so on — having to take jobs abroad. That has caused a rundown in the balance of natural scientists working in the council, which is so essential for the preservation of sites of special scientific interest, for example.

Mr. Straw: I accept that. No research council, even the Medical Research Council, is in more serious difficulty than the Natural Environment Research Council, which today announced an absolute drop in its funding.

Our third charge against the Government is the most fundamental: that their attitude to science is too short-term and too short-sighted. In their concern to achieve better value for money and more support from industry — both laudable aims in themselves — they fail to appreciate the critical importance of pure research; or, if they do appreciate it, they fail to provide an environment in which it can flourish. As we know, the Government are obsessed with markets as the cure-all for everything. But every advanced industrialised society that aspires to a decent scientific base understands that industry — the market — cannot provide funds or support for all research.

Yes, British industry should do more. Its record of support for research and development is one of the most appalling in the western world. British industry is itself constrained by a financial system in the City which has appallingly limited horizons, and does not accept the importance of long-term investment in research and development, as do other nations.

By definition, a major part of any research undertaken by industry is bound to be goal-driven. A firm says to its researchers, "Find a drug to do this," or "Find the electronic technology to do that." The Government fail to understand that none of that goal-driven research would be possible without the base of research initiated by curiosity or speculation, in which bright, inquisitive people are given the environment, security and resources to follow their instincts to an end—or, often, to no end at all.

The goal-driven research project at present is that on AIDS. There is a clear goal: to find a cure. The project is making considerable progress, but the Government must understand that there would be no goal-driven research in AIDS if 30 years ago a few mavericks driven by curiosity —Crick and Watson, and others at Cambridge — had not been messing about, wasting time and money. They were criticised for it, but after a while they discovered DNA and the double helix, and initiated the work of a series of other people, who also messed about for many years in laboratories trying to understand genetic structures.

Another example is Alexander Fleming and the development of penicillin. Penicillin was developed in the

[Mr. Straw]

war in goal-driven research because of the concern to find a cure for infections. But that achievement would never have been possible had not Fleming been messing about 15 years before discovering, before putting the research aside for a time, that some moulds could kill other bacteria.

There are plenty of contemporary examples. There is one from my local university of Leeds, where the biodegradable glass pellet was developed to solve mineral and vitamin deficiencies in sheep and cows. It arose as a result of conversations between scientists in the department of animal physiology and in the department of ceramics who were funded out of block grant money and who could not get money from the research council for initial development. They have produced a world beater, and Pilkingtons are selling it across the world.

We have the example of much more applied technology in the shape of the Loughborough lockstitch pile fabric machine about which I know a little because it is made by a firm in my constituency. Professor Wry and Mr. Ward, who designed it on the back of a British Railways menu on the train to Loughborough from London, were funded out of block grant. Initially, they received no funding from the SRC.

There are scores more examples. The simple truth is that if curiosity-driven research dries up, there can be no applied research to follow. The shift of Government policy is away from curiosity-initiated or pure research to specific, targeted research. They seem to expect that the result, as well as the goal, of the research should be within the horizon before it is funded.

I should like to consider funding and concentration and specialisation — the so-called XRT proposals of the advisory board. The Opposition do not believe for one second that the present distribution of scientific endeavour, which has happened in a random way, is perfect. We certainly accept that changes in scientific discovery and initiative require institutional changes to reflect them. There always has been discrimination, but discrimination in terms of funding must be exercised project by project, department by department and subject by subject — not institution by institution. There are many great universities which have poor departments and there are many not so good universities which have great departments. It would be terribly short-sighted to write off whole institutions.

Universities must not be given gradings which are set in concrete for all time. Reputations change. Some R-rated departments may need to drop out and some T-rated departments may need to come into research. Any concentration needs new funding—much more than has been achieved. Everyone in private industry understands that if enormous changes such as these are to be initiated, they must be funded, but evidently the Government do not.

The parallel between the Government's attitude to the National Health Service and the science base is striking. We are now a land of great plenty. We have a Government who tell us that they are awash with money. The moral and political question is not whether the cash is available but how to spend it. We must decide on whether to spend it on tax cuts for the better off or to invest it in the future. Today's balance of payments figures, which show a current account deficit of £905 million, show that if we spend it on consumption — tax cuts — that will be an investment in our competitors rather than in ourselves. If we spend it on science, it will be an investment in our future.

There is an overwhelming case for the Government to agree to the additional £100 million which the ABRC recommended. I hope to hear the Secretary of State saying that he has bullied or cajoled the philistines in the Treasury to achieve that end. The Government preach the philosophy of entrepreneurship and risk, but in science policy their cautious and centralist approach demands certainty where none is possible.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, Britain led the world in exploration of outer space — the new world — and accepted that for every expedition that succeeded, scores would fail. How ironic it is that in today's challenge of outer space beyond the universes and the inner space of human cells, the Government have abandoned entrepreneurship, risk-taking and imagination. By doing so, they will fail our nation in the next century.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I must tell the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.54 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof,

'notes the essential and increasingly important contribution made by the science base in higher education and the research councils to the nation's economic and social development; applauds the achievements of Britain's scientists which are second only to those of the United States of America with its vastly greater resources; welcomes the 15 per cent. real terms increase in the science budget since 1979, the progress made by the University Grants Committee and research councils in promoting better value for money and responsiveness, and the new central machinery announced in Cm. 185 for considering science and technology priorities; and commends the Government's intention to take further steps to enhance the strength and quality of the science base and to ensure that research outcomes are better exploited to the United Kingdom's benefit.'.

I welcome this debate. It provides us with a valuable opportunity to pay tribute to the achievements of British scientists and to discuss the difficult issues which lie ahead concerning the future of the British science base, which have been well laid before us by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils. I also welcome it as an opportunity to dispel the myth which Opposition Members have propagated about the Government's parsimony and cuts in publicly funded academic research.

I should like to deal first with what the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said about spending. Public spending on the science base—the dual funding system involving universities and research councils, to which the hon. Gentleman referred—will be about £1·4 billion in the coming financial year. This represents a real terms increase relative to general inflation of about 6 per cent. compared with the curret year, and of about 11 per cent. since 1979.

Internationally, our public spending on civil research and development does not compare unfavourably. The hon. Gentleman was not quite accurate in what he said in this regard. Government spending on non-defence research and development as a proportion of gross domestic product is above that of the United States and Japan, although a little below that of France and West

Germany. I accept that there are arguments in favour of our aiming higher, but hon. Members are woefully misinformed when they claim that we trail significantly behind all other industrial countries.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): What about industry's investment in research and development?

Mr. Baker: I shall come to that soon, and join in the hon. Member's condemnation.

Within our public spending on science, the science budget for the research councils has fared well. In 1988-89 it will total £699 million, which is over 15 per cent. more in real terms than when we came into office in 1979. That reflects the £160 million extra for the science budget over the next three years that I announced in November, following last year's public expenditure survey.

I am well aware that the ABRC put forward a reasoned case for an even larger increase, but there are many demands on the public purse and it was not possible to meet that bid in full. Nevertheless, we provided substantial additional resources which will ensure that scientific expenditure at least is held at the present level, and is at slightly more than that in the next two years. In the past two rounds I have been able to secure quite significant increases.

The £155 million for university restructuring includes new appointments. That is not entirely appreciated. When a department is restructured, it is not simply a matter of easing people out. One has to make sure that new blood comes in.

I must emphasise that our decisions on funding for science were taken in the knowledge that we shall respond later this year to the ABRC's discussion document, "A Strategy for the Science Base".

The hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) mentioned industry's spending on research and development. I am afraid that that is a far less satisfactory feature of the present scene. United Kingdom industry spends far less than our competitors on research and development as a proporton of gross domestic product. The latest figures available from the OECD are for 1985, and show that industry's funding of research and development as a proportion of GDP totalled 1 per cent. in the United Kingdom, 1·3 per cent. in the United States, 1·8 per cent. in Japan and 1·6 per cent. in West Germany. To be fair, we seem to be in about the same position as France and Italy, but I am afraid that I am not satisfied with that. I do not think that any hon. Member is. The Government believe that there is a prime need for industry to increase the amount of research and development that it funds. The hon. Member for Blackburn made broadly the same point.

Our policies have transformed the British economy since 1979. It was one of the slowest growing in the 1960s and the 1970s, but it has been one of the fastest growing in the 1980s. Most companies are now much better placed to increase their investment in research and development than they have been for many years. During the past five years we have reduced corporation tax significantly—to 35 per cent. I hope that that will make companies keen to invest more in research and development, especially as they are nearly all showing increased profits. There has been a slight improvement. Figures published earlier this month showed that, after falling between 1981 and 1983, spending within industry as R and D rose by 12 per cent. in real terms between 1983 and 1985, and by a further 7 per cent. between 1985 and 1986. However, one cannot afford to be complacent about such figures.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I appreciate that the Secretary of State will have to await the report of the ABRC, but in the meantime is there any comfort that he can give to good researches in good departments of small universities, who are wondering whether they have a future? Heriot Watt, for example, has a distinguished physics department. What is its future, and can any comfort be given to it in the interim?

Mr. Baker: In my previous incarnation I happened to visit that physics department. It is an extremely good department and it has done some outstanding work on laser technology. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), in common with his hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn, raises questions about the RTX proposals, and it is important to discuss this matter. The question that arises is one of selectivity in research. That question must be faced head on, not only by us, but by other countries. No country can possibly maintain the full stretch of research in every possible discipline at full speed.

Last summer, in its advice on strategy, the ABRC judged that present policy would not maintain the international competitiveness of United Kingdom university research. The board put great weight on the need for faster progress and suggested that there should be a differentiation of research roles between higher education institutions. That was contained in the so-called RTX proposal. Therefore, some universities would do research, some would offer a combination, with the balance towards teaching.

Our consultations on that strategy advice have generated a considerable number of detailed and interesting responses. I have been impressed by the constructive way in which the scientific community has moved the debate forward — *[Interruption.]* — that is what my brief says. As hon. Members know, not many voices have been raised in support of the RTX proposal. Indeed, there has been a clamour of opposition to it. However, beneath that clamour there is a substantial ground swell in favour of greater concentrations of research provision, but focused on subjects rather than on institutions. That was the point raised by the hon. Member for Blackburn.

The ABRC has said that the science base is at a watershed. Britain's economic and social prosperity in the 21st century will depend significantly on whether our decisions about the organisation and funding of research are right. I assure hon. Members that I intend to make a considered statement later this year on the Government's policy objectives for the science base and the steps that we will be taking to achieve it. The hon. Member for Blackburn will learn from that statement that we will be considering especially the concentration on subjects.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Merionnydd Nant Conwy): I want to ask about the regional aspect of specialisation in science research. At the University of Wales, where research is subject to peer review, the university gets its fair share of funding. However, the system falls down when we consider the dual funding system of the research councils. No research council has ever willingly established itself within Wales. Clearly, there is a £20 million sum to be made up to ensure that Wales gets its fair share of the

[Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas]

science budget. Will the Secretary of State address that problem in Wales, Scotland and some of the English regions?

Mr. Baker: Some good research is being done at the Welsh and Scottish universities. The distinction of certain departments of universities in both countries has been recognised by the UGC. We have had interesting debates in Committee about research council funding and the power that I have. It is an arm's length relationship, and I do not influence—nor did any of my predecessors—the exact amount paid in research council grants. I would not seek to do so. I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of the chairman of the ABRC.

We must also consider the importance of collaborative research between universities, polytechnics and research councils and industry. I believe that everyone agrees that there must be closer links. I should like to commend two particular schemes that are extremely effective. The first is the teaching company scheme, which I first came across when I was at the DTI. It was then in embryo form. The scheme creates a link between a particular university or institution and a company. The graduates from the university, often research assistants of one sort or another, work with the company on its particular processes. That is excellent. At the same time, the company is encouraged to recruit outstanding graduates. The scheme works well and we are currently spending about £10 million a year on it in support of 270 programmes. Of that sum £7 million is provided from public funds, half by the Science and Engineering Research Council and half by the DTI. The SERC will increase its contribution over the next three years, with a matching increase from the DTI. We want to see that scheme expanded by about one third in the future.

The second scheme is the Link initiative. About a month ago I attended a press conference with my noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on this matter. It is an important programme that links institutions with particular companies in a consortium. At the press conference we announced five programmes concerning molecular electronics, advanced semi-conductor materials, industrial measurement systems, eukaryotics — essentially non-bacterial genetics — and nanotechnology. These programmes cover many areas of research. The total expenditure on them will be £83 million, of which half will come from public funds. I hope that more such programmes will be announced in the coming months, because they are extremely important.

A further example of collaborative endeavour, which is regional—it is not in Scotland or Wales, but it is in the north of England—is the new centre for exploitation of science and technology, which has been set up by industry and the City. We are providing £1 million over five years towards the cost of the centre and another £5 million is being contributed from industry. The centre will be located at the Manchester science park. I remember opening that park about five years ago when it was just a heap of rubble. The appointment of the chief executive of the centre has just been announced. He is Dr. Bob Whelan, formerly of PA Technology. The steering committee is composed of people with strong interests in industry and is chaired by Sir Robin Nicholson. I am especially glad that that centre is situated in Manchester, because it can draw upon the considerable strength and technological excellence that is found in the Manchester conurbation, not only at the University of Manchester, the University of Manchester institute of science and technology, Manchester polytechnic and Salford university, but in other parts of the north-west.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State is right in saying that few would disagree about the importance of collaborative research. It is something that should be welcomed. Is he suggesting that, in some way, additional spending on collaborative research should be offset by reductions in expenditure on what we have described as "curiosity-initiated research" through the dual support system? There is grave anxiety among the universities that the Government are putting too much emphasis on collaborative, attractive research, and not providing the environment in which curiosity-initiated research can flourish.

Mr. Baker: I do not agree. It is extremely important to back research projects for which one can see no particular end—curiosity-orientated research. The hon. Gentleman quoted some examples, and there is a great deal of such research taking place in British universities. It is funded principally through UGC grants.

The research councils have some contracts for such work, and industry occasionally funds such work. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we do not want to throw all the emphasis on the application end of research. That would be a narrow view, but we wish to make sure that some of the great inventiveness of British universities—there is still such inventiveness in many of our universities, as well as great talent and creativity—comes out to the market place. If that happens, it adds to the prosperity of the British economy and British companies.

Over the centuries we have been rather good at that. Indeed, it was a Scot who invented the first television and demonstrated it in a room in Soho, which I believe is now an Italian restaurant. However, it is palpably true that other countries have developed the television industry much more effectively than we have. There are many examples of that sort, and we must ensure that more of our inventiveness comes on to the market.

I praise the research councils for their work. British science has a worldwide reputation for excellence and has achieved large numbers of major scientific successes, some of which the hon. Member for Blackburn mentioned. They include penicillin, monoclonal antibodies, which have important implications for medical research, synthetic pyrethroid insecticides, which are non-toxic to mammals, and the development of new types of radio telescopes. Since 1970, 15 United Kingdom scientists have received Nobel prizes, while the United Kingdom share of world science citations and publications exceeds that of France and Germany. The research councils also produce practical benefits for United Kingdom industry. For example, the Medical Research Council obtained 37 patents in 1986-87. The Agricultural and Food Research Council received six Queen's awards for industry between 1976 and 1984. I am sure that all hon. Members will welcome such achievements.

As the House will know, following the excellent report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology, we announced the strengthening of the Government's central machinery for considering science.

The first component is collective consideration under the Prime Minister's leadership of science and technology priorities across all Government Departments — something that has hitherto been lacking. This is linked with the annual public expenditure survey and will influence the expenditure plans that my colleagues and I will announce in the autumn for 1989-90 and for later years.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I shall get on.

Secondly, we have established the Advisory Council on Science and Technology — ACOST — with terms of reference that embrace all science and technology and with a membership drawn broadly from industry and the universities. This body is expected to provide the Government with influential advice on priorities for science.

Those developments have been welcomed and should contribute considerably to the value of the scientific debate in the coming years. I must stress, however, that, contrary to the belief of some commentators, the new arrangements do not imply a diminished role for the ABRC. I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the advisory board and particularly to its chairman, Sir David Phillips.

Let me deal with selectivity and concentration. As I said, it is very important that we should move towards more selective discrimination in deciding which aspects of science to fund. This is a difficult decision for any politician. Some progress has been made. The research councils have made good progress. For example, the SERC has doubled its spending on engineering research over the past decade—as a specific aspect of determined policy—largely at the expense of astronomy and nuclear physics. However, Britain has kept a world-class presence in both disciplines because research has been focused on institutes of established excellence.

Similarly, the priority that the MRC has given to molecular biology in particular centres has paid handsome dividends. The hon. Member for Blackburn mentioned AIDS research. In money terms our AIDS research programme seems modest, but it is beginning to work very well and the scientists are optimistic, although any sort of cure or vaccine is many years off. We could not have mounted that programme without our outstanding virology and molecular biology departments, which, as the hon. Member for Blackburn said, are Government funded.

The swiftness of the response impressed me enormously. When the proposals from the MRC first reached the Committee under the chairmanship of my noble Friend Lord Whitelaw, I thought that the process would take a long time to get under way. I am impressed by the speed with which we have responded, and I hope that our scientists will be able to contribute to doing something about this appalling disease.

The UGC has grasped the nettle of selectivity in its famous list, produced last year, grading the research activities of various departments. Since then, grants to universities have explicitly reflected judgments about the quality of their research.

One of the main proposals in the ABRC's strategy advice—the hon. Member for Blackburn said that I had never listened to Sir David Phillips; I talk to him often and value his counsel and in this matter I have accepted his advice lock, stock and barrel—was for the establishment of university research centres focusing on new developments of potential interest to industry. That is very important. The university research centres will concentrate research effort. They will ensure more inter-disciplinary working, for example, of chemists with physicists, and biologists with engineers. They will forge strong links between higher education research and industry, and they will provide better co-ordination.

The SERC has already announced the establishment of the first four centres. These will be for research on higher temperature super-conductors at Cambridge, research on engineering design by a consortium based at Glasgow university, research in surface sciences based at Liverpool, and research on molecular sciences at Oxford. Each involves an investment by the SERC of between £6 million and £10 million, and each will also be backed by significant UGC and industrial funds. They are intended as powerhouses in their fields and are being funded as such. Some of the funding has been provided by redeployment from other parts of the SERC's budget, but more than half is new money, drawn from the additional resources that I announced last November.

I look forward to the establishment of other research centres. They are an important way of bringing together expertise in the established disciplines without constructing pillared buildings to house the project. It is difficult to bring together the different disciplines, but it is well worthwhile.

The hon. Member for Blackburn asked about the strength of science in general terms. Tomorrow the report of an international study on science achievement in 17 countries will appear. It measures how well our children do in science. The report holds no comfort for us at all. It shows that although we do very well at the top end of the system, at 17-plus — this is because we are highly selective at that stage—the scientific performance of our pupils at 11-plus and 14-plus lags behind that of our competitors. The main reason for that is that many of our schools have low scores. This creates a long tail of low achievement which drastically lowers our average scores in science. We cannot be satisfied with that. The report shows the wide variation in our schools, but it is a clear signal for us to pull up our scientific socks in schools.

In 1978 the inspectors issued a report on primary science which found that science was the least developed subject in the primary curriculum, We have done much since then, and if one wanted to single out a discipline in the primary curriculum that is doing well one might now single out primary science. We published our policy statement, "Science 5 to 16" in 1985 and set out the important objectives, that all pupils should be introduced to science in primary school, and that all class teachers should include some science in their teaching. Since 1985 we have followed up the policy statement by supporting expenditure of more than £16 million on the development of primary science and technology through education support grants, and we expect to support expenditure of a further £9 million next year.

We have a long way still to go and I do not wish to appear complacent. Hon. Members who have visited primary classes in their constituencies will know that in the better schools interesting work is being done by six, seven and eight-year-olds.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Is my right hon. Friend addressing this point to the teachers' training colleges, which I am sure is one way to improve matters?

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend, who brings to education matters considerable personal experience, is absolutely right. We shall not get science right in our universities and research councils unless we start in the schools. We must be concerned about the beginning of the flow through.

Our success depends also on the availability of science teachers, which is a matter of some concern. We published a consultative document on the matter in 1986 and started to implement a comprehensive action plan. Within two years we secured a 100 per cent. increase in the recruitment of trainee physics teachers. Many are joining the profession from other careers, attracted to teaching by the challenges and rewards that it offers. In 1987 we came within 1·3 per cent. of recruiting up to our target number of physics places in teacher training institutions and had, as part of our shortages action plan, increased the number of such places by nearly 6 per cent.

We are giving local education authorities £3·85 million in grants this year, and £4·4 million next year, to retrain and upgrade teachers of science who do not have adequate qualifications. There is no shortage of biology teachers, nor, as yet, of chemistry teachers. However, we are watching carefully a shortfall in recruitment to chemistry courses. Secondary pupil numbers will continue to fall until 1991.

Mr. Douglas: The Secretary of State is referring to England and Wales.

Mr. Baker: I am responsible for the English education system. I have a high regard for Scottish education. It does very well. However, I am talking specifically about teacher training in England and Wales.

I do not want the House to feel any sense of complacency in this matter. There is a great deal to be done. However, we do not want to sell British science short. We should be proud of what our scientists do. They work well in our universities, research councils and, in growing numbers, in our polytechnics. As I have said already, the quality of Britain's academic research is recognised across the world. The country is rightly proud of the outstanding record of its scientists. They have won honours out of all proportion to Britain's size and wealth. Britain has a reputation and strength in science which we must do everything possible to maintain and enhance. The quality of scientific research in our universities and research councils constitutes a major national asset. I welcome this opportunity to applaud the work of the men and women whose talent and dedication keep us at the frontiers of knowledge.

8.21 pm

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): The speech of the Secretary of State comes at the end of three years of almost continuous protest from industry and the academic world about the Government's policies towards science. The right hon. Gentleman's speech showed some evidence of a small but late rethink. However, the Advisory Board for the Research Councils has taken that into account and its advice note published in December said that the Government's revised expenditure plans for the science budget, those on which the Secretary of State has taken his stand tonight, do not provide "the means to move our nation's scientific capability towards the 21st century. We remain precariously poised at the divide and are beginning to slip in the wrong direction. A great opportunity has been missed."

The five research centres under the Link programme, to which the Secretary of State referred, the long overdue and still awaited search for a direction for the science base and the one and only collaborative research centre—at Manchester—between the academic world and industry serve only to emphasise the fact that the necessary structural and individual career links between basic, strategic and applied science do not exist and that the links between the science world of the university and the science world of industry are perilously weak.

The changes announced by the Secretary of State are small and have, as he admitted, been financed by cuts elsewhere in the science budget. It is worth bearing in mind that in the next financial year, the first in which the measures will have any effect, the total sums of money involved amount to scarcely more than that provided for two research ships—one replacement and one new—in Antarctica, which were also provided for in the increase in the expenditure programme.

Import penetration in our high technology industries is rising steadily and has risen throughout the life of the present Government. There is a £2 billion trade deficit from 1987 in a narrow group of important high technology industries concerned with electronics. The technology requirements board, set up by the Department of Trade and Industry, published its first report in the middle of last year. Its first statement was on the lack of industrial civil research and development. The Government's contribution to industrial civil research and development has fallen steadily throughout their life and the measures announced tonight by the Secretary of State go only a small way towards correcting that long-term decline. Two thirds of our industrial civil research and development is confined to a narrow range of industries. In fact, overseas funding of industrial research and development is now almost as great as the Government's contribution towards the science budget.

Even in regions such as mine, where we have one or two high technology industries, the links between multinational companies and the academic world are often tenuous. Many of the industrial plants are branch plants where research and development does not take place. Our research and development facilities are often unconnected to the products produced in the plants in the region. The friction costs of creating and sustaining a proper basis of skills for science in the future are high, given that pattern of industrial disconnection, for which the Government are not providing a proper element of leadership. They have not provided proper leadership throughout their time in office. The Secretary of State has said that companies will be in a position to finance their research and development from their own resources. That is a policy of laissez-faire which will simply add to the problems that are accumulating in British science.

The Government's tax take from industry is rising constantly and has risen steadily over the past three years. We are the only industrial country in which the tax take from industry has risen during that period. Every other major industrial country has been attempting to reduce the tax take from industry in the context of a planned advance of research and development. This Government are unique in not supporting those policies.

The Secretary of State does not pay sufficient attention to the regional effects of some of the Government's industrial policies. In order to create the links between basic, strategic and applied research and the world of production it is necessary to create sustained networks of interconnection between the academic world and industry. Too many of the industrial closures and mergers in the regions of Britain have broken the reality of those connections. My region has seen the virtual disappearance of Plessey as a major employer and the recent amalgamation of a major industrial ceramics producer, Thermal Syndicate, with a French company, which is clearly stripping its research and development capability. The Secretary of State has ignored that important aspect of the connection between science policy and industrial policy. The measures he has advanced for science policy leave the connections between science and industry to the work of the market. In his own comments on industry's performance in civil research and development he has made statements which suggest that we do not have an adequate policy.

In the academic world we are still seeing measures by which Peter is being robbed to pay Paul. Universities are responding to the need for industrial sponsorship for their research programmes. However, many of the employment places created are of a short-term contract nature which cannot provide the career structure on which science needs to develop. The Government's policies towards universities mean that they must increasingly seek to place a considerable burden of their overheads on to the research funds that they are attempting to generate from industry. A collision between the universities' need for sponsorship and their need to provide for their own basic overheads will produce a crisis of sponsorship funding in the near future.

The policies of the Health Service are also serving to undermine research in universities. Newcastle university has cut 38 posts in the medical faculty, many of them research posts. The National Health Service in the city cannot possibly take up the slack of funding that that represents.

The Secretary of State should have sent out the message that he was committed to building proper, continuing links of research and science between the academic world and the world of industry. That clarion call has not come. In my region, there are a number of locally based initiatives which the Secretary of State could have used as a model and which, significantly, are often funded by the local branch of the Department of Trade and Industry. It is a worrying aspect of the Government's policies towards science that the spending programmes of the Departments which have a share in research spending are not well co-ordinated, so that the best use is not being made of the money available.

Finally, I hope that there will be measures in the Budget through which the Government will seriously seek to link their belated efforts in funding for a science policy with a genuine restructuring and reconstruction of the base of civil research and development in industry through tax and other measures. Shortly, we are to have the promise of a new Companies Act. I hope that the Government will take advantage of that Act to respond to many of the requests from industry, to ask companies to identify their research and development spending and to provide for the links that they ought to be making in terms of the skill and science base of their own activities. We must await those conclusions.

It is clear that the Secretary of State has stuck narrowly to his departmental brief. We need a new approach in which the problems of science policy will be combined with a consideration of industrial policy and industrial planning. From the limited measures announced tonight, it is all too clear that that is not what we shall have.

8.32 pm

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): I welcome the subject of the debate which the Opposition have chosen because it is vital to the future of the country, the economy and our reputation around the world. I was impressed by many of the statistics that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave earlier, but I hope that he will remember that it is not just a matter of statistics and money.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) underlined the fact that our role in universities and research institutes is based upon human beings. Our biggest resource in science and research is the human resource. That resource requires to be motivated if we are to continue to produce the results and to maintain the reputation that we have in the past. From my contacts in universities and institutions, it is obvious that there is a sense of disillusionment and bewilderment and a need for direction. In that sense, the debate is particularly topical this evening.

I understand the general thrust of policy. For example, the Government amendment referred to better value for money and better responsiveness. I understand the need for better co-ordination with industry. I have just spent four years at the Department of Energy where I endeavoured to mobilise the oil industry to put more into research and, at the same time, to obtain the co-operation of research establishments, universities and institutes. I was consulted when the Link programme was drawn up because, in many cases, the Offshore Energy Technology Board was already fulfilling many of the objectives of the Link programme.

I support the suggestion of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for better co-ordination and links between research, science and industry. However, I have a number of major concerns to which I hope the Government will pay attention and on which they will take action.

First, despite the comments of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—I believe that he does not want to be complacent — there is a danger of complacency because we are becoming almost over-obsessed with the need for this greater link between industry, science and research. Development and technology are important in themselves, but we must remember that research is equally important, particularly fundamental research. This country has long had a reputation for fundamental research. The funding of that research is a public responsibility. It is the kind of research which only in a limited way can we be sure of getting simply through links between industry and research institutions and universities. We must remember that fundamental research has always been, and is likely to remain to a great extent, a public responsibility.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for better understanding of the background against which our

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policies are applied. The Government amendment refers to the progress made by the University Grants Committee. I make no apology for referring to that and to universities. In the light of the discussions that I have had with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently, I am sure that he will not be surprised at that. My right hon. Friend fairly said that he is at arm's length from the UGC. But the UGC puts into effect the Government's policies. It is a Government agency and, although it carries out those policies at arm's length, the general policy in relation to universities and research is the ultimate responsibility of the Government.

Some of those policies do not fully take account of the traditions and histories of some of those institutions. Again, I make no apology for referring to my university, Aberdeen, which is an ancient university. In Scotland, we had four universities at a time when England had only two. That fact and the fact that we have a higher proportion of ancient universities means that, within our universities, there is a far wider range of disciplines than in many modern universities. At the same time, particularly in the case of Aberdeen, it has traditionally been the academic centre for a far wider geographic area of population than many of our modern institutions.

Because Aberdeen is a university with a wide range of disciplines, departments and also an important medical school with a good scientific record, it tends to be a relatively higher cost university. Even though the medical school at Aberdeen is well recognised under the new kind of UGC rating system, within such a small university, the effect of this high-cost department has gone unrecognised. Aberdeen has probably been the worst hit in that respect. Because the background of this university has not been taken properly into account by the UGC or by Government policy, it has been fairly hard hit and there have been bad consequences for this university. Failure to apply appropriate policies will simply lead to political alienation. We hope to avoid that.

Thirdly, the Government must be much more aware of the consequences of the policies which they are pursuing. Between 1980 and 1986 Aberdeen university suffered a 24·4 per cent. funding cut. I do not say that all was well in the university. There was room for improvement in particular departments but, because of the objectives of the UGC's plan, it now has had to shed 245 academic and non-academic posts. The Government have said, properly, that transitional and additional funds will be available—£155 million over three years for purposes that include transition where that is difficult—but the UGC has not made a commitment as to how it will achieve those objectives. One cannot run a business in that way, far less an academic or research institute. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should not be surprised at the growing disillusionment. There is compliance with difficult policies and remedies are being applied, but the means must be given—whether by the Government or through the UGC—to ensure that objectives are achieved in an orderly and sensible way. If that is not done, there will be disillusionment among all the human resources to which I have referred.

Fourthly, there must be more consistency in Government policies. I make no apology for speaking from first-hand experience. The universities have been told to get money from industry for research, to relate their activities to industry and to train their graduates better for posts in industry. I have already acknowledged how right that is.

The geology department at the university of Aberdeen is to be decimated, in accordance with the advice of the Oxburgh committee looking into earth sciences, yet it has one of the best records for placing graduates, especially in petroleum geology, in industry. The department is on the doorstep of North sea oil. Where could one find a better place to expand? It is the only department in Scotland that teaches petroleum geology at BSc and MSc level.

Scotland does not have polytechnics but petroleum geology, for example, is taught in polytechnics in England. If the Committee's proposals were followed through, the number of geology departments in Scotland would fall from six to three, whereas in the rest of the United Kingdom there would be 57 departments, including 21 polytechnics, to which students could turn for training.

There is no logic in these kinds of recommendations. This shows the inconsistent approach. I use the opportunity of this debate on an important aspect of science to demonstrate in practical terms what is happening. Fortunately, the news today is rather better. Apparently there have been second thoughts and there may be modifications in the proposals. I hope that there are modifications, but they will be judged when we see and hear them and I have not yet had an opportunity to do so. Even if the proposals are modified, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should not be surprised that there is disillusionment among people involved in research and among those who teach science in universities when proposals demonstrating such inconsistency come forward.

I support much of what is being done in our science and university policies, but there is also much that is not well. I have pointed to four aspects where things are not going well. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will pay attention to those points, otherwise many of us will find it difficult to support these policies.

8.43 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I welcome the speech of the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith), who echoed the worries of many hon. Members. They many not be expressed by some hon. Members, but they do exist. Those worries have led to the motion. I welcome the fact that the Opposition have devoted time to this subject, especially as I made my second speech, after coming here as a Member almost exactly a year ago, on this subject and research council funding.

We cannot ignore the fact that internationally—not just in this country—there is a shortage of scientists and technicians. If we are not able to offer the rewards, guarantees, excellence and facilities that other countries can offer, the prizes that go with individuals will be given not to this country but to others.

Unarguably, Britain has spent less on civil research and development than France and Germany. It is even more important to consider our priorities. Some 50 per cent. of research spending in Britain is on defence, compared with one third in France, less than 10 per cent. in West Germany and just 2·5 per cent. in Japan. That difference in emphasis is far more telling than a juggling of figures, comparing expenditure under various Governments. The record not only of this Government but of successive

Governments has fallen short. More than half of Britain's £4·5 billion science budget goes on defence, compared with a NATO average of one quarter. A great deal of our military expenditure is not on research but on the development of military items. According to reports from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, the science budget of the University Grants Committee has been cut by 11 per cent. since 1981. That difference in emphasis is the key to many of our problems.

The ABRC document "A Strategy for the Science Base" echoes the criticism of the Government's spending over many years. The report says:

"Unavoidable increases in costs — under-indexation in respect of pay and international subscriptions, rising superannuation outlays and essential restructuring — constitute a major offset against the apparent real increase in the Science Budget in recent years. Together with the rising real cost of scientific equipment, these factors have almost certainly led to a reduction in the amount of scientific activity which the Councils have been able to fund. The Government's present expenditure plans offer no prospect of an end to this continuing contraction."

The report continues:

"Government expenditure on the science base has been significantly less in the UK as a proportion of GDP than in several European countries, and in contrast with other countries has been falling. The brain drain from the UK is symptomatic of the failure of our investment to keep up with that of our competitors."

The report goes on:

"The Government has a responsibility to create confidence in its plans for enhancing the strength and quality of the science base, in partnership with industry and the research community . . . Further consideration should be given to the introduction of a link between part or all of the Science Budget and growth of GDP."

It is clear that the Government have continued to fail on each score. Despite the welcome news in November, they have not tackled the essential difficulties that are highlighted in the report. We await the Government's full response, which I hope we can debate in the House.

The Government's response to these problems has been to increase the emphasis on private research. Although our companies have increased spending on research and development by one fifth over the past decade, the Secretary of State has been right to highlight his worries. In America, France and Germany expenditure has doubled and in Japan it has trebled. It is not enough for the Secretary of State to say that he has worries and that he agrees with the Opposition that there are problems. He must go one step further and tackle them. In particular, he must tackle the difference in spending by our European partners on research in industry and technology compared with Britain. That point has been emphasised already by Members on both sides of the House. According to *The Guardian* today, Britain's universities are less dependent on Government grants than at any time in the past 20 years. Block grants accounted for only 55 per cent. of university income last year compared with 70 per cent. in 1974. It is a pity that it is not simply because private money has been flooding in; unfortunately, it is because Government money too often has been flooding out. It also adds to the real worries of which we have heard already about the emphases and the area on which the money is going and the kind of research that is taking place.

Professor Robin Weiss, director of the Institute of Cancer Research, said:

"we were able to respond to the AIDS challenge only because of the excellent groundwork laid in the UK. But the erosion of our science base is so bad that the next virus along will beat us."

Mary Warnock states in her article in *New Society*:

"The universities do not exist solely to train managers or employees. They are not in business merely to provide statistical . . . backing for Government policies."

There is a general concern, both in regard to broader university education and, particularly, to the Universities Funding Council. It will be chaired by an industrialist and the academics who become members are unlikely to be a majority. To put it again, not in my words but in those of Mary Warnock,

"there is, therefore, real danger that the long-term academic duties of universities may come to seem less important than the delivery of short-term and wealth-producing results."

We have had a whole variety of examples of where research which is not directed to any particular goal, not directed, in particular, to industrial goals, has paid off. To take an example that has not yet been mentioned, in the early years of the century Einstein was studying the movement of the planets, which resulted within 40 years, through the development of relativistic equivalence of mass and energy, in nuclear power, a jump that no one could have predicted at the turn of the century. Who knows what kind of jumps may yet be to come?

That is the sort of thing that has led to the criticisms of the Government in their cutting-off of funding for space research and leaving it all to industry, which will look to short-term ends. It is the kind of criticism that we have about the devotion of Government research and development funds in energy policy almost exclusively to nuclear research, with very little left to other areas that are discounted as less likely to show a return.

The result of all that has been a migration of scientists from this country—probably the most worrying statistic of them all. Incomes Data Services recently reported figures from American and British institutes of physics which reveal that technologists with 10 to 14 years' experience can expect to earn the equivalent of £36,000 in America in comparison with a little over £13,000 in Britain. Figures from the United States immigration services, analysed by the United States National Science Foundation, show that the United Kingdom contributed 9,500 foreign-born scientists who took up permanent residence in the United States in 1984.

The science and engineering policy studies unit of the Royal Society demonstrated that the number of its British fellows living abroad had risen from 4 per cent. in 1960 to 13 per cent. in 1984. According to that report, fewer new doctors of philosophy who emigrate return than did 25 years ago, yet it is on them that our scientific future depends.

At the moment we train good scientists and then we export them. Unfortunately, we do not get the foreign scientists who train here to stay. The Government should ask themselves why that is so. Only 20 per cent. of foreign scientists and engineers work in Britain for longer than three years. Four times as many British scientists and engineers who left Britain took up long-term jobs abroad.

It is only by tackling this kind of problem that we will find a solution to the crisis that we see in British science. It is no wonder that such emigration exists, particularly among the youngest talent, because, predominantly, younger people are put on short-term contracts, with a hit-and-miss system of going on to further work. It may well

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appear to many of them that by the time they have won one contract and ensured that that is going ahead, they barely have a moment's pause before going on to make sure that they have another contract to follow that.

Paul Hare and Geoffrey Wyatt, in an article shortly to be published in *Research Policy*, say:

"The application of financial pressure, in the absence of powers to hire and fire, is simply counterproductive, as many universities discovered to their cost after the 1981 cuts in British university funding: often the best people turned out to be the most mobile and promptly left the system."

In the report published by the Royal Society, the reasons given for the exodus of top university talent were mainly better opportunity—20 per cent.—facilities—13 per cent. and financial rewards—14 per cent. Those are matters that the Government can be more positive about immediately. They need to address those issues if the problems are not to continue.

Just a few positive notes before I finish. I pick on one because it is of particular interest to parts of the country such as my own. The Government have taken some welcome initiatives in getting new research establishments going, bringing together research talent and setting off new ideas in new directions, but one characteristic of these initiatives is that they have gone where such talent already exists, where there is already a resource base of these individuals, where people can already go if they want to get benefits in the United Kingdom.

The Government have ignored the potential in spending such sums and bringing forward such developments for getting things going in areas that do not offer such resources and infrastructure to the local community—areas such as Cornwall where we lose far too high a proportion of our brightest youngsters. There is nothing in Cornwall or anywhere near it that they can go to. Exeter, for example, is two hours' drive from my constituency, and not an easy drive at that.

That is the kind of problem that we face. It would be good if the Government would use the opportunity to take resources to the areas that can best utilise and benefit from them. We could create science parks around St. Austell and Camborne, based on the skills that already exist in mining and clay and the rest, and bring in new talent and resources which will allow such development to grow. There is no better way of bringing in new technology or taking advantage of the facilities that new technology creates—the opportunities created by there no longer being a need to have individuals based where other research and development is going on. Computer information technology has got rid of that need and we should seize with some imagination the opportunities that it provides.

In addition, there is a desperate need for an immediate restoration of morale. The only way to do that will be to provide long-term commitments and the ability to plan ahead for at least five years with a rolling programme of commissioning, development and funding. We must expand education to reach the level of France, the United States, Germany and Japan. According to the Save British Science group, we need an expansion of at least 50 per cent. by the end of the century. We must tackle the problem of the shortage of qualified physics, mathematics and science teachers in our schools—something which the Minister has talked about but which he has so far failed to deal with. We must find quality research and stimulate industrial research and development, perhaps in the way that I have suggested. But, above all, the Government need to raise their eyes to the next century, to the horizon and not keep looking at and stumbling over their own feet, and over the faults that admittedly exist in the system—faults which will be tackled only by a more far-sighted approach to the questions that British science raises.

8.58 pm

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): I am sure that the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) will forgive me if I do not follow his interesting speech too closely, but time is short.

As some of my right hon. Friends are aware, I have been pressing for this debate for some time. Therefore, I am obliged to the Opposition for securing it by using one of their Supply days, although I regret that the debate is only for half a day. It is symptomatic of the attention paid to science that we should have waited until 29 February for the debate. I wish only that it was a leap year for British science. However, we now have the time and whatever our views the debate is long overdue. If the Government wish us to accept, as some of us would wish to, that they pay more than lip service to the importance of science and Government decisions relating to science, we should have an annual occasion on which these matters can be discussed. It should not depend on the Opposition giving up one of their Supply days or on an Adjournment debate at 3 am. This is a prime subject of great national importance and it deserves prime time.

The Government's policy and performance in this sphere is something of a curate's egg. There have been some excellent initiatives; some of them have been obscured by what might be described as the dance of the acronyms. Science policy has shifted from ACCORD, ACARD and others to ACOST, ABRC, STAO and CEST. It is not easy to keep up with the changes of policy that are associated with the changes of the acronym, and that is to say nothing of the changes in the EEC acronyms such as ESPRIT, BRITE, JET, FRAMEWORK and others.

Nevertheless, there have been some excellent developments. I do not share the range of criticisms that have been levelled by the Opposition. The Link scheme has much to commend it. The CEST proposal will achieve important results, if only because Sir Francis Tombs is at the helm and it has adequate resources. Many of the initiatives described by the chief scientific adviser to the Cabinet office, Mr. John Fairclough, in his Midland bank lecture at Brunel, are important, significant and deserve support. Very few of the matters involved have been discussed here. I refer to the multidisciplinary research centres, on which the Secretary of State laid much welcome emphasis, the teaching company schemes and the development of science parks by English Estates, which has been a most successful venture.

I share many but not all of Mr. Fairclough's conclusions and judgments. In particular, I am sceptical—this scepticism has already surfaced in the debate—about his conclusion that the

"effective exploitation of science should always be our goal."

It is a major goal, but something vital in the brilliance and uniqueness of British science may be lost or prejudiced if we allow too great an intrusion of market judgments. It is the market which must assess science, not science which must assess the market.

Much of the debate is bound to concentrate on the question of resources for science. Much of the disagreement on the matter is sterile, particularly if it rests on different interpretations of GDP percentages, defence research and development percentages and arcane mysteries such as the transatlantic flow of PhDs, fellows of the Royal Society and Nobel prize winners.

I attach little significance to publication tallies in learned journals. One paper by Crick and Watson, Rutherford, Chadwick or Fleming is worth 1,000 that vanish without trace after publication. Quality in science is all important and it is quality that we must sustain, encourage and support.

There are some sets of figures, however, that cause me, and no doubt others, great concern. The first is that the United States, which spends half the world's research and development budget, is immensely concerned about its scientific performance and its consequent loss of industrial leadership, particularly with regard to Japan. The scale is most significant. The United States spent $125 billion on research in 1987, $60 billion of which came from federal resources, and of that $11 billion was spent on basic research. Since 1980, as a percentage of GDP, that expenditure has increased from 2·3 to 2·8 per cent. In non-defence spending it has increased from 1·8 to 1·9 per cent. Between 1987 and 1994 its basic research expenditure will approach 16 per cent. of the total federal budget. Despite those trends, the United States, which is still possibly the worlds' most significant research and development base and leader in the higher technology sector, now imports 75 per cent. of its requirements for integrated circuits from Japan. In the most critical sub-sector, which is known as DRAMS, its share of world production is down to 5 per cent.

Europe, despite substantial if not comparable research and development, is in a similar if not worse plight in this sector. We are almost out of it altogether. The report, "Silicon 200", said:

"Mainstream memories . . . it argued . . . represent the very highest volume products typified by DRAMS . . . It is an area requiring the highest investment and a long term strategy. It is an area in which politics and economic considerations existing in the U.K. preclude U.K. Company involvement. The U.K. has withdrawn any pretence of involvement."

The report calls for an investment of £255 million and warns that it will be largely wasted if

"it is not complemented by a substantial commitment to build a more credible and viable semi-conductor industry within the United Kingdom".

I would argue that the context should not be the United Kingdom but Europe, the finance should be European and the market worldwide if we are to succeed. The main conclusion is that, despite repeated warnings and millions of pounds spent in support of limited and ineffective policies, the United Kingdom and Europe have lost out to Japan.

Money alone, even on the United States and European scale, is not the answer. So what is the answer? Perhaps one answer is that Japanese integrated circuit companies are investing 35 per cent., not of their profits but of their revenue in research and have done so since 1979. Their revenues are vast.

This is not a debate about space, but the scale, vision and determination of the Japanese space programme leap out of reports and suggest a most intriguing relationship between priorities and results. If I may detain the House for a moment, the latest Japanese project is to construct the largest international joint space centre in the world. They propose to form an international science and technology community for space and to create a parent body to provide international co-operation in space and to develop its utilisation. This is taking place at two places in Japan — at Tashei and Oybayashi. It is also developing the H2 rocket, which will have a launch capability of two tonnes. That really puts Japan ahead in space.

Therefore, I accept and I ask the House to accept Professor Dennis Noble's conclusion in his Lloyd-Roberts lecture, where he summarises the reality when he argues that:

"It is a gross oversimplification to suppose that the relation between science and wealth-creation is direct. It requires the integrity of many essential links, the blue skies research itself, the consolidation of fundamental discoveries into exploitable fields, the inventiveness to see how they might be exploited, the entrepreneurship required to risk capital development and the determination to market the product . . . fail at any of those stages and you will have failed to convert science into wealth creation".

He made out a most powerful case when he argued in conclusion that

"the political argument about the future of science in the United Kingdom is not a funny aberration that will simply go away . . . once we have solved the next round of funding crises. We have a long trek ahead . . . if we are to avoid a major cultural and economic catastrophy for our nation."

I share that judgment. The nature of the catastrophe has never been better summarised than by Correlli Barnett's powerful book on Britain, "The Audit of War". It is precisely because we have done and are doing so well in other directions that this area of concern has been kept out of sight or swept under the carpet. We are indebted not to the House but to another place, as my right hon. Friend conceded, for bringing it back into the limelight where it deserves to remain.

However much the Government may wish to disagree with some of the report's most powerful conclusions, they cannot disagree with the evidence, and the evidence discloses the mounting dismay and concern of some of the most informed and responsible people in science in Britain. The most recent report of the ABRC itself has already been quoted; I shall not quote it further. It is in the context of those and many other comments that I have found some of the comments of my right hon. and hon. Friends disturbing.

Lord Joseph is on record as saying:

"It is not the role of Government to have a policy for science".

My noble Friend is no longer responsible for science, but I fear that in certain areas that philosophy remains, and in this day and age it is utterly indefensible. The ABRC concluded that the Government's revised expenditure plans

"do not provide the means to move our nation's scientific capability towards the 21st century,"

to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy replied with the pious hope that

"it will be possible to give greater priority to science in this year's public expenditure survey discussions."

I have looked at the public expenditure survey volumes with some care. Science creeps in here and there. Coverage is diffuse and scattered. Research and development is treated at length on only 12 out of about 515 pages. Some major Departments do not mention it at all. Astonishingly, the Ministry of Defence, which spends just

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under half of the annual total, gives research one line. The review volume includes an analysis of just over one page—that is it; one page. From all that, it is just possible to discover that there is a science policy in the United Kingdom. In responsible Departments, the policy is obscure, benign and peripheral. In Departments that have no responsibility—if I may put it bluntly—science sinks without a trace and there is an almost audible sigh of relief.

Nevertheless, it is possible to discern some threads in the Government's science policy that have to be put together rather like a jigsaw. The words that appear most frequently these days are those such as "targeting", "direction", "selectivity", and "orchestration". The philosophy is based on the premise that, as we can hope to do only 5 per cent. of the world's research and development, central direction is necessary and unavoidable. "We cannot do everything" is the refrain. My right hon. Friend repeated it tonight. It is a plausible argument, but it begs many questions. The most important question is, "Who are 'we'?"

The need for choice is understandable, but can or should the Government attempt to make it? Does the need to improve our application of science sustain the cohesion of the argument right through to the choice of strategic direction in basic science, which is what we do best, and which will always be the most crucial? I think not.

What, then, can and should the Government do? They must clearly provide vital resources in major aspects of fundamental research. Industry cannot and will not do so. The Government must ensure that the education system rewards brilliance, especially eccentric brilliance in science. If that means differential rewards for scarce scientific skills, so be it. They must also provide moral support for that long overdue change in our national culture. Congressman Don Fuqua reported to the United States Congress on the subject. He summed up the situation in one sentence. He said:

"Scientific illiteracy is a threat to the representative democratic system and ultimately to science itself."

Government can and should do more to reinforce their own successes by ensuring that excellent systems such as the overseas technology information service are made more widely known and more generally used by industry. What they should not do is pursue the objective set out by Mr. Fairclough and others. Mr. Fairclough asked that scientists

"be kept in touch with the market and commercial opportunities."

In my judgment, our most valuable and original scientists should be preoccupied not with the market but with their subjects. Scientists should complete their research and publish it. It is up to industry and commerce to keep in touch with scientific endeavour and to equip itself to interpret and apply the results. The philosophy has never been better expressed than it was by the great French scientist, Pasteur. He said:

"No. A thousand times no. There does not exist a category of science to which one can give the name applied science. There . . . are sciences and the application of sciences, bound together as the fruit of the tree which bears it."

That statement is as true today as it was in the century when Pasteur uttered it.

Where is the missing link? Will historians of the future, researching for the "Audit of Peace", the natural successor to Correlli Barnett's book, looking into the Olduvai gorge of British scientific history, search in vain for a strong and powerful lead from Parliament? Here is, or should be, the major instrument of national policy criticism and formulation, yet, with the conspicuous exception of the Lords' Select Committee, we have no instruments of and little opportunity for policy discussion and formulation. No time is found for the discussion of major policy documents on science. We are too busy legislating, often to repair or remedy the consequences of major policy deficiencies in science and technology 10, 20 or even 50 years ago. As has been said recently in relation to some aspects of United States science policy, we have confused "who should mind the future and who should mind the factory."

The key statistic is the 5 per cent. of world science that is done in Britain. That means that 95 per cent. is done elsewhere. What proportion of that is accessible? It could be 30 per cent. What proportion is in fact accessed by Government or industry or both? It could be 10 per cent. What proportion of that which is accessed is applicable? I believe that it could be half, which brings us down to 5 per cent. Finally, what proportion is applied? I suspect that that figure is about 1 per cent.

If the Government have a positive role, it is to stimulate an upward movement in those percentages. That is the way to ensure that if the rest of the world takes advantage—as it will—of British science, we take a reciprocal advantage of science abroad. Here is a lake of the purest water surrounded by a vast herd of animals whose sensory perception is so poor that they appear to have no wish even to drink. We shall determine our future industrial rank not by using the national science output but by using the output of science as a whole, wherever it is done—and done well. That is the lesson that the Japanese have taught the world, and we must learn it.

What can Parliament do? First, it can pay much more attention to the subject. Secondly, it can take steps to ensure that it is much better informed on such matters and on the scientific aspects of legislation. Thirdly, it can persuade the Government that an informed Parliament has a role to play and that it is worth substantial expenditure to ensure that Parliament is informed. That is the prime purpose of the Office of Technology Assessment in Washington, and of the Parliamentary Science and Technology Information Foundation that we have established at Westminster. But let us contrast the scale of the resources. The OTA has a budget of $15 million per annum, while our humble, but I hope successful, foundation has £50,000.

One of my right hon. Friends with whom the project was discussed once remarked that Parliament has always been an ignorant place and that he hoped it would remain so. That is the most desperately sad and cynical comment on democracy that I have heard in a decade. If the nation is to have an informed and relevant science policy, we need an informed and relevant Parliament. At present, we have neither.

9.17 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): I join the hon. Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) in urging the House to find time to discuss this important subject annually. On this occasion, the Opposition have taken the initiative and introduced this debate.

There is considerable significance in the agreement among hon. Members on both sides of the House about

the crisis in British science, and a symptom of the severity of the crisis is that since I told some colleagues in Oxford that I wished to take part in the debate I have hardly been able to get off the telephone because of the number of anxious and angry scientists who wished to give me information to draw to the attention of the House. Had they been here to listen to the Secretary of State, notwithstanding the few new points that he made, and although they would have noted his words of caution against complacency, they would have found his contribution complacent and a classic case of too little, too late.

Is that any wonder when, by any fair standards of international comparison, British science is so chronically under-funded? The Sussex university science policy research unit has shown that Britain ranked bottom, or next to bottom, compared with the United States, France, West Germany, Japan and the Netherlands. Reports for the Advisory Board for the Research Councils by the Royal Society reveal that Britain shows the most marked decline in its share of scientific output of any major OECD country. What is worse, notwithstanding the small increase in funds that the Secretary of State says will be available in the next two years, the amount of scientific work that those who should know expect that that will fund will fall by 2 per cent. Meanwhile, the cream of our scientists are going abroad, with 1,000 of our best scientists going to the United States alone. As the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) said, the consequence is grave disillusion and a devastating effect on key areas of basic research work.

Let me give a couple of examples. The total United Kingdom research budget for materials science is about £5 million. That is research into new materials with important implications for work in super-conductivity, new materials for construction and aviation, and so on. That £5 million is peanuts compared with the sums that other countries put into that area.

My informant on the matter recently visited the United States, where he found that one department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology was spending more on materials science than the total United Kingdom budget. He went to Japan, where he found one project that was bigger than the total amount being spent in this country.

One of my informant's best-ever students has just completed his doctorate in material sciences. He failed to obtain any money for continuing his research, so he has now joined an accountancy firm in the City of London. That case and many others like it are a tragedy for this country.

Similarly, another colleague in Oxford reported that a specialist in the central nervous system, doing incredibly important work on multiple sclerosis and so on, recently tried 500 United Kingdom companies and funding agencies in an attempt to obtain the resources that he needed to undertake an important new research project. No help was forthcoming. That support is now coming from a United States drugs company. It will have the options on any results of the research.

The consequences for our universities and our students' future are catastrophic. The figures from Oxford university bear out other statistics that were given earlier in the debate. In 1985-86, compared with 1983-84, 10 per cent. fewer students went from Oxford university into industry. Over the same period, the proportion of students going to commerce was up by 11 per cent. Despite, or perhaps because of, the 20 per cent. Government cut in funding, studentships in Oxford have been left unfilled —the first time in memory that that has happened.

Universities are having to advertise to our students to apply for post-doctoral places. The best are simply either going into the City or on to scientific work in the United States. I dare say that in reply the Minister will claim that the brain drain figures can be interpreted this way or that way, and that the numbers coming in or going out are roughly equal. As other hon. Members have said, quality is crucial. Those who are coming here are coming to do short-term post-doctoral work for specific projects, whereas those who are leaving are the best people — senior academics, members of the Royal Society, prize winners and students who will be the leading scientists of the future.

We must heed the words of Professor Sir George Porter, president of the Royal Society, who said:

"You cannot have a successful manufacturing industry unless you have something good to sell. You cannot have a good product without continuing applied research and development.

You cannot maintain good applied research and development without a good domestic science base."

As well as recognising the importance of scientific research in its own right, we must, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) said, recognise the connection between the strategy that needs to be followed in science and education and that which needs to be followed in industry.

In the limited time available I wish to say a few words about the importance of research assistance for small companies, which is now generally recognised to be a critically important factor in exploiting the valuable links between university and polytechnic research departments and the work of entrepreneurs.

A certain sleight of hand has been involved in the labelling of schemes. We cannot escape the conclusion that, if the energy that was put into relabelling and repackaging schemes had instead gone into obtaining additional funds for research, and if the DTI had taken the time that it took in making television commercials to expedite decisions, small high-tech companies and the innovation that they undertake would have been a great deal better off.

For example, the support for innovation scheme operated by the DTI, providing funding of 33 or 35 per cent., had some defects, and the system was relatively indiscriminate. Nevertheless, it was a route by which small companies could secure funding for research and development. When that scheme was superseded by the Eureka and Link schemes, the experience of firms on the ground has been that no new money has been made available. Funds that had been available in any case are simply being recycled under a new name.

While the funding for the development phases of Eureka was heralded at 50 per cent., the fact that no new money was available meant that fewer projects or work were to be assisted. While Link is proclaimed to be assisting small companies, it does so only when they are in collaboration. At least two companies or a Government laboratory must be taking part. Those are silly conditions. If they are intended to establish the credibility of the project, they are a pretty sloppy substitute for the real work of evaluation that ought to be done.

[Mr. Andrew Smith]

More seriously — this is the real danger that small companies fear — if they have a brilliant idea that they are compelled to share at the so-called pre-competitive research stage, they risk losing the particular commercial benefit of the idea. They are put in an impossible dilemma. Either they must risk missing much-needed funds, or they must risk losing the financial benefits of the research to a larger competitor. Either way, operated in such a fashion, the scheme cannot but discriminate in the interests of larger firms, at the expense of small ones.

Even more frustrating and self-defeating than the packaging of the assistance schemes and the terms under which they operate are the delays in decision-making, which can paralyse a small company. I wrote to the DTI only today about a firm in my constituency. It is a small firm, with a spectacular record of innovation, development and manufacture in electro-optics. It is poised on the threshold of an exciting research project to develop key filtration units for the new generation of industrial lasers.

That work would keep Britain at the cutting edge of innovation in a vitally important sphere. The firm applied for assistance under the Eureka programme, and the final application went in on 25 September last year. While the DTI officials with whom it has dealt have been sympathetic, today the company is still waiting for a decision on whether the project can go ahead. That means that it has lost five months at a crucial stage.

But it is worse than that. Under the terms of the assistance, the company cannot spend any of its own money on the work without prejudicing the funds that may be forthcoming from the Government in the future. In the meantime, its financial and staff budgeting and its work schedule are thrown into uncertainty, which, were it not for the enterprise and flexibility of both management and work force, would be crippling. In contrast, the company's competitors in the United States, under the small business innovation research programme there, can take in an application in the morning and come out with a cheque in the afternoon.

Faced with such shortcomings in Government support, it is a tribute to the scientists and scientific entrepreneurs in this country that there are any subjects left in which we are world leaders. What is needed is clear: more funding, more straightforward and simple criteria so that firms can develop their own ideas, and, above all, quicker decision-making so that high-tech firms can compete on an equal basis with those abroad. There lies the way to success for innovation and for high-tech industry, and for a more prosperous future for the country as a whole.

9.29 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Of all of those who have spoken, the Secretary of State has shown least understanding of the intense frustration articulated by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, which he appointed to advise him. That frustration is shared by the whole scientific community.

This is a time of unprecedented fertility and opportunity in basic science and its applications. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) spoke of the lack of strategy and leadership which the Government have brought to bear in response. The right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) spoke about disillusionment in research and teaching. The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) spoke about frustration throughout the scientific community. The hon. Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) spoke of the brilliance of individual scientists, which has been the glory of the scientific tradition, facing the catastrophe which he feels the Government are bringing about. My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) spoke about the flood of representations that he has received in just the day or two in which it has been known that we were to have this debate.

The Government's expenditure plans have the science budget reaching what appears to be a plateau or perhaps continuing on a plain. We are spending only 15 per cent. more than in 1979. We are failing to keep up with the 2 per cent. per annum sophistication factor, or the 17 per cent. growth of national income. That means, for those who understand the definitions of national income, no increase in scientists and no increase in science bought. To be fair, that represents a consistent pattern, with the science budget having dropped from 0·2 per cent. to 0·16 per cent. of GDP in the early 1970s with the onset of disillusionment about science at that time. Spending has remained at that level ever since. What has changed is the pace of development in science and the pace of its application in the rest of the world.

After allowing for the welcome 7 per cent. increase in industrial research and development between 1985 and 1986, total research and development in the United Kingdom still fell from 2·39 per cent. to 2·36 per cent. of GDP last year because of Government cuts. After taking out defence research and development, the new OECD figures which are out this month show that spending on civil research and development in the United Kingdom has been static at 1·8 per cent. of national income since 1979 while that in all of our industrial competitors has risen steadily. I doubt whether the Secretary of State has even looked at the graphs.

The rise in other countries has accommodated the growth in opportunities for science and its application. R and D continues to rise as a proportion of GDP — in Germany from 2·3 to 2·8 per cent., in Japan from 1·8 to 2·7 per cent. and, with a far larger volume of research, in the United States from 1·6 to 2 per cent. The freeze in Britain shows in the failure to fund alpha-graded research projects, in the paucity and obsolescence of equipment, in the diminished international standing of our higher education, in the lack of career opportunities for research scientists, in the poor status of engineers in industry, in the shortage of teachers of science and mathematics, in the cantankerous and obstructive role of the Government in international scientific co-operation, in the low level of research and development in industry, in the loss of so many of our best scientists abroad, in the continuing loss of technological competitiveness, and in the deteriorating balance of payments.

So why bother with all this research and development business? Why not leave others to make the advances and pick up the science and technology from abroad? Why not have done with it all? What is wrong with the argument is that, first, in basic science, in as large an economy as ours, unless we work at the frontiers in high temperature superconductivity and developmental biology, molecular sciences, surface science and the rest, we will have no body of people who can develop, understand, produce or use the products and processes of tomorrow.

We have already had warnings from ICI, Glaxo, Wellcome, Smith, Kline and French, BP and the pharmaceutical industry that Britain is losing its viability as a base for applied research. That research depends on a ready supply of people and ideas from basic science. The new inter-disciplinary research centres are fine and necessary. However, with continued level funding and if each centre continues to be financed by sacrificing 30 or 40 of the project grants that get young scientists going and provide many of the new ideas and discoveries of which the hon. Member for Havant spoke, the IRCs will become small islands of excellence sustained by and communicating with the international scientific community but without any means of communicating with British industry, application, education and training in research, thus entirely defeating their purpose.

No one knows better than the Treasury—on no day better than today — the debilitating effect, as the oil revenues pass their peak, of the grinding 2 per cent. per annum loss of non-price competitiveness which needs to be appreciated to make sense of our deteriorating trade figures. January was a bad month, but the trend is inescapable.

Industry needs to double its research and development if we are to match the present research intensity of German and Japanese industry. That funding is essential if we are to compete technologically. It means a £3 billion increase per annum in research and development funding, compared with the modest £100 million for the science base that was sought by ABRC and denied by the Secretary of State.

There is no meaningful contribution that can be made to remedy the huge deficiencies in industrial research by denying or redirecting the far more modest needs of the science base. There is no hope of achieving the increases needed in industrial research from spontaneous allocations of increased profits such as the Secretary of State spoke of. Such profits have already occurred. Between 1981 and 1986, industrial profits increased by 70 per cent. in real terms, but industry's funding of research and development increased by only 20 per cent. The magnitude of the increase in industrial research and development that is required is too large to be brought about by discretionary grants. We need to bring about a step change in British industrial practice while we still have a science base to support it.

Industry should be given a powerful fiscal incentive to increase its funding of its research and development. Britain is alone among the industrial countries in having had no such fiscal incentive scheme. The Inland Revenue survey of fiscal incentives for R and D spending did an honest job of reporting overseas practice and experience, but it stopped short of Mansfield's key paper in the 1986 "American Economic Review" that suggested how the American system could be improved. If we adapt Mansfield's suggestions, what we need, for a few years, is a high percentage grant for increments of R and D expenditure over a fixed base year, phasing into a grant to maintain the doubled level of expenditure for a further few years until firms have learnt the benefits of a higher level of R and D, which they will then sustain without the need for a continuing incentive. It is that step change that we must aim to bring about.

In addition to the fiscal incentive that will change the climate, specific programmes will be needed in such areas as space and telecommunications where considerable co-ordination is required. Such necessary and practicable advances in industrial R and D make heavy demands on the people and the ideas produced by Britain's science base.

The increase in the science budget of £100 million recommended by the ABRC and rejected by the Government is needed in full and is needed this year. The ABRC is not "just another lobby", as the Under-Secretary described it. That is not something which a sensible Minister says to any lobby. It is certainly not something which one says to one's lawyer, doctor, fire brigade or plumber — to someone whom one has summoned to one's help, as the Government summoned the ABRC. Least of all should Ministers say that to the ABRC when, like the true mother, it has offered to centralise management—in a way quite alien to science but dear to the dictatorial heart of this Government—as the price for the funding urgently needed to save British science. But Solomon the Government are not. By refusing the funding the Secretary of State butchered the baby. He cannot reply to the ABRC report "A Strategy for the Science Base" because he has no strategy. A charade presided over by the Prime Minister is still a charade, albeit a prime ministerial charade.

Science has always been in politics. Now the Government have pushed politics into science just as they have pushed politics into the universities, the Church, the courts, and the BBC because they can brook no challenge to their autocratic rule. The consequence is that the Government have demonstrated their total incompetence.

Gone are the days when as the Minister responsible for information technology the Secretary of State boasted:

"In this area we have a clear strategy". — [*Official Report*, 27 Nov. 1981; Vol. 12, c. 1150.]

He said that information technology was,

"the area of fastest growth in public expenditure . . . something that I proudly point out to the Prime Minister on every possible occasion." — [*Official Report*, 17 February 1984; Vol. 54, c. 521.]

Does the Secretary of State remember that? Gone is Information Technology year. Gone is the support for innovation programme. Gone is the Alvey programme, and its successor is never to come. "Automate or liquidate," cried the Secretary of State, whereupon Sinclair and Acorn computers, of which the Secretary of State justly boasted, did both.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Today I had a meeting with Olivetti-Acorn at which the company announced that it had sold more than 1 million Acorn computers to British schools and launched a new product — Archimedes. The hon. Gentleman really must get up to date.

Dr. Bray: Did the Secretary of State ask Olivetti how much it had paid for Acorn—*[Interruption.]* They went bankrupt. The Secretary of State bought one Acorn computer and I bought two. The Archimedes machine is a splendid machine but it was an example of an industrial initiative denied backing by the Government in terms of the comprehensive increases in educational activity and in application needed to sustain that initiative.

The Secretary of State was first recruited to the Government partly because on the Treasury and Civil Service Committee he was being too helpful to my colleagues and me in showing how the Government had, in two brief years, destroyed more British industry than Hitler managed to do in the war and partly to bring some

[Dr. Bray]

lighthearted showbiz to that ravaged industrial scene. Industry, the Health Service, even the education system can be rebuilt in a decade as the Germans and Japanese have shown. A peerless scientific tradition that has taken centuries to build will be destroyed and dissolved in 10 brief years if the Government are allowed to proceed any further on their present course. That crime would be remembered long after many other wounds, at the time apparently more grievous, have healed and been forgotten.

I urge the House to reject the Government's amendment and support our motion.

9.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Robert Jackson): This has been a reflective debate in which we have heard some considered and thoughtful speeches addressing complex issues. Thankfully, in the process, we have sometimes eluded the customary acrimonies of party debates, although the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) did his best towards the end of his speech with some judicious misquotations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley) has an article in today's edition of *The Independent* in which he casts strictures on ministerial speeches, particularly the wind-up speeches made by luckless junior Ministers who he says gabble through their briefs scratching — I will not say what he says they scratch. I cannot promise high-flown rhetoric such as my hon. Friend would like, or indeed flights of fancy, and I do not think that they are particularly appropriate to this subject.

I shall try to rise to the high level of the debate and the best way to do that is to set the debate in a wider international context, which is sometimes not sufficiently appreciated. However, I noticed that in his excellent speech my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) emphasised the importance of that context, particularly in Europe. He stressed the need to develop strategies for Britain to exploit research and development at home and abroad.

I should like to look first at the similarities in the position of science in Britain and that of other countries and then to look at the differences. Unfortunately, it is necessary to use some figures and statistics when making those comparisons and I apologise for that. However, in matters of science it is necessary that we strive for a degree of objectivity and logic and figures are helpful to that.

I shall deal first with the share of the gross domestic product devoted to science. When looking at those figures, the hon. Member for Motherwell, South will see that he has gone over the top in some of his language. The figures show that Britain is in the middle of the league in terms of the share of the GDP devoted to science. The figure for Britain is 2·33 per cent., for France it is 2·31 per cent., in the Federal Republic of Germany it is 2·66 per cent. and in Italy, our nearest comparator in terms of the size of GDP, it is only 1·33 per cent.

Mr. Douglas: What about defence?

Mr. Jackson: I shall deal with defence in a moment.

The next set of similar figures is the Government's research and development spend as a proportion of GDP. That is the proportion spent by Government, leaving aside industry. It shows that Britain is near the top of the league. In spite of that, I will not follow the hon. Member for Motherwell, South in his argument that we should somehow fix an arbitrary percentage of GDP to be devoted to research and development. In 1985, 1·3 per cent. of GDP was spent on Government research and development. That compares with 1·13 per cent. in the Federal Republic of Germany and 0·95 per cent. in Italy.

Another similarity — this is important because it has come up in various ways during the debate — is the percentage of GDP devoted by the Government to the advancement of knowledge. Some strictures were cast by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) and it was referred to by the hon. Members for Truro (Mr. Taylor) and for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). When one looks at the figures for the commitment to basic science they do not bear out the strictures. They show that Britain is in the middle of the league and, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, we achieve good results. In Britain the figure is 0·28 per cent. as compared with 0·05 per cent. in the United States of America, which has a huge GDP, 0·27 per cent. in Japan, 0·23 per cent. in Italy and 0·39 per cent. in France. That shows that Britain is in the middle of the league table. It is certainly not at the bottom.

We agree with the analysis made by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant on the importance of basic science. However, when deciding in which of the fundamental projects to invest, decisions have to be made. It must be right for the Government and the scientific community to keep an eye on the potential exploitability of science as well as its purely intellectual attractions, which are also important. It is relevant to ask questions about exploitability. That is what is now happening and we should welcome it.

Mr. Dalyell: If all is as well as the Minister says and we are in the middle of the league table, how does he explain the case to which my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) referred whereby there are cries de coeur from many of our most senior science professors about their most brilliant students at post-doctoral level seeking posts abroad?

Mr. Jackson: I shall deal with that because the subject has been raised many times during the debate and it must be answered. I shall do my best to answer it. The brain drain study, which was quoted particularly by the hon. Member for Truro, does not bear out the construction placed upon it by the hon. Members for Truro or for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). In 1962, which is when the last major brain-drain study was made, 30 per cent. of post-doctoral students emigrated, whereas in 1982, the year to which the present study relates, only 9 per cent. emigrated. There is a migration and immigration of talent in this area.

I was going through a list of the similarities between the position of British science and that of science in other countries. I wish to deal with one similarity, which is crucial. In all countries, there is a tendency for the rate of spend on research and development to slow down. In Britain, as the hon. Member for Motherwell, South said, Government expenditure has increased by 15 per cent. in real terms since 1979. That growth is continuing. However, if we consider changes in Government expenditure on research and development between 1981 and 1985 as a percentage of GDP, we see that the figure is minus 0·1 per

cent. In the Federal Republic of Germany the figure is precisely zero. In the United States, the figure is plus 0·1 per cent. and in Japan it is zero. France is the only country where there has been an upward lift of 0·2 per cent.

Dr. Bray: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jackson: I shall give way in a moment.

We must recognise that, throughout the world, there is a shift away from the exponential rates of growth in investment. The golden age years of investment in science were the 1950s and the 1960s. Between 1959 and 1963, there was a 30 per cent. annual growth in science spending in Britain. That is not happening in any country nowadays. We have moved into a situation of steady state in most science. That is perhaps happening first in Britain, but it will happen in many other countries.

Dr. Bray: With all respect, the Under-Secretary of State is behind the times. He is not taking account of the current mood. He should consider those graphs which show clear, continuing increases in all industrial competitors, while Britain has remained stagnant.

Mr. Jackson: There has been a substantial slow—down in investment in science in all countries, compared with previous levels. In Britain, it has gone further than in many countries, but the situation is the same in all countries.

What is flowing from that is something that we again find happening around the world—a focus on the need to manage science more effectively. In Britain, the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany, there is an emphasis on the exploitability of science and a move away from near-market science. We see the same emphasis on selectivity and concentration being brought forward with concepts such as university research centres.

Mr. Straw: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jackson: I shall not give way. I must get on.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not persist in trying to intervene.

Mr. Jackson: There is also a tendency throughout the world towards rationalisation of access to costly scientific equipment. The answer to the point raised by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is that we are negotiating to stay in CERN, by seeking a reduction in the cost to Britain of our participation, in line with the Kendrew committee recommendations.

So far, I have been talking about similarities between British science and science in other countries. I now wish to say a few words about the differences. First, there is the relatively low industrial investment in research and development, where we are substantially lower, in terms of the proportion of GDP, than either the Federal Republic of Germany, the United States or Japan, although we share the problem with France and Italy who invest even lower proportions of their GDP in industrial R and D than we do.

Another difference is the relatively high commitment to defence in Britain. That is reflected in the share of GDP devoted to civil R and D. In Britain, this figure is 0·6 per cent. In France the figure is 1 per cent. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the figure is 1 per cent., but, on the other hand, in the United States and Japan, it is lower than in Britain. That reflects a long-standing pattern with deep historical roots. The hon. Member for Truro was right when he said that the responsibility, or blame, for that falls equally on both Conservative and Labour Governments. The Government have reflected on this issue each year, in their decision on the balance between civil and military R and D, as the public expenditure process continues.

There is another difference between science in Britain and science in other countries — the exceptional quality and range of British science. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the recent citation study. It showed that in 1982 Britain had 8·9 per cent. of world citations compared with 4·3 per cent. for France, 6·2 per cent. for Germany and 6·3 per cent. for Japan. My impression is that Britain fields teams of high quality in a wide range of activities.

There is another difference between Britain and other countries. We have a relatively weak system of central management of science and an unusual degree of academic self-government. The contrast, especially between Britain and the continent, is important. In academic science in Britain, half the funding of science goes through the universities, where it is administered on the basis of academic self-government. I think that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside failed to recognise the full extent of the UGC's autonomy in allocating resources between institutions. The other half of the Government's scientific expenditure goes to the research councils. There are separate research councils, run by peers who jealously guard their academic independence. As for departmental expenditure, there are separate Government Departments with a separation of responsibilities, with consequences that were criticised by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins).

Britain's model of diffused management, with a high degree of academic self-government, can be compared with the system in other countries — for example, France, the Federal Republic of Germany and Italy, where there are central science Ministries, single research councils and considerable scope for political override of scientific decisions. That is why there has been a recent move in this country — an overdue one — which was described by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, towards a strengthening of the capacity to take horizontal as well as vertical decisions about the management of science. Changes are being made within the Government following the House of Lords report. Changes are being made within the research councils, and changes have been recommended by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils within the universities to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred.

The conclusions to be drawn from this picture of the similarities with and differences between British science and science in other countries is that, first, the intellectual output of British science continues to be excellent and, secondly, our financial inputs as a proportion of GDP are broadly in line with those of our competitors. No one can say that those are out of line or that we are markedly under-performing in one of those indicators. Nevertheless, there is undoubtedly within the scientific community a sense of unease, which has been reflected in every speech made in the debate, and we must recognise that. We must ask ourselves about the causes of that phenomenon. They are rooted in the analysis which I have made of similarities and differences in the position of British science.

[Mr. Jackson]

Despite the fact that our GDP has been growing relatively fast in recent years, its size is relatively small. The total volume of British GDP is 75 per cent. of that in France and well below that in the Federal Republic of Germany. Consequently, the same proportion of GDP spent on research produces rather less money in Britain. We spend a great deal more than Italy, which is our nearest GDP comparator. We must set that fact against our scientists' high ambitions and high abilities based on their historic successes and the vitality of our scientific community.

The Government's view is that it is not possible to bridge the gap between the reach of our scientists and their grasp by increasing public expenditure on the scale recommended by the Opposition. What Britain must do is what all countries must do, and what they are increasingly having to do — manage science more effectively without damaging scientific creativity. I am conscious that this is a very great challenge to the scientific and academic community because, in the British system, they carry a great burden of responsibility for rational, cost-effective and purposive direction of science. I stress the word "purposive", a word used by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils.

The Government have a part to play in all this but the decisive factor will in the end be the energy, creativity and flexibility of our scientific community.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 202, Noes 249.

Division No. 198] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*

Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Ch[illegible], Rt Hon Mrs L[illegible]da
Ch[illegible]mon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hi[illegible]d, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Ryder, Richard
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. David Maclean.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker *forthwith declared the Main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House notes the essential and increasingly important contribution made by the science base in higher education and the research councils to the nation's economic and social development; applauds the achievements of Britain's scientists which are second only to those of the United States of America with its vastly greater resources; welcomes the 15 per cent. in real terms increase in the science budget since 1979, the progress made by the University Grants Committee and research councils in promoting better value for money and responsiveness, and the new central machinery announced in Cm. 185 for considering science and technology priorities; and commends the Government's intention to take further steps to enhance the strength and quality of the science base and to ensure that research outcomes are better exploited to the United Kingdom's benefit.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Lords Amendments to the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Orders of the Day

Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Bill

Clause 2

FUNCTIONS OF THE AUTHORITY: GENERAL

Lords amendment: No. 1, page 2, line 33, leave out from "to" to second "the" in line 34 and insert—

"(a) the variations made by Part I of Schedule 2 to this Act; and

(b) any variation made in accordance with the provisions of Part II of that Schedule;".

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Colin Moynihan): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendment No. 10.

Mr. Moynihan: The purpose of amendment No. 1, together with the associated amendment, No. 10, to schedule 2, is to give effect to undertakings respectively to the Great Yarmouth Court and Haven Commissioners and Associated British Ports during the Select and Standing Committee stages in the House. For technical and timing reasons the amendment could not be tabled before the Bill left the House.

The purpose and effect of the two amendments is to remove from the map of the Broads, as defined by the deposited map, two separate small areas of Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft respectively. In each case the area forms part of these two ports. After discussion with both harbour authorities we agreed that, at this time, there would be no real benefit to the Broads Authority from these areas—*[Interruption.]*—including the areas within its jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Would hon. Members beyond the Bar please leave the Chamber, or come and join us?

Mr. Moynihan: We in no way rule out the possibility, at some future date, of including Mutford Lock and Lake Lothing, not only in the Broads area, but within the navigation area of the Broads Authority. We believe that this could best be pursued in discussion with Associated British Ports, the owner, by the new authority when it is established.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): This is not a major amendment, but it covers the issue of designation and leaves out

"any variation made in accordance with the provisions of Part II of that Schedule"

Clause 2 is important. It goes to the heart of the legislation in relation to the designated area. During the proceedings in another place Lord Belstead undertook to ensure that a code of guidance would be issued regarding commitments to long-term conservation. As a result of that undertaking, many amendments that would otherwise have been tabled by the Opposition were not tabled. We still have not received any publication or statement of when such a code of guidance will be produced. The then responsible Minister has moved to another portfolio—a significant one. We are concerned that we will not be able to consider the amendments that we thought we might debate. Will the Minister tell us when we can expect the code of guidance on long-term conservation? Is it forthcoming? What will it entail? Will we have adequate time to debate it?

Mr. Moynihan: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) will be aware, we are not in a position to discuss whether it was right for certain amendments to be tabled by the Opposition, although I respect the strength of feeling of those Opposition Members who have urged further amendments. I undertake to write to the hon. Gentleman about his specific request. The commitment was given in another place, and we intend to uphold it.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 11

LICENCES REQUIRED FOR CONSTRUCTION OF WORKS

Lords Amendment: No. 2, in page 10, line 20, leave out "maintain".

Mr. Moynihan: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment makes a minor refinement to the original wording of clause 11. It exempts straightforward maintenance from the works licensing requirements. On reflection, we decided that it would be undesirable to require licensing of maintenance works, especially as failure to maintain waterside structures could affect safety of navigation.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 3, in page 11, line 14, after "any" insert "reasonable".

Mr. Moynihan: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

This amendment also makes a minor refinement to the works licensing procedure prescribed by clause 11. It is a technical amendment.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 13

NAVIGATION CHARGES

Lords amendment: No. 4, in page 12, line 26, leave out "conservation" and insert

"conserving the natural beauty of any area".

Mr. Moynihan: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this we may take Lords amendments Nos. 5 and 17.

Mr. Moynihan: Amendments Nos. 4 and 5 correct imperfections in the original wording of clauses 13 and 17. The intention has always been to exclude from the authority's navigational revenue account expenditure incurred for purposes of nature conservation, but carried out in exercise of the largely navigation powers conferred on the authority by part II. The original imprecise reference to conservation has been replaced by the phrase "conserving the natural beauty of any area",

thereby attracting the extended interpretation that clause 25(2) applies to the phrase wherever it is used in the Bill.

Amendment No. 17 makes a similar change to the wording of paragraph 3 of schedule 5, where the less precise phrase "nature conservation" was originally used.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Minister seemed to suggest that the amendment represents an improvement. He will need no instruction on definitions, but the word "conservation" is much more wide-ranging that the words "natural beauty". Some years ago I took through the House a Bill to protect the natterjack toad and the smooth snake. Few hon. Members would regard them as especially beautiful or as adding to the natural beauty of an area, but their protection was a necessary step in conservation. Conservation must mean the survival of the species. Whether or not they are attractive, they may have an important place in the natural order.

The replacement of "conservation" with words that seem to imply that something must be environmentally attractive is a dangerous step. I hope that the Minister will explain the advantage of the change, so as to make it acceptable to the House. The Bill is, by and large, not controversial, and it seems that their Lordships may have made a mistake, especially if they believe that, given recent decisions made in this Parliament, the House would retreat further from its proper commitment to the cause of conservation.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am sorry that this debate is delaying another, but that is not the fault of those of us who wish to speak. It is the fault of those who arrange our business, and I hope that the blame for any inconvenience caused to hon. Members will be laid at the door of those who decided the running order, and not aimed at hon. Members who wish to debate the amendments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) put his finger on an important principle that has run through the lengthy discussions inside and outside the House on this important conservation measure. I am sorry that the Minister had to move the amendment, because I understand that it was moved originally by the Government in the filled-up Bill stage in the Committee of another place and was not debated.

The Minister introduced the amendment as though it was a fair cop, saying that navigation charges should not go towards conservation. He is nodding his head. But not only navigation charges are involved here. Clause 14 deals with the authority's power to make levies on participating authorities. The amendment says that any expense incurred by the authority on conservation—as the Bill is worded now—must relate to preserving natural beauty. Those moneys will come from levies raised under clause 14, or any other funds which come from elsewhere. Perhaps the Minister will confirm that that is so. The amendment is much more important than it appears to be at first sight. I am sorry that it was not discussed in the Lords other than in Committee.

This is a controversial issue because the amendment will constrict the discretion of the authority in expenditure on "conservation". It will not be conservation; it will be "conserving the natural beauty of any area".
There is a big difference. I know that the Minister will say that clause 25(2) states:

"References in this Act to conserving the natural beauty of an area include references to conserving its flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features."

However, the Minister and his hon. Friends have withstood any means of ensuring that the Bill is truly a conservation measure. I can prove that to the House in respect of what happened in the other place.

All the conservation interests clubbed together to suggest an amendment to this important Bill, to be discussed in another place. The amendment's importance can be judged by the fact that those bodies were the Council for National Parks, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the Norfolk Naturalists Trust, the Ramblers Association, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, and the Suffolk Trust for Nature Conservation. They said: let there be at the end of clause 2(1), which sets out the limited functions of the Broads Authority, the following amendment:

"in such a way as to ensure their long term conservation"—

that is, the conservation of the Broads. Most people think that that is what the Bill is all about and that the main object of the Broads Authority, to be set up under the Bill, is that very purpose.

The conservation bodies went to the other place and said, "Please write that in. The provision does not supersede the three purposes mentioned in subsection (1), but those three purposes should be handled in such a way as to ensure the long-term conservation of the Broads." But the Government said no. The Select Committee summarised their case thus:

"The Government argued that the proposed amendment was ambiguous. It appeared to give primacy to the needs of conservation, and would therefore fundamentally distort the careful balance, achieved by the Bill, of the three duties of the Authority. By giving greater priority to one particular interest, it would jeopardise the general agreement on the Bill"—

hon. Members should notice these words—

"reached after lengthy negotiations. On the other hand, if the amendment was held not to give primacy to one interest, it would have no substantive effect. In any case, the special character of the Broads would be well protected by the actions of the new Authority in pursuing their three joint aims—there was no possibility of conservation being sacrificed to one of the other interests. Ministers had declared that the Bill did meet their objectives for the Broads."

The Bill may meet the Ministers' objectives, but they are not the objectives that many other people have in mind. I suggest to the House and to all those who may be listening to or may read our debate that the fact that the Government refused that modest and constructive amendment in another place puts a question mark over the effectiveness of the Bill and the Act that it will become.

I shall not weary the House with many other detailed examples of the concern that is felt, but I shall refer to just two. In the third sitting of the Standing Committee, I moved two amendments. One was about water quality and flow. The Minister said that the Anglian water authority was not to be constrained by directions from him in respect of water quality and flow. We all know that the water quality and the water level are keys to the proper conservation of the ecology of the Broads.

On the same day, I moved an amendment to ensure that there would be proper control of the water level. The Minister said that we could not have that because it would rehybridise the Bill. So the fear of many people is that the Bill is an inadequate instrument for carrying out what most people want the Broads Authority to do. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth said, one does not

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

conserve only natural beauty, because if that is the criterion, the microscope and the test tube are not as important as they might otherwise be.

We fear that, if there is argument about the purposes of the Bill, and the powers that it gives to the new authority, the proper purposes of conservation will not be given the consideration that they deserve. It is a pity to end this important Bill's progress on a note of controversy. It is better, however, for there to be controversy here, and for the new authority to work properly and effectively, than for the reverse to happen.

I fear that the Act will not be a proper and sufficient trust deed for the trustees of such an important area, which is perhaps under commercial pressures like no other area of ecological interest. It will be a defective basis on which to carry out conservation. We hope; however, that the ladies and gentleman who are appointed trustees, will, through the good will that is necessary to run the legislation, make up for any defects in it.

10.30 pm

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): I respect the observations that the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) has made in Standing Committee, and on the amendment tonight. I must, however, take issue with his description of the Bill as an adequate instrument. I think that it represents a realistic consensus from within the county of Norfolk.

One of the problems in dealing with the environment of the Broads over recent years has been the difficulty of reconciling the vast range of conflicting interests. It is not simply a case, for instance, of conservation versus navigation. Although I came to the House determined to oppose the establishment of yet more quangos — to which status the Broads Authority is in every danger of descending — I believe that the Government have the right solution to a problem that we have tended to regard as local but which, as the House has rightly recognised, has national significance.

Those of us who represent the people of Norfolk — and who look to the Bill — have a responsibility to acknowledge that there is a wider national dimension to the issue. The Government have recognised it; the Lords amendment recognises it; and I believe that to go any further would be wrong. I hope that the House will accept the Government's stance, recognising in doing so that it would be wrong to give precedence to any one of the many conflicting interests in Norfolk.

I welcome the amendment, and hope that the House will accept it.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): I shall not follow the course taken by my neighbour, the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss), which I thought more appropriate to a Second Reading debate. This is a rather narrow amendment. Let me make some specific points about it.

I understood the Minister to say that the amendment relates to navigation charges, replacing the words in the Bill—

"Expenditure . . . in connection with conservation, shall not be taken into account"—

with the words:

"Expenditure . . . in connection with conserving the natural beauty of any area, shall not be taken into account".

Does that mean that navigation charges will not cover the damage caused by navigation traffic? Damage to banks may not affect the natural beauty of the area, but may greatly affect the flora and fauna of bankside areas. Is not the intention of the amendment to limit expenditure chargeable to navigation interests?

The place of navigation in the objectives of the new authority has been subject to discussion throughout the many stages of the Bill's progress. The Government have continually refused to rank conservation above navigation. That attitude is likely to be borne out by the amendment. As Lord Melchett said on 1 February:

"this Bill was introduced because of widespread and long-standing concern about the deterioration in the conservation and amenity interests of the Norfolk Broads. It was not introduced because of concern about navigation or concern for some other interest such as agriculture in that area. It was introduced because of concern at the appalling loss of wildlife and loss of the natural beauty of the area." — [*Official Report, House of Lords*, 1 February 1988; Vol. 92, c. 903.]

Whenever the matter was raised in the other place — I read the debates this afternoon — the Government had recourse to the argument about the risk of rehybridising the Bill. Changes that would have reduced the primacy of navigation were turned down because, the Government argued, the Bill might be rehybridised because not all interests had been consulted.

If the amendment is not the subject of consultation, presumably it also may rehybridise the Bill. It singles out navigation interests as exempt from a general charge of conservation when local authorities face a share of expenditure on general conservation — not conservation of natural beauty which, in the context of the amendment, seems to relate just to landscape. It does not relate to freedom from pollution or the conservation of habitat and flora and fauna.

I shall not make any general observations about the Bill. We in Norfolk have waited 40 years for it, so we must welcome it, but it is very far from what conservation interests in the county want. It tries to strike a wholly impractical balance between navigation, conservation and commercial and recreational interests. I hope that a future Government will redress that balance.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Most of what I wanted to say has already been said, so I shall be brief. I want, however, to draw the House's attention to Lords amendment No. 17. Paragraph 13 of schedule 5 reads:

"The Authority may, for the purpose of nature conservation—

(a) close to navigation any area at the edge of any waterway within the navigation area; or

(b) restrict navigation in any such area to specified classes of vessel."

The phrase "nature conservation" is to be removed and replaced by "natural beauty". As it stands, the Bill could protect a rare species of bird that is nesting next to a waterway because it provides a power to close that waterway. The amendment refers more to the natural beauty of the area, however, and does not take enough account of the rare species that are to be found in the area.

I take the point about conflicting interests, but we are aiming for a balance. In the original debate, the Minister said that the balance would be maintained by putting in the word "conservation", but it is now being taken out.

Mr. Hardy: My hon. Friend reminds me of a case which the Minister might like to consider. The bittern is an

extremely rare bird which is found in the Broads area in small numbers. Unfortunately, it is rarely seen. It hides in the reeds. Because it is not likely to be seen, it could easily be argued that it is not part of the natural beauty of the broads environment and therefore the authority would not be able to close a waterway to navigation as schedule 5 suggests because that argument may be used.

Mr. Morley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that illustration. The Norfolk Broads is the only known breeding area of the European crane in the United Kingdom. It is extremely rare. On my reading of the amendment, the criterion of protecting such species is lost in the Bill. I believe that a balance between the three main interests should be struck, but I believe that it is being upset by the amendment, and I shall certainly vote against it.

Mr. Moynihan: With the leave of the House, I hope that I may assist Opposition Members.

The purpose of the amendments is to clarify exactly what is meant by conservation. We believed that the definition had been imprecisely drafted, and hon. Members will be aware, from studying the Bill closely, that by virtue of clauses 25(2), the words

"conserving the natural beauty of an area"

widen the effect of conservation rather than reduce those effects. They also cover

"flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features".

Therefore, the amendments widen and define more precisely what conservation means—namely,

"concerning the natural beauty of any area."

The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) will be aware from the background notes and from our discussions that "conservation" in clauses 13 and 17 has always been intended to mean nature conservation. The definition in clause 25(2) is entirely acceptable to the Nature Conservancy Council and other conservation bodies that asked for the extended definition as in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, the Countryside Act 1968 and The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

It would not be right and proper for me to comment on the other matters that have been raised with regard to primacy. These matters have been extensively debated and I do not believe that they arise again as a result of the amendments before the House.

Special reference has been made to bank maintenance. In general, bank maintenance is the responsibility of the Anglian water authority. Bank maintenance incurred by the Broads Authority for navigational reasons might be chargeable to the navigational revenue account. However, the special maintenance of banks — for example the regeneration of reed beds—would not, and should not, be financed through tolls on boat users. Clauses 13 to 17 seek to ensure that the navigational revenue account, and therefore tolls, have to cover expenditure incurred genuinely for navigational reasons. Such expenditure must be met by tolls, and that is the distinction that we have tried to make. I hope that I have assisted in clarifying that point.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 5 agreed to.

Clause 25

INTERPRETATION

Lords amendment: No. 6, in page 19, line 13, at end insert—

"'inland waters' has the same meaning as in the Water Resources Act 1963;"

Mr. Moynihan: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 14, 15, 16, and 16A.

Mr. Moynihan: These amendments make refinements to the original wording of paragraphs 34 and 35 of schedule 3, which was not entirely satisfactory in two respects. First, both paragraphs as originally worded talked in terms of the quality of water in any part of the Broads. That wording was too wide, since it would have included tap water and such like, with which the Broads Authority should not be concerned. Amendment No. 6, with amendments Nos. 14 and 16, substitute a more precise concept, making use of the term "inland waters", which is defined in the Water Resources Act 1963 and includes all, and only, those waters with whose quality the Broads Authority will properly be concerned — rivers, broads, dykes, ponds and such like.

Secondly, neither paragraph, as originally worded, took proper account of the interests of the East Anglian Water Company. Furthermore, although paragraph 34 placed an obligation on the Anglian water authority to consult the broads authority before implementing proposals that could affect the quality of water in the Broads, paragraph 35 failed to place a corresponding obligation on the Broads Authority to consult the water authority or water company before exercising its powers in regard to water quality. Amendments Nos. 15 and 16A put those defects right.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 26

COMMENCEMENT

Lords Amendment: No. 7, in page 20, line 12, after "Section 1" insert

"and sections 23 to 27".

Mr. Moynihan: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 8.

Mr. Moynihan: Amendments Nos. 7 and 8 are purely technical. They will ensure that the provisions of part IV, which consists mainly of the "nuts and bolts" needed for implementing the legislation fully, will be in force at the right time.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 8 agreed to.

Schedule 1

THE BROADS AUTHORITY

Lords amendment: No. 9, in page 24, line 16, at end insert—

"*Authority chief officer*

The Authority shall not—

[Mr. Moynihan]

(*a*) a person to the office (by whatever name it is known) of chief officer of the Authority; or

(*b*) determine, or vary, any of the terms and conditions on which he is employed by the Authority;

without first consulting the Countryside Commission."

10.45 pm

Mr. Moynihan: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Amendment 9 was tabled by the Government in response to the urging of the Countryside Commission. Each national park authority is required to appoint a national park officer and to consult the Commission before making that appointment or giving that officer any additional duties. The Commisson felt very strongly that in this respect, as in so many others, there was considerable merit in the Broads Authority following this precedent.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 10 agreed to.

Schedule 3

FUNCTIONS OF AUTHORITY

Lords amendment: No. 11 in page 26, line 6, leave out "subsection" and insert "subsections".

Mr. Moynihan: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 13.

Mr. Moynihan: These two amendments rectify minor imperfections in the way in which the Broads Authority had been written into other legislation, as the Bill's provisions were orginally drafted. In both cases the singular was wrongly used where the plural was needed.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 12, in page 29, line 8, after "II" insert

"and section 45(2) and (3)".

Mr. Moynihan: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

This is a technical amendment that rectifies a small oversight. In applying to the new authority the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, we originally overlooked the need to confer on it a power contained in part III of the Act, which will enable the authority to incur expenditure on archaeological investigations.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 13, 14, 15, 16, 16A and 17 agreed to.

Schedule 6

APPLICATION TO AUTHORITY OF CERTAIN ENACTMENTS APPLYING TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES ETC.

Lords amendment: No. 18, in page 47, line 15, leave out from "Authority" to end of line 17 and insert "and any member of its Navigation Committee"

Mr. Moynihan: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 19 and 20.

Mr. Moynihan: These three amendments put right minor defects in schedule 6, as originally drafted, in the way in which the Broads Authority was made a local authority for the purpose of existing legislation.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 19 and 20 agreed to.

Schedule 7

TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS

Lords amendment: No. 21, in page 49, line 35, leave out sub-paragraph (2) and insert—

"(2) When the Secretary of State is satisfied that all of those members have been duly appointed, he shall, if he has not already exercised his powers under sub-paragraph (2A) below, do so.

(2A) If the Secretary of State is satisfied that at least 27 of those members have been duly appointed, he may by order specify a date for the purposes of this paragraph.

(2B) The Authority shall be deemed to have been duly constituted as from the specified date, notwithstanding the absence of some of its members."

Mr. Moynihan: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Amendment No. 21 is one of two amendments that are designed to facilitate the earliest possible establishment of the authority, by minimising the risk of delay in making appointments — particularly in regard to those about which my right hon. Friend will be required to consult interested bodies.

Amendment No. 21 will enable my right hon. Friend to make a commencement order, prescribing the date on which the new authority is to be established, as soon as 27 members — just over three quarters of the full membership—have been appointed, instead of all 33 of the members to be appointed by the local authorities and other appointing authorities—including my right hon. Friend himself. This seemed to us a wise precautionary measure, to guard against the possibility of delay in making even one single appointment — for whatever reason—preventing the establishment of the authority.

Mr. Allan Roberts: We are coming to the end of our consideration of the amendments. We welcome amendment No. 21 because we want the Norfolk Broads Authority to be established as quickly and effectively as possible. We want it to get on with the job that it has been given by Parliament. However, as Opposition Members have said throughout the proceeding on the Bill we shall watch carefully the body's work to try to assess whether it is as effective as the Minister claims it will be or whether our fears about the balance between navigation and conservation interests not having been properly established are justified. We fear that the commercial interests of those concerned with navigation have been given too much priority.

As I said on Third Reading, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. We welcome the establishment of the authority as quickly as possible, but we are not convinced that it has all the powers that it needs and that the legislation has been drafted so as to make the body as effective as it should be. We shall examine developments carefully and return to the subject, bringing forward our own proposals to strengthen the legislation and the authority's powers if we discover that our fears are well founded.

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 22, in page 5, line 15, leave out from beginning to end of line 19 and insert—

"*Consultation*

6.—(1) Consultations carried out by the Secretary of State before the coming into force of subsections (5) and (6) of section 1 of this Act shall be treated as satisfying the requirements in those subsections if they would have done so had those subsections been in force at the time in question.

(2) Consultations carried out by the Authority before the coming into force of subsection (3) of section 13 of this Act shall be treated as satisfying the requirements of that subsection if they would have done so had that subsection been in force at the time in question."

Mr. Moynihan: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Like amendment No. 21, which we have just agreed, amendment No. 22 is designed to facilitate the earliest possible establishment of the authority. In that context I should like to confirm that we now intend that the operative date should be 1 April 1989.

Question put and agreed to.

Education (Scotland)

10.50 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Education (Publication and Consultation Etc.) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 107), dated 26th January 1988, a copy of which was laid before this House on 27th January, be annulled.

I hope that the House will agree that there is an important function to be served in discussing the regulations. The negative order procedure requires a prayer against orders to be tabled. That was the only way in which we could apply pressure on the Government, so that they would concede a debate on the Floor of the House. I fully recognise that under the statutory instrument procedure it would have been possible to table a "take note" prayer, seeking to persuade the Government to debate the matter in a Committee at some time. However, I do not believe that the Government would have responded seriously enough to such an attempt to deal with the position in which we found ourselves. As soon as I found out that the regulations had been tabled on 27 January and that they were to take effect on the same day, I immediately took steps to table a prayer to secure this debate.

The regulations have significance in a strictly parliamentary context. If there was any doubt about that previously, I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree that the recent report of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments confirmed that these regulations — the Education (Publication and Consultation Etc) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations— are a significant document.

The Committee took the view that there were serious flaws in the regulations as laid. It concluded that there was a failure to comply with the Statutory Instruments Act 1946. That Act makes it clear, among other things, that statutory instruments should lie on the table for a minimum of 21 days prior to the implementation date. Of course, the 1946 Act gives specific exemptions for when the Government feel that they have to implement statutory instruments immediately. If that is necessary, the stipulated provisions are laid out in the Act. The Speaker should be advised, as should the equivalent authorities in the other place. The Government should make a statement saying why the legislation needs to take effect on the same day as the instruments are laid.

The Statutory Instruments Committee took the view that there had been a failure to comply with that part of the procedure. The Government said that there was a need for haste—we could argue about that—in letting the Strathclyde regional authority know what the Government's view was. They never at any stage argued a case for enforcement to take place immediately. In that respect, the conclusion of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments was right.

The Committee also took the view that the drafting of the statutory instrument was substantially defective. The figure of 80 per cent. in regulation 2 is the formula for defining capacity and is left to be decided by persons unknown and undetermined. That leaves a substantial area of doubt within the regulations and the Joint Committee asked the Government to clarify their view on that matter. The Government's view was that the

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

calculation would require to be made by the local authority, having regard to the three criteria set down in the regulations. The Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments also took the view that that was an unsatisfactory way to proceed, which left a wide margin for error.

The question of the retrospective provisions in new paragraph (c)(ii) left areas for substantial doubt. There are real problems, therefore, in terms of the parliamentary precedent that is to be set by those regulations. For that reason, if for no other, there was a need for a debate tonight.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) mentioned parliamentary precedents. Surely he is aware that the existing regulations, where the Secretary of State is involved in the closure of a primary school of more than five miles' travelling distance or a secondary school of 10 miles' travelling distance, he does not find it necessary to specify who should determine whether the route is five or 10 miles. Surely the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that there is a precedent.

Mr. Kirkwood: There is surely a difference between geographical distance, which can be measured and about which there can be little argument, and these procedures and criteria, which are subjective. The analogy is not as exact as the Minister suggests.

In the context of the comments made by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, the Government have a duty to tell the House exactly what they are doing and why, and to give us an explanation of the procedure adopted.

The politics of the situation is inextricably linked with the Strathclyde schools organisation. Alliance Members recognise that, prior to 1981, the closure of any secondary school required the sanction of the Secretary of State. At that stage, the Labour party claimed that that was an abdication of responsibility by the Secretary of State. For the Conservatives, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) said that it was an appropriate devolution of power. But 1981, it now appears, was a long time ago.

In 1987, there was a further development of that policy, which was clearly in the direction of further devolution to local authorities. The regulations were further amended to increase local power. They gave local authorities the ability to put out options for consultations and enforce any of those options without further reference to the Secretary of State. The aim was also to increase the local authorities' power in respect of the closure of some nursery schools.

Here we have in 1988 —

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Come on, put the boot in.

Mr. Kirkwood: Putting the boot in is not my style. It may be something to do with why I am a Liberal.

In 1988 we suddenly find the whole process being slammed into reverse. The House has a right to know whether the Government will pursue this policy further or whether it is a one-off reaction and a matter of reacting expediently to political events.

I was interested to note the claim made by the Secretary of State in announcing the new regulations that this intervention was necessary because the schools were so highly regarded by the parents that they happened to be full to capacity. Eighty per cent. capacity is an arbitrary figure. Such capacity can be affected by a series of factors, not just parental choice. Small schools can be 95 per cent. full, but, because they are small, they have fewer pupils and parents. Larger schools can fall below the 80 per cent. capacity rule. I should be interested to hear how the Minister arrived at that figure.

It is surely also important to consider other factors, such as whether those on school rolls are attracted from within the catchment area of a particular school. That factor has been left out of the equation by these new regulations. It can be argued that the regulations are defective and that they will not even serve to bring about the Government's stated intention.

Judging by the educational precedent in England and Wales, there may well be a case for a rational and well-thought-out process of appeal. The proposed system is certainly not rational. It is arbitrary, inconsistent and legally dubious, and it subverts the legitimate rights of local authorities.

The House will, however, want carefully to consider the short-term practical effects. Although the regulations will apply throughout Scotland, there is a special concern, and hon. Members from Strathclyde constituencies will obviously want to take part in the debate. Opposition to the regulations is considered by some to imply unqualified support for the proposals advocated by Strathclyde regional authority, but that authority has carried out the procedures of consultation hopelessly inadequately. We are opposed to its lack of sensitivity, consultation and consideration of the parents' wishes and to the disregard shown for the quality of education. The authority has conducted itself in so blatant way that the Government's heavy-handed intervention may even be justified.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Can the hon. Gentleman tell us how long the consultation period by Strathclyde lasted? How long did it take over the consultation?

Mr. Kirkwood: That depends on one's point of view. A lot of people in Paisley take the view that the Paisley proposals were cooked up by the Strathclyde education authority a long time ago and that the consultation process that it went through was something of a sham. But as far as I can make out, the consultation process started officially last summer, and has been continuing ever since.

The relative merits of the area review groups and the way in which the regional review group operated in conjunction with the area groups left a great deal to be desired. The situation that we are left with is, to any rational, objective observer, one of Hobson's choice — between the devil of the Secretary of State and the deep blue sea of the local education authority, which can be accused of not properly conducting the consultation process necessary to give expression to the real wishes of the local parents, which have been largely ignored.

The Minister has a difficult task in trying to explain how it is that he got himself into this situation and brought regulations forward in this way. We are anxious to hear just how the Government explain both their method of

procedure and the dubious technical legality of the regulations. It is with great interest that I wait to hear what the Minister has to say.

11.7 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): The best description of the interesting speech of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) is that it was a fraction muted. A quieter call to the barricades the House has not heard for some time.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is legitimate to table a prayer against regulations for the purpose of having them debated in the House. These regulations may affect many schools. They may affect notably two which have been the subject of press comment — Paisley grammer school and Notre Dame. I had the probably unworthy thought that, in the past week or two, Liberals from the west end of Glasgow and the east end of Paisley, if such still exist, had perhaps been in touch with the hon. Member to express their views.

I have no wish to be partisan. I wish to be helpful and constructive. Perhaps, first of all, I can be helpful to the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan), who raised this issue first on 27 January, when he said,

"The documents contain a letter which had been sent to the headmaster of a grammer school in my constituency". —[*Official Report*, 27 January 1988; Vol. 126, c. 341.]

In the spirit of comradely help, I will send the hon. Member a map of Paisley, South, because Paisley grammar school does not come into his constituency, and has never done so; it is very clearly in the Paisley, North constituency.

The regulations, of course, raise a general issue, but the issue that concerns my constituents has been the treatment of a substantial number of parents whose sons and daughters attend Paisley grammar school.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): How many?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Member asks how many. I have had just under 200 letters from constituents. I do not know the precise figure, but, as a reasonable indication, I have had just under 200 letters from constituents in Barrhead and Neilston.

The hon. Member for Paisley, North (Mr. Adams) will have the opportunity to express his views later in the debate. It is with some interest that one reads in his local press that he says of himself that silence must not be taken as a sign of inactivity. The hon. Gentleman, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), the hon. Member for Paisley, South and others had a meeting, on 16 January with the convenor of Strathclyde region. When the hon. Member for Paisley, North left the meeting, he said, "I defended my constituents' interests," but of the meeting he said,

"I have to say at this point that I will not report what else was said as the meeting was largely confidential."

He has an opportunity tonight to express his views.

As hon. Members will know, I have been the subject of letters from the hon. Members for Paisley, South and for Paisley, North accusing me of interfering in an outrageous manner in the affairs of Paisley. Only one of those hon Members bothered to sign his letter. Above the hon. Member for Paisley, North, it said "PP" and then there was a blank; what that signifies I leave to the imagination of the House.

The hon. Member for Paisley, South has made the motivation for the proposed closure of Paisley grammar school brutally clear to the House. Referring to the parents of Paisley grammar, he said that the Secretary of State

"knows perfectly well why they are fighting against moving to a new school in Merksworth. It is because they would be sharing with kids from working-class housing estates." [*Official Report*, 28 January 1988; Vol. 126, c. 502.]

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Paisley, North agrees with those sentiments, but it is outrageous for hon. Members so to describe the motivations of their constituents.

Speaking for my constituents, I can tell the House that that absurd charge is not true. I shall give a flavour to the views of my constituents. One says:

"I cannot believe that the Government would condone this apparently rigged closure of a full and very successful school serving all areas of the community including a large proportion of families either unemployed or single parent who will suffer greatly if this 'merger' goes ahead.

One fact which is apparent in all this deviousness . . . is that the authorities seem totally against placing requests."

Another letter says:

"There is a political will to close Paisley grammar school".

Another letter says:

"My son attends this school through parental choice, a choice the Regional Council clearly intend precluding through the review process."

Strathclyde region is determined to continue its social restructuring in spite of complete opposition from parents, teachers and pupils.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I am listening with great interest to what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Will he say what criteria should operate for the retention or closure of a school?

Mr. Stewart: When a clearly popular school is targeted for closure against the wishes of parents, it is right that the Secretary of State should review it, in precisely the same way as he reviews closure proposals for rural schools or, in certain circumstances, denominational schools.

The hon. Member for Garscadden will have an opportunity tonight to tell us of the Labour party's attitude to the regulations. He may adopt the views of the hon. Member for Paisley, South — the chief Opposition spokesperson for Paisley on this issue — who, in his article in the *Glasgow Herald*, said of these fairly minor regulations:

"I know of no such dangerously arbitrary action by any Government since the introduction of the emergency powers at the beginning of the last war."

The mind boggles.

That view is not universal among Labour Members. At Scottish Question Time last week, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin), representing his constituents, said:

"Why is the Minister not prepared to intervene and help out those schools?" —[*Official Report*, 24 February 1988; Vol. 128, c. 291.]

The hon. Gentleman wants more intervention; he wants my hon. Friend the Minister to go even further.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): The hon. Gentleman hits the nail on the head. Strathclyde has made an absolute mess of the consultation procedure. I am asking the Minister, why make flesh of one and fowl of the other? The children in Springburn are entitled to the same attention as the children in Paisley, even if Paisley does not want to come up to Springburn.

Mr. Stewart: The House will recognise the voice of an hon. Member genuinely representing the views of his constituents.

Mr. Graham: The hon. Gentleman mentioned earlier that the Secretary of State should look at schools which are popular with the parents. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that Saint Conval's primary school and Moss Edge primary school in my constituency, which are up for closure, are both excellent schools. The parents would love them to remain open. Strathclyde has been forced to close them because of the lack of funding from the Government. Will the Secretary of State intervene and support the parents by keeping those two schools open?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The debate should be confined to the particulars of the regulations before the House.

Mr. Stewart: The schools mentioned by the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) would not fall under the regulations. Of course, Strathclyde is right to pursue a general policy of schools rationalisation. It is a question not of resources, but of school numbers. The proposition before the House is simply that, in certain circumstances, the Secretary of State should review proposals where schools are, by any standards, very popular with parents, and are full or nearly full.

A number of hon. Members wish to speak. Before closing, I must tell my hon. Friend the Minister that there is concern about the future. I shall read just a couple of sentences from a letter from a constituent:

"It is not possible to predict how the region will react when parents are forced to appeal to the Secretary of State under the regulations. Parents have doubt about support and funding from the educational department and the security of staff. For these reasons I consider that some form of legislation is necessary to provide parents with the right to opt out of regional council control."

I have received more than 2,500 letters on this issue. It is an important general issue and it is important for the principles of parental involvement and parental choice which underlie so much of the Government's educational legislation.

The proposition before the House is sensible and reasonable. I do not expect for a moment that the Labour party will not oppose it, despite the honest reservations about what has happened expressed by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin). I hope that the House will reject the prayer and that we shall have the support of the Liberal party.

11.17 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): The regulations are important, as they alter the boundaries of responsibility between local and central Government in regard to the closure of schools. Any school threatened by closure or by rezoning must be referred if its current roll is more than 80 per cent. of its capacity.

The debate is not about a particular school; it is a debate of general application, which will affect every part of Scotland and an unknown number of schools as councils in every part of the land face up to the problems of falling school rolls.

No one knows when these powers will be called into play in future. We are painfully aware why they are before the House now. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) asked, a little naively, why the Government had decided upon 80 per cent. The reason is, simply, that 80 per cent. was the neat figure that ensured that one particular school fell on the right side of the line. That is the basis on which laws are now being made.

The regulations do not deal specifically with Paisley grammar school, but the educational policies of Paisley are dominating the debate. I must say to the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) that it is an extraordinary story of backstairs influence and intrigue, culminating in the Prime Minister's thunderbolt from on high. When Paisley grammar school was threatened with closure, the parents banded together — as they were entitled to do, and as parents from other schools had done — to try to influence the course of the debate. No one would complain about that.

What was unusual, so far as we can piece the story together, was that Paisley grammar had some very unusual and powerful allies. In particular, Mr. Neil, the editor of *The Sunday Times* — whose precocious talents had been noticed at an early stage by Mr. Rupert Murdoch, who had therefore made him a great man — decided, with the aid of one of our ex-colleagues, Mr. Gerald Malone, to start a public campaign in *The Sunday Times* on behalf of Paisley grammar. Subsequently, the matter was drawn to the attention of the Prime Minister, who decided to intervene. On that basis, the law was to be changed.

According to *The Sunday Times* — I do not know whether it is accurate, although Mr. Neil is near to the centre of events — a dramatic tale then unfolded. A note was fired off to the Secretary of State, and a reluctant Minister was carpeted and sharply reminded of his duty. The right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) has said that that is not so; he has asked us to reject the credibility of Mr. Neil. That is a dispute that they may conduct between themselves, but the Secretary of State does himself a disservice by trying to pretend that these regulations were his idea and that he wanted to act in the way that he has acted.

It is not just *The Sunday Times* that has produced that version of the events. I shall quote a short BBC précis of what happened. There was a description on television of what happened. *[Interruption.]* The Minister laughs, but the précis says:

"Mrs. Thatcher confronted her Scottish Secretary with the background and told him that she wanted a swift and positive solution. He returned to the Scottish Office to bang civil servants' heads together"—

[Interruption.] Yes, it is comic, but all the evidence points to the fact that at least the general drift of this account is correct. That is why we find it alarming.

"From then on the school's future was never in doubt. To make maximum political capital, the Scottish Office, No. 10 and the party political advisers planned that the decision would be announced in a letter to the school's rector, signed by the Prime Minister."

I do not say that that account is accurate in every particular, but I believe that the general picture of the Secretary of State having been bounced in the way that I have described is right. It is a sad commentary on what is happening.

I object to what has happened, because I believe that a complicated, difficult and often bitter process was under way. I believe that many people felt ill used by the local authority's decisions. I suspect that in the circumstances it was inevitable that people would feel ill used, but at least the Government and the Opposition have one thing in

common: given the enormous and dramatic fall in school rolls, which is particularly accentuated in the Paisley area, schools had to close. However, I do not believe that the Government were entitled, on a completely arbitrary basis, to pluck one school out of the whole system and say that, whatever the consequences for the other schools in the area, that school was inviolate and would be preserved. But that is what happened.

I, too, have received many letters on this issue. Before the Prime Minister's intervention, I received many letters from parents whose children are at Paisley grammar school. I have also received many letters from parents whose children are at St. Aelred's, Merksworth, Stanley Green and a number of other Paisley schools. When the Prime Minister took that decision and signed the letter that went to the headmaster of Paisley grammar, I wonder whether she considered the implications for parents with children in those schools. That decision may have been right or it may have been wrong, and every hon. Member will make up his or her own mind, but what the Government have done will result in a bitter legacy. I see evidence of that bitter legacy almost every day in my mail bag, and I suspect that the hon. Member for Eastwood and other hon. Members have had the same experience.

The hon. Member for Eastwood says that it is deplorable to suggest that people are talking in terms of class and social divisions, but let me quote one parent who is actively involved with the Merksworth school. He wrote to me the other day:

"The main points of the arguments put up by Paisley Grammer School Parents are invalid when you consider what lies behind them. Essentially they do not want their children to mix with those from Shortroods or Ferguslie Park—two areas of deprivation. They also feel that their house values will decline without the magic ethos of Paisley Grammer School nearby. Both arguments are clearly absurd in the context of children's education . . . We ask for your support in righting this wrong. We are not fighting for house values, nor do we care about the class of our children's friends. We do care about the quality of choice for our children's education."

The hon. Member for Eastwood may say that those are deplorable views, but he cannot deny that they are heartfelt and increasingly widespread, and are encouraged by what the Government have done. That will be the legacy of the Government's handling of this business.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: From what the hon. Gentleman is saying about Paisley, it appears that he believes that the regulations would apply only to Paisley grammer and Merksworth in Paisley. Is he aware that Castlehead and John Neilson high schools in Paisley will also be affected, and if he is, why is he making such intemperate remarks?

Mr. Dewar: As I understand it, the only school in the Paisley area that will be covered by the regulations is Paisley grammer. I have spent the past few minutes pointing out that all schools will be affected by the knock-on effect of the regulations. Is the Minister saying that other schools in Paisley meet the 80 per cent. criterion?

Mr. Forsyth: I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman does not appreciate that. The regulations will affect schools that are subject to rezoning, whose occupancy will be in excess of 80 per cent. More than 20 schools in Strathclyde will be affected, and those in Paisley include Paisley grammar school, Merksworth, Castlehead and John Neilson. Before the hon. Gentleman criticises regulations, he should try to understand what they mean.

Mr. Dewar: The Minister has said something extremely surprising. Is he saying that Merksworth's roll is more than 80 per cent. of its capacity? Is the Minister saying that other schools in Paisley have more than 80 per cent. of their capacity? If they do not, how are they covered?

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman needs me to explain the regulations to him, I will. They are clear. They relate to the schools that will be subject to rezoning or closure, where the occupancy will exceed 80 per cent. He asked me about Merksworth, and he must know that, following the laying of the regulations, Strathclyde made three separate proposals involving Paisley grammar and Merksworth——

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): What does this have to do with rolls?

Mr. Forsyth: I am explaining it. One proposal involves the closure of Paisley grammar and its merger with Merksworth. The other involves the closure of Merksworth and its merger with Paisley grammar. Where there is rezoning of schools' catchment zones and their occupancy is more than 80 per cent., they will come within the scope of the regulations. In Strathclyde alone, more than 20 cases of closure or rezoning of catchment areas are likely to come before the Secretary of State as a result of the regulations.

Mr. Dewar: The Minister is confirming the fact that this is total chaos and confusion. The regulations refer to

"proposals to discontinue any school or any stage of school education in any school or to change the site of any school or to vary the delineated area of any school, where the number of pupils in attendance at any such school is greater than 80% of that school's pupil capacity."

They refer only to a school whose roll is 80 per cent. or more of present capacity. That does not include Merksworth or the John Neilson institute. The Minister is talking arrant nonsense and he should be ashamed of himself.

Of course, the Minister is right to say that not only Paisley grammar school will be affected. Other schools, some as yet unknown, will be affected, including Notre Dame, which is on the borders of my constituency. If it is to be saved on that basis—we do not know—what about the feelings of the parents of pupils who attend Our Lady and St. Francis, which falls just on the wrong side of the 80 per cent. criterion? What will be the impact on St. Thomas Aquinas, whose future was apparently secured by plans to amalgamate it with Notre Dame? I say that because there is bitterness and confusion in my area as well, although it is not so widely publicised. The situation has been made much more difficult.

If the criterion is the popularity of a school, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) has said, other criteria might be thought to be equally valuable. Community needs, social considerations, and the deprivation strategy of the education authority should all be taken into account and, I hope, are taken into account by Strathclyde region in reaching those decisions. But the Minister has merely taken one arbitrary criterion of an alleged popularity rating, which he endorses only when it is convenient, as the recent history of the Inner London education authority debate illustrates. If there was a universal validity in that criterion, we would certainly shut down the Scottish Conservative party.

I should like to ask the Minister one or two specific questions. Will he try to clear up the point that we have

[Mr. Dewar]

been debating about how many schools are affected? If he is saying that schools that do not meet the 80 per cent. criterion are covered by the regulations, the situation is infinitely more complex than any of us, including the education authority, guessed. Are there schools in Grampian, for example, which will be covered by the regulations?

The 10-year rule, in regulation 2(c) (ii) , is as follows:

"the maximum number of pupils in attendance at the school in any one year in the period of 10 years preceding the proposal".

Is that merely a factor that has to be taken into account when the local authority judges the capacity of a school, with the 80 per cent. count being based on current rolls only? There has been some confusion about that.

Will the Minister say a word or two about the time scale? Assuming that the Government go ahead, will there be a proper consultation process? At least on this occasion, will the Government observe the law as it is applied to education authorities when it comes to consultation? Will the Minister assure us that there will be consultation with other schools in the area that will be affected if the school that has been referred is to be preserved?

We know that Mr. Corbett, the present rector of Paisley, wrote in a report on the building in 1976:

"The rooms in the main building were handsome and fitting in 1898, but no longer meet the needs of the 1970s."

Those rooms certainly do not meet the needs of the 1980s, so prima facie there is an argument on whether, if Paisley grammar is to be preserved, it should be preserved in the same building. That will affect other schools in the area. Will we look at the other schools' record and give them a chance to have their say in the decisions that will affect them?

If we are to talk about success, the Minister should read the letter that appeared on 23 February in *The Scotsman*, which referred to Merksworth school. It stated:

"in 1987 Merksworth High School students gained more 'A' passes in Higher grade science subjects than any school in Paisley".

I make that point because Merksworth has been the target of some slighting remarks, particularly by Mr. John MacKay, an ex-Minister responsible for education, who referred to it as a school of

"lesser merit . . . whose academic record has been far fom excellent,"

as he attempted to justify what the Government have been doing.

As time is pressing, I shall not deal with the valid criticisms by the Statutory Instruments Committee. The House is well aware of the trenchant criticism that was rightly made of the drafting and the way in which the rules of the House have been observed by a Government in haste, cobbling together an unsatisfactory measure.

This is a shabby little power play, based on political opportunism. It has been almost universally condemned. There has not been a kind word about it in any serious leader column of any paper that I have come across. It is an affront to the normal courtesies of the House. It is an arbitrary use of power. There is in it a strong dash of populism. Most importantly, it is a dangerous educational precedent, which commands no respect. The Government were right in 1981 when they decided that the matter should be left to the education authority, which could weigh up all the complicated and sometimes conflicting factors. It is a tragedy that we have now rushed to a judgment that will be regretted and reflects no credit on those who are responsible for it.

11.34 pm

Mr. Allen Adams (Paisley, North): The regulations show a disgraceful contempt for democracy. If any council decides, at any time on any issue, to take a policy decision which the Government do not agree with, the Government will abolish the council, take away its money, restrict its powers or do all three.

Strathclyde regional council may or may not have been correct. However, it is an elected body, it has certain democratic rights and it took a decision. I do not necessarily agree with the decision completely, but the council had the right to take that decision. We are in great danger of obscuring the basic issue. A fundamental threat to democracy is involved. We cannot repeat that point often enough and many people stressed that point before the regulations reached the Floor of the House. This is a very serious matter, quite apart from the educational issues that are involved.

The educational issues are complex and detailed and they are worthy of more than the pseudo-intellectual, petty, pedantic lower middle-class mentality approach shown by the Members for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) and by the Minister. They know nothing of the detailed problems in Paisley. I suggest that they stop visiting my constituency because they are frightening the horses. Only yesterday I had to hide a copy of the *Paisley Daily Express* because it contained a picture of the hon. Member for Eastwood and we were frightened that the children would see it when they came home from school.

This is a complex issue and no one is completely right or completely wrong. Paisley grammar school is located in the east end of the town and the local residents in the east end of Paisley have a right to a local community school. No one would argue about that. I believe that the grammar school should remain for the local people. The Government cannot get round the simple fact that 50 per cent. of the pupils attending Paisley grammar do not live in the east end of Paisley. Indeed, a substantial number of them do not live in Paisley at all, but come from the area represented by the hon. Member for Eastwood. People talk blithely about a community school. It must be a far-flung community, as it stretches almost 25 miles. Indeed, two pupils come from Kirkintilloch.

The solution is simple and I want to put it on the record. Castlehead high school in the centre of Paisley should have been designated as the town's Catholic school, and it should have been renamed St. Mirren's—*[Interruption.]* This is very important. The name "St. Mirren's" is synonymous with Paisley and we want to retain that name in Paisley. There is no doubt that St. Ailwood's in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) should be retained because the alternative would mean that children would have to travel two or three miles to the other Catholic school.

The two Catholic schools should be retained in Paisley. Castlehead should be renamed St. Mirren's and should be retained and we should also keep St. Ailwood's. The other obvious solution to the non-denominational problem is to keep Paisley grammer as a community school. We should also keep the John Neilson school in the west end. Many people say that that is not viable because the school has

only 250 pupils. However, those people tend to forget that 150 adults attend the John Neilson. The school is in a deprived area. It can be extended and developed as an educational facility in such an area. Camphill school—another old traditional Paisley name—is in the south of the town and should also be retained.

My two daughters attend the Merksworth high school in the north of the town. I do not like to hear people denounce that school because I am proud of it and proud of what it has done for my children. Let me give an instance of the educational excellence of the school. My youngest daughter Kirsty is 16. She is in her fourth year at the school. Her English class has 20 pupils and two teachers. If some people do not wish to avail themselves of such educational facilities, I do not intend to force them to do so, but I will do so. It is a good school, and it needs to be said that it is a good school.

Apart from that, however, the north end of Paisley is entitled to a centre of educational excellence. In this whole argument, one simple fact has been forgotten: the Government are not giving the council enough money to provide working-class children with a decent education. We want enough money to run the Neilson, the Merksworth, Paisley grammar and the Camphill, and to provide for the children in Fergusley Park and Shotroots the additional teachers and educational back-up that they need. They, more than anyone else, have never had that, and it is high time they did.

Let us not get away from two fundamental issues. One is the denial of democracy by the Government. I repeat this without apology: the minute that any body does anything that the Government do not like, it is abolished. And—this is the second issue—if it is not abolished, it is underfunded. The basic problem is that Strathclyde regional council has not been given enough money to provide the education that children in the west of Scotland deserve and need.

11.41 pm

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Paisley, North (Mr. Adams), because he is the hon. Member for whom everyone should have the greatest sympathy. He is the man who backs a decision to keep Paisley grammar open against the decision of Strathclyde regional council, and who must in some way justify the defence against the regulations—which, oddly enough, are prayed against, not by the hon. Gentleman or by any Member of the Labour Opposition, but by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), whose speech defied comprehension. It had neither principle nor purpose; nor did it take sides. I can only imagine that the reason why the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire found it necessary to pretend to be both on all sides, and on none—I must say that he was better at pretending to be on none than at pretending to be on all—is that by the end of the week he may belong to a different party, whose name he does not yet know.

It is important to remember that the hon. Gentleman is praying against regulations that would save Notre Dame—or, at least, could do so. The Liberal councillor in Strathclyde region is now claiming that he has already saved it. Here we have the Liberal spoke—I presume that they are called spokes—for education, praying against the very regulations that might do what the regional council claims it has already done. He is praying against himself—and prayer might be a suitable matter for him this week.

I was impressed when the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garcadden (Mr. Dewar) said that the Opposition care for the quality of choice for children's education. The purpose of the regulations is to give choice. It is no good the hon. Member for Paisley, North, who is in an impossible position, saying that he wants Paisley grammar school, but a different Paisley grammar school, which the children of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) cannot attend. That is apparently the hon. Member's definition of caring about choice. In other words, he would have it that only certain children should be forced to go to that school to change its nature. That is not parental choice.

The hon. Member for Garscadden said that the Opposition believe in parents' choice. The hon. Member for Paisley, North said that there should be no choice and that certain people should be forbidden from going to the school. What is the Opposition's rationale? I understand that they have been attempting to keep New Temple college open.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. and learned Gentleman is referring to New Temple college. That is an important matter, but I question its relevance to the debate, especially when there are projected closures in many of our constituencies — unlike the hon. and learned Gentleman's—and many of us are hoping to catch your eye.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that hon. Members will keep to the regulations.

Mr. Fairbairn: That is exactly what I am doing. The regulations centre on the fact that any school or education establishment which is proposed for closure but is 80 per cent. full should be referred to the Secretary of State. The Opposition are saying that that is wrong. They want to rephrase that principle when it comes to a college which is only 10 per cent. full.

Mrs. Ewing: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman believe that the 80 per cent. of capacity consideration is the only criterion on which closure or retention should be decided?

Mr. Fairbairn: No, indeed, I do not believe that 80 per cent. of capacity is the only reason why such a decision should be made. I believe that if there is 80 per cent. of capacity that demonstrates that the school is popular and, in this case, immensely successful, and that very good reasons should be given for closing it, but the Opposition tell us that somewhere which is less than 10 per cent. full should be kept open for doctrinaire reasons.

The Opposition may say that this is a doctrinaire proposal to keep Paisley grammar school open because it happens to have that word "grammar" in its title, although it is a comprehensive school. If that is so, one might equally argue that the reason why Strathclyde regional council decided to close a school was that it was also deceived by the word "grammar" and thought, "Let us get rid of that school."

It is not the Labour Opposition who are praying against this matter, but no doubt they will get on the little go-cart of the Liberals. At least the Liberals have had the courage

[Mr. Fairbairn]

to test the matter. It is not a real prayer, but a probing prayer, but no one on the Labour Benches has put his name to it.

We should be clear that parents now have the choice of sending their children to any school. They have chosen to send their children to a school of immense success, which is what we want in Scotland. No local authority should be able, for doctrinaire reasons, to close a school that is popular and successful, unless the Secretary of State is entitled, taking all matters into account, to ensure that that decision is equitable and right.

11.50 pm

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): Naturally the debate has been dominated by Paisley grammar school, because it is the subject of the regulations. My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mr. Adams) spoke with obvious detailed knowledge and great passion about Paisley. He made a case that the Minister must answer. However, given the Minister's intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) I do not believe that we will get an adequate answer or anything else from the Minister. We should not be debating the details of education in Paisley. We have heard the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn) pontificating about the issue, but he knows absolutely nothing about it.

It is absurd that such regulations were introduced. Before the Education (Scotland) Act 1981 was introduced, all school closures came to the Secretary of State for approval. At the time of the 1981 legislation, the Opposition believed that there was no need to change that provision — it had worked perfectly well. Why was it changed? At the time, the then Secretary of State said that it was being done to take the Scottish Office off the backs of local education authorities and to allow them to make their own decisions. However, even at that time the Government were urging local authorities to close schools, especially rural ones. They wanted schools to be closed, but they did not want to be associated with such unpopular decisions. For that reason, the 1981 legislation was introduced.

We believed that there was no reason for change, but we argued that if the legislation were changed, it had to be done on a non-discriminatory basis. For that reason we objected to the provisions dealing with denominational schools that gave them certain additional protections unavailable to non-denominational schools.

We also wanted to ensure that parents were properly consulted about any matters that affected their children's education. Under the old system, when the Secretary of State's approval was required for the closure of a school, such consultation took place. No Secretary of State — I did not, and I am certain the same was true of my predecessors — would agree to the closure of a school unless he was sure that there had been consultation with the parents before that closure came forward for approval.

Before 1981, parent consultation used to take place. However, in 1981, the Secretary of State's excuse was that regulations would be introduced to provide for such consultation. That argument does not bear serious examination. The regulations went into considerable detail, and did not just deal with school closures, but other proposals that could affect particular schools. That is the background against which we are considering the regulations.

If there is a criticism of Strathclyde region in all this — I do not intend to go into detail about Paisley grammar — it is that the authority has evaded the issue of school closures for far too long. It has long been known that Strathclyde had an excess of school places and that sooner or later action would have to be taken to close certain schools. That is common ground on both sides of the House. From 1981 onwards Ministers — including the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who was a junior Minister at the Scottish Office — have repeatedly urged Strathclyde and other authorities to close schools and reduce their capacity to correspond more closely to the number of pupils. Strathclyde failed to grasp the nettle early enough, and I do not particularly blame it, because every school closure causes local agitation and concern. Schools with no particular local reputation suddenly become schools of tremendous local reputation when there is a closure proposal. School closures are matters of acute local difficulty for any education authority, so one must not be too critical of Strathclyde.

On the process of consultation, about which Strathclyde has been severely criticised, it is ironic that Strathclyde has done more in the way of consultation than is provided for by the regulations. The irony is that all the consultation so far has been in addition to the statutory obligation to consult that is laid down in the regulations. It is only when one produces a specific proposal that one has to go through the specific process of consultation laid down in the regulations. Until now, all that has happened has been outside the statutory obligations of Strathclyde regional council. It has not been provided for by the regulations introduced by the Government apparently to look after parents' interests. Let us not have any cant, hypocrisy or humbug from the Government about the regulations, because they have not been effective in Strathclyde.

The regulations are about Paisley and about nothing else. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) asked how the 80 per cent. criterion was arrived at. It was arrived at simply to include, and save, Paisley grammar. Incidentally, when a proposal comes before him, the Secretary of State is supposed to behave, if not in a quasi-judicial manner at least objectively. But we know that the decision about Paisley grammar was already made when the Prime Minister wrote to the headmaster and wished the school well for the future. That was a complete abuse of central Government power. The regulations have been introduced cynically for populist reasons relating to Paisley grammar. They are arbitrary in their operation and essentially authoritarian — in line with the Government's authoritarian approach to education authorities and local authorities generally.

Quite apart from all that, the regulations are the worst drafted that I have had the misfortune to read. The Select Committee criticised them not just because of the failure to observe the proper procedure — which may be considered a technical matter, although I consider that it is a matter of considerable importance — but because of the inadequate drafting. If I understood the Minister aright — it was difficult to understand what he was trying to say when he intervened in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Garscadden — he was giving an interpretation of the regulations that I believe to be

fundamentally wrong. The regulations do not seem to bear the interpretation that the Minister attempted to put on them, although no doubt he will have an opportunity to clarify that matter later.

Whatever the interpretation of the regulations, the fact is that they work in an arbitrary way. There is no objective consideration involved in the 80 per cent. criterion that has been adopted for the purpose of the regulations. The hon. Member for Eastwood talked about schools being popular with the local population and local parents. There are schools with only 50 per cent. capacity that are as passionately involved with the local community and about which local parents feel just as passionately as any school that has an 80 per cent. capacity. Therefore, considerations of that sort do not bear serious examination.

This is an intervention in a sensitive local issue which, under the terms of the regulations as we have had them before and under the terms of the legislation introduced in 1981, should have been decided by Strathclyde regional council itself. It should not have been the subject of an intervention in this arbitrary and authoritarian way by the Government. That is why we shall vote against the regulations.

12.1 am

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I shall be brief, but, as Chairman of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, which reported the regulations to the House, I feel that I owe the House an explanation in addition to the printed report. It is worth pointing out that there is a majority of Conservative Members on the Committee. The House lays a duty on the Committee to report measures which, in effect, are an abuse of the procedures of the House. We do not consider the merits of the measures; I shall be brief because I will not go into the merits of these regulations.

The Committee was concerned that the 21-day rule, which applies to measures made under the negative procedure, was breached. No adequate explanation was provided by the Scottish Office. It was asked to provide memoranda and was given a full opportunity to provide information to the Committee. It claimed that it wished to make its attitude known to the Strathclyde regional authority. Of course, it could have written a letter. It did not have to produce regulations or bring them into force. In bringing the regulations into force, the Scottish Office was supposed to notify the Speaker and the Lord Chancellor of the reasons for doing so. It failed to do that and, therefore, was in breach of the Statutory Instruments Act 1946.

I know that the Statutory Instruments Committee is not often much regarded in the House. In fact, by and large it does its work without much attention being paid to it. The Committee was established after an outcry led by a Conservative member of the judiciary. Lord Justice Hewart described the powers that the House was giving to Ministers as the new despotism. There is an obligation on Ministers not to abuse the powers they are given. If they do, it invokes descriptions such as new despotism or elective dictatorship. It is on such occasions that criticisms are directed at the Government because they are abusing the procedures of the House, which are designed to safeguard the powers given to them.

The regulations have the force of law. They are not simply codes of conduct or notes for guidance. The Minister knows that they have the force of the law. That is why the Committee drew the House's attention to the fact that there is no exact formula for calculating capacity. It is not clear in the regulations who will make judgments on the capacity. The memorandum says that it will be the local authority. However, the Committee looks at the regulations. The people who are carrying out the law as the Government expect them to will be guided by the regulations. They are required to follow the law, yet the law does not say how the capacity is being defined. Therefore, the regulations are defective in drafting. When the defective drafting is coupled with the rush to get the measure through, it is not surprising that the Statutory Instruments Committee reported it to the House.

It does credit to all members on the Committee that they were aware of the shortcomings and agreed to the report. I can say only that, since a Liberal Member moved the prayer, it comes as something of a surprise to note that the place reserved on the Committee for the Member from the Social Democratic party has not been used since the general election, shortly after which the Committee was established.

It is a convention that the Chairman of the Joint Committee is an Opposition Member. In scrutinising the work of the Government, it is therefore a considerable surprise that a member of the SDP has not considered it sufficiently important to participate to a greater extent.

I have not dealt with the merits of the measure, but it is an important issue. I am grateful that Parliament has debated a statutory instrument and the report by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. It brings to light the way in which the Government are using procedures with scant regard for the democratic and accountable procedures of the House.

Mr. Foulkes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In a debate of such importance, which has been introduced by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) as the spokesman for the Liberal party and in which the principal spokesman for the Opposition in Scotland, the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. McMillan), a former Secretary of State for Scotland, and the Chairman of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), have participated, is it right that, when the Secretary of State, who is the Minister responsible, is present, the speech on behalf of the Government should be made by an Under-Secretary of State for Scotland?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Foulkes: Could we not have the regulations——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is taking up valuable time in this short debate.

12.6 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): We have had an interesting debate, but, having listened to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), I am still puzzled as to whether he was for or against the regulations. I shall do my best to convince him of their worth.

The Government believe that parents have a right to be involved in schools and that the school system should take account of parental preference——

Mr. Foulkes: Rubbish.

Mr. Forsyth: I say to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), who said "Rubbish", that is not a principle that we have invented; it applies throughout our education system. We differ from Opposition Members because we have done something about the matter and have introduced measures to extend parental choice through the parents' charter, through our proposals which we will bring to the House on school boards and through the regulations.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the Minister will have regard to the strictures that I levelled at the House earlier, about the need to keep the debate to the regulations before the House.

Mr. Forsyth: The regulations take account of parental choice in decisions on school closures. I make the point about the background, so that the House is fully aware that this is part of a continuing policy.

Choice may be limited by the constraints of public expenditure. I fully accept the points made by the Opposition Members, that Strathclyde regional council and other educational authorities are right to seek to rationalise their school places and to seek to avoid keeping open half-empty schools, heating buildings and using money which would otherwise be spent on extra books and equipment.

Mr. Buchan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman allows me to make progress, I shall try to give way.

The regulations provide that, if closure is approved for a school which is fully utilised, there should be an opportunity for a review. I find it difficult to understand why the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) should find that so unreasonable. He referred me to a letter which appeared in *The Scotsman* last month.

Mr. Buchan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forsyth: I shall give way in a moment. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman wishes to comment on that letter.

That letter, dated 1 February, referred to the regulations and was from a Mr. Alex Wood. I believe that he will have some knowledge of the gentleman, who was the first Labour leader of Edinburgh district council and a former pupil of Paisley grammar school. He was critical of Paisley grammar. It was to be damned because it indulged in

> "Rugby in an overwhelmingly football-playing area, the school motto in Latin, 'Disce Puer Aut Abi' (Work, Boy or get out!) hanging over the school war-memorial; a rigidly enforced and distinctive school uniform; a prefect system; and a constant wallowing in the school's 400-year history".

[Interruption.] I am asked whether Mr. Wood is for it or against it. At the beginning of the letter, referring to Strathclyde's closure programme, he said:

> "It had, however, one plus-point. It threatened the closure of several of the magnet schools, archaic educational establishments which sought to maintain their old selective status in the comprehensive epoch and which, successfully, in this Parents' Charter age, drew countless students from local comprehensives in working class areas."

That is the really damning thing to Mr. Wood and for the Labour party and many people on Strathclyde region.

The hon. Member for Garscadden may well make a lot of noise, but the fact is that he is saddled with a party that is opposed to those schools that are able to attract parents under the parents' charter.

Mr. Buchan: I shall try to restrain my temper at that misuse of the time of the House. The hon. Gentleman referred to the crucial point of the 80 per cent. Will he explain what is meant by 80 per cent.? Clearly, an hour ago he did not know. The hon. Gentleman has again referred to the schools being fully utilised. What does he mean? Does he mean in any year in the past 10 years or does he mean now? Is it 80 per cent. as calculated by the local authority in terms of the capacity of the rooms, or can a school be fully utilised even if it is not at the 80 per cent. level, by using it also as a community school? Can the hon. Gentleman explain even that for us, because that element was grossly defective in the regulations?

Mr. Forsyth: Of course I shall try to help the hon. Gentleman. I do not think that it is a misuse of the time of the House for me to point out that a former Paisley grammar school boy, a leading figure in the Labour party —*[Interruption.]* I take it that Labour Members now wish to repudiate the first Labour leader of Edinburgh district council. That is a matter for them. I suspect that some of the thinking behind Mr. Wood's letter is behind the proposals in Strathclyde.

I should be happy to explain the point about 80 per cent. capacity. It is very straightforward. Whether a school has 80 per cent. occupancy will be a matter to be determined by the education authority. Under these regulations, if the education authority thinks that the school is 80 per cent. full or more, it is required to present to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State any proposal for closure or any proposal to alter the catchment zone of that school. It is clearly spelt out—*[Interruption.]* If hon. Members will listen, they will know what the regulations are about and they can decide whether they are for or against them. I suggest that that is the proper way to go forward.

If any school meets the 80 per cent. capacity rule, a proposal for closure or for alteration of the catchment zone will have to be referred to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. That will mean in Paisley that the matter of the Castlehead and John Neilson schools, may have to be referred—[HON MEMBERS: "May?"]—will have to be referred—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"]—I say "may" because I am relying for my information on Strathclyde regional council. The proposal is to close the John Neilson school. That will result in a change in the delineated area of a school—Castlehead school—with a pupil population exceeding 80 per cent. of the capacity. So it will come to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. For all those hon. Gentlemen on the Opposition Benches who said that this was about one school in Paisley, it is true of the Brediland primary school, Paisley of South primary school, Paisley, of Bushes primary school, Paisley, and of a large number of schools in Strathclyde. Opposition Members have based their opposition to these regulations on a reading of them which clearly shows that they did not understand what the regulations were intended to achieve.

Mr. Buchan: If the Minister claims, as he did just now, that Castlehead, because of the shift of roll, will be brought within the 80 per cent., does he base this on the present roll

or does he base it on the roll of any of the past 10 years—since that is part of the regulations? If it is on the present roll, how does he explain the non-inclusion in his remarks of John Neilson?

Mr. Forsyth: All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that he needs to sit down and study the regulations. They are very clear. If there is a proposal to alter the catchment area of a school or to close a school with more than 80 per cent. capacity, it has to come to my right hon. and learned Friend.

Hon. Gentlemen must allow me to make progress, so that I can try to answer the points made in the debate.

Mr. Buchan: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to adjourn the debate so that the Minister can be further advised by the Box over there?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Forsyth.

Mr. Forsyth: What is in order is to debate these regulations. If the hon. Gentleman will not take the time to study the regulations, he will find himself at a disadvantage in debate.

I was asked why the regulations came into force immediately. They were made on 26 January. We were aware that Strathclyde council would be meeting on 3 and 12 February, and we were anxious to avoid any question of the retrospective use of these powers. We believed that it was important that Strathclyde should be in no doubt that the regulations would bear on any decisions which it was to take at these meetings.

I was asked why the regulations came into force before being laid. It is certainly true that they came into force at midnight and that they were laid 16 hours later, at 4 pm, as the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) said. The Joint Committee acknowledged that the procedure required for this circumstance in section 4 of the Statutory Instruments Act 1946 was followed, in that Mr. Speaker and the Lord Chancellor were notified by letter that regulations had come into operation ahead of being laid. So the Government do not accept that there has been a failure to comply with the 1946 Act.

Another criticism was that the regulations do not make it clear who is responsible for determining capacity. It was a point made by the hon. Gentleman the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire in opening the debate. Section 22(b) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and the context of schedule 2 to the principal regulations make it quite clear that the duty rests with education authorities to decide which proposals to put to the Secretary of State for his consent.

I say to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, who answered my intervention in his speech about the existing regulations—which are in respect of decisions which deem it necessary for the Secretary of State to decide, for example, whether a school is five or 10 miles distant—that they do not specify who is to take the decision on the five or 10 miles. The hon. Gentleman said that that was not a precedent. It was, he said, easy to decide whether a school was five or 10 miles distant. He has obviously never had that sort of case in his constituency, because there is considerable argument about the precise route followed by the child, and so on.

The regulations do not say who is to decide that, but they clearly point, because of their context, to the education authority. These regulations are no different in that respect.

Mr. Worthington *rose*—

Mr. Forsyth: There have been a number of questions about the capacity of the school. Actual capacity depends on the curriculum, the teaching methods and upper limits on class sizes which may be negotiated from time to time. The fact that there is no unchanging yardstick does not mean that no measurement can be made.

Mr. Worthington: If the way in which this has been done is even-handed, why did the Minister see representatives of Paisley grammar school twice but refuse to meet representatives of Merksworth high school?

Mr. Forsyth: What is even-handed is that the regulations give Paisley grammar school and other schools an opportunity for their cases to be reviewed by my right hon. and learned Friend. By opposing these regulations, Labour Members are preventing parents from being able to have that review.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to order [26 February].*

The House proceeded to a Division:

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West) *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand that one's vote must go with one's voice, and vice versa. I understand that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) will not vote in the Division. I ask for your comment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on that posture.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): The House must assume that the hon. Gentleman has been influenced by the course of the debate. It may be unusual, but it can happen.

The House having divided: Ayes 173, Noes 199.

Division No. 199] **[12.20 am**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin

Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Adam Ingram and
Mr. Nigel Griffiths.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W
Blackburn, Dr John G
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Michael
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Ryder, Richard
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertfordshire N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Alan Howarth.

Question accordingly negatived.

12.32 am

Mr. Buchan: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like some guidance and advice from you over what has just happened. The prayer was tabled by Liberal Members of Parliament. In the event, they decided not to take part in the vote that followed the prayer. Is that customary, is it precedented, is it democratic and is it fair?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I dealt with this point of order during the Division. I see no reason to add anything to the ruling that I gave on that occasion.

Mr. Foulkes: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to ask you to confirm that, if the alliance Members had voted with the Opposition, the prayer would have been approved?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not for me to indulge in hypotheses.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Might this incident be remembered in future as "Holy Archy's Prayer"?

PETITION

A47 (Great Yarmouth)

12.33 am

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of 19,976 residents and visitors to my constituency of Great Yarmouth and to the constituency of Mid-Norfolk, represented here tonight by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder). I quote from the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House acknowledges the urgent need to improve the A47 highway between Great Yarmouth and Acle, and asks the Secretary of State for Transport to include a dual carriageway scheme for this length of highway in the Government's roads programme at the earliest opportunity.

The tragic death yesterday of an 18-year-old constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter)—killed in a head-on crash with a family of four who were seriously injured and who are represented tonight by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), who supports the petition—lends poignancy to the petition, because it is the sixth fatality on the eight-mile road between Acle and Great Yarmouth during the past three years, and the 40th personal injury accident since 1984.

The petition, which I wholeheartedly support, has been organised in recent weeks by Great Yarmouth borough council and is presented tonight in the furtherance of the economic, commercial and industrial development of Great Yarmouth as a holiday resort, a port and an area of above average unemployment.

To lie upon the Table.

Schools Outreach Project

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

12.35 am

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): I am most grateful for the opportunity to draw the attention of the House to the works of Schools Outreach. It fulfils a role which, so far as I am aware, is unique. It plugs a gap in preventive youth care that desperately needs to be filled. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science is to answer the debate, because his Department has shown interest in and provided support for the project. I want that interest and support to be extended, and I look forward with great interest to what he will say.

My hon. Friends the Members for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), for Dudley, West (Dr. Blackburn) and for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon) will seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they will do so with my full consent and encouragement. I have the support of my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) and for Bromsgrove (Mr. Miller) and many hon. Members on both sides of the House, especially those who represent constituencies in and around Birmingham. I also have the support of the Second Church Estates Commissioner, my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison).

Schools Outreach is a charity that was established in 1973 to support and encourage the work that has been done for many years, and continues to be done, by Gordon Bailey in preventive care among schoolchildren. Its aims are to train, support and sustain preventive care workers, who will establish child-centred, long-term relationships with young people in schools; to encourage young people to recognise the need for values and responsibilities; to help young people to acknowledge, accept and achieve their personal, social, moral and spiritual potential; to stimulate their wisdom in every aspect of life, and thereby prevent problems that would otherwise occur; and to present them with a programme that will offer a whole, balanced concept of the human personality. That is achieved in co-operation with teachers and youth workers, by participating in creating links between schools and their surrounding communities and by concentrating on enhancing links between schools and the parents of their pupils. In summary, it seeks to help young people to grow into mature, whole, fulfilled and responsible citizens.

The project arose from the work and experience of Gordon Bailey. While working as a volunteer youth worker at a youth centre in south-east Lancashire in the mid-1950s he became aware of the serious problems that some young people developed: involvement in crime, sexually transmitted diseases, alcohol and drug abuse, truancy and alienation from school and community. Gordon Bailey was convinced that most, if not all, of those problems were preventable. His first success was with the problems of a 15-year-old boy whose parents had thrown him out of his home.

The conflict had arisen because of the boy's low sense of self-worth, combined with his parents' unrealistic expectations. Mr. Bailey was able to achieve a reconciliation between boy and parent. One month later, the boy's headmaster reported that, from being an extremely disruptive child who had been on the verge of expulsion from school, he had become responsible, and could Mr. Bailey do the same for the rest of the fourth-year pupils at the school? Mr. Bailey continued to visit the school for one full day every week, and by working during class periods with groups of pupils he found that he was able to establish and build developing relationships with the pupils.

By the early 1960s Mr. Bailey was able to see positive effects in the lives of the children. He had been able to create a classroom environment, made easier by his unofficial and informal approaches, within which children found themselves willing and able to discover the wisdom of becoming interested in and committed to their personal whole health and well-being. The core of the work is that it is child-centred and aimed at the development of the child's wisdom, so that problems that would threaten their well-being can be prevented.

Word of mouth commendations of Mr. Bailey's work resulted in such pressure on him to extend his work that in 1960 he resigned from his job as a television technician with Independent Television and entered full-time preventive care. Working with children in junior and secondary schools, he rediscovered the concept of getting alongside a child very early, watching for any sign of a risk to the health and well-being of the child, maintaining involvement with pastoral teaching staff and local child care agencies, the parents and family of a child at risk, and co-operating with and complementing all forms of child care. In the late 1960s, the needs of people in inner cities came to Mr. Bailey's attention, and in 1972, at the invitation of several head teachers, he and his wife and their four children moved to Birmingham. In the following year, the Schools Outreach project was established as a charity.

Mr. Bailey became linked informally with several schools, the local education authority and Winson Green prison in Birmingham. The link with the prisoners afforded an opportunity to assess the value of his work. Linked with 10 per cent. of the city's schools, as might have been expected, he came across several young boys from the schools in which he worked who passed through the prison on remand for assessment on their way through the penal system. Among the boys who were prison residents, he met about 10 per cent. from the schools he knew. By the late 1970s, however, he was no longer meeting in prison any former pupils from the schools where he had worked.

The aims of Mr. Bailey's classroom programme have been, first, to offer friendship to children; secondly, to encourage them to develop a sense of self-worth; thirdly, to take them through a programme of learning that offers each child the opportunity to develop a sense of responsibility towards his own and other people's health and well-being; and, fourthly, to prepare each child for adulthood and parentcraft. That is done by open as well as private discussion.

Preventive care, which Mr. Bailey and his team provide, is what most parents are able to provide for their own children, but in the inner cities of Britain today the environment is hostile. Good teachers and parents are often frustrated by the lack of time in which to establish and build deep friendships with their children. Lack of time results from distractions such as work, other children, the need for crisis management, and so on. I do not propose to say more about the responsibility of parents, except to observe that both the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for the

Home Department have recently made excellent speeches acknowledging the urgent need for positive parenthood to prevent problems that Schools Outreach is trying to prevent. Sadly, however, the need for preventive care provided by schools to inner-city children remains urgent.

A pilot scheme has been established in the west midlands. It is encouraging that it has the support of so many hon. Members, on a cross-party basis. Eight workers are undergoing training in the skills that Gordon Bailey has developed over the past 20 years. Their basic training will end early in May. Between May and September, they will establish relationships with teachers and those who work in child care agencies. They will begin their full-time, long-term work with schoolchildren in September.

Four of the eight workers are male, and four are female. Four were teachers, and between them the British, Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities are represented. All eight are committed to community based, child-centred preventive care on a long-term basis. A headmaster who was appointed in 1974 to the school in Birmingham where Gordon Bailey was working has taken early retirement to direct the training.

It is difficult to evaluate any form of preventive care. However, there will be an independent evaluation of the Schools Outreach pilot scheme which will result in a report which should be completed and available in 1991.

A number of companies from commerce and industry are helping to fund the project. Groups of people, particularly parents who care about their children's futures, are working together in different places to raise money for the project. The Schools Outreach programme needs funds, and this is clearly an area in which a partnership between the private and public sectors is required. The private sector has already committed £200,000, and more is being sought. The total cost of the project over three years will be more than £500,000.

An application for funding for the pilot scheme has been considered by my hon. Friend the Minister. He turned the application down on its face value, but suggested that revised proposals could be made and that, on certain conditions, the Department would be willing to provide £150,000 towards the cost of the pilot scheme. I welcome what my hon. Friend has been able to offer, but I hope that there will be a continuing and increasingly positive approach to the project. I appreciate that the scheme does not fit neatly into the boundaries set by the Department's responsibilities, but that makes it all the more urgent that the project should receive support from central and local government.

I understand that the Department is concerned about what will happen after the pilot scheme ends. Such concerns must exist about any pilot scheme. This pilot scheme will have to prove itself, and the Outreach team recognises that. To object, as the Department did, that Schools Outreach has not spelt out clearly how effective relationships could be established between preventive care teachers and local authority welfare agents, suggests to me that the Department has not examined adequately the way in which Gordon Bailey and his small team have been working.

I appreciate that departmental money for new projects must be limited, but I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to reconsider the funding of this pilot scheme. In doing so, I do not want to appear unappreciative of the support that the Department has already promised. Schools Outreach has been tackling problems that affect young people; problems which established institutions are failing to tackle and with which parents feel helpless to deal. Many of us have put forward remedies in the House to tackle the problems of alienation, truancy and irresponsibility among young people that are manifest at football grounds, in inner cities, in classrooms and elsewhere. Schools Outreach is doing something about those problems.

I want to ask my hon. Friend the Minister some difficult questions. What does a teenage girl's pregnancy cost the community? How much does an abortion for a teenage girl cost? How much does it cost to keep young criminals in secure accommodation? How much does it cost to treat a drug addict? How much does it cost to treat an AIDS victim? What are the costs of legal aid for a young criminal going through the law courts? No doubt my hon. Friend will tell me that the costs involved are difficut to measure precisely, but it must undoubtedly be the case that for every pound spent on preventive care of the kind practised by Schools Outreach, hundreds, if not thousands, of pounds would be saved by the work that is carried out.

I invite my hon. Friend the Minister to try a simple cost-benefit analysis of that approach. If he tries that, he will want to increase his support for this worthwhile, excellent and unique project. I thank my hon. Friend for his support so far and invite him, for the sake of our young people, to do even more in future than he has been able to do so far.

12.49 am

Mr. W. Benyon (Milton Keynes): I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) managed to obtain this debate. Outreach is a wonderful organisation, and there is now sufficient proof of what it is doing to ensure its success.

I wish to make only two points in the short time available to me. First, let me reiterate what I said to my hon. Friend the Minister in a letter in June last year about the partnership aspect. If we are to ask the private sector to help in matters such as this, we must gear up Government support or everyone will lose heart. The amount of fund-raising has been remarkable, and a great success, but if the Government do not come in behind it, all that will be lost.

Secondly—time is far more important—I emphasise to my hon. Friend that every piece of legislation since the war has been detrimental to the family, and to the upbringing of young people in this country. The divorce laws, the fiscal operations, the social security regulations —all, in a sense, have been directed against young people's managing to make a success of their lives and having happy, stable family relationships.

I warmly welcome, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North, the speeches that have been made recently about the problem. If the Government mean what they say, this is the moment for them to put their money where their mouth is. I hope that the debate about this wonderful organisation, which is doing such good work, will be successful.

12.51 am

Dr. John G. Blackburn (Dudley, West): The House pays a warm and generous tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) for raising this issue. I, too, have only two small points to make but they are important, and saturated with sincerity.

[Dr. John G. Blackburn]

First, I have had the privilege of knowing Gordon Bailey for 35 years. I also know the work that he has undertaken, particularly in the west midlands, adjacent to my constituency. It is about time that we as a House determined that the quality of education also has a great bearing on moral teaching, and on the safeguards that will bring people up into responsible youth and manhood.

I recommend my hon. Friend the Minister to view the case with the greatest possible charity. No, not charity; we are looking for justice, and we are looking for a figure at least to match that of the private sector. It is in that spirit that — because of my constituency involvement with Schools Outreach, and because of the work that it is doing — I commend it warmly to my hon. Friend.

12.52 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): The House is most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) for raising this matter tonight. I listened with great interest to his speech, as well as to the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon) and for Dudley, West (Dr. Blackburn).

The House will also note the presence in the Chamber of my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) and my hon. Friends the Members for Bromsgrove (Mr. Miller) and for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell). They have come to listen to the discussion of an important topic which is well worthy of debate in the House.

The excellent work of Mr. Gordon Bailey and his Schools Outreach preventive care project has been ably described by my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North. He is one of many hon. Members on both sides of the House who have been persuaded by the merits of Mr. Bailey's work. I am well aware of that, not least because of the considerable number of letters received by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and myself, both from hon. Members and from their noble Lordships.

The letters that we have received have given weighty support to the proposals from Mr. Bailey for my Department to provide funding for his preventive care project. We have also received a large number of letters from teachers, head teachers and others who have seen at first hand the value of the work carried out by Mr. Bailey, and have argued strongly for its replication in other schools. We do not need persuading, therefore, of the strength of feeling of those who know Mr. Bailey and are aware of his work in schools and elsewhere.

Since we first made contact with Mr. Bailey and learned of his activities, both my right hon. Friend and I have been impressed with his level of commitment and of the possible long-term benefits that might accrue from the placement of preventive care workers in schools. We have therefore given him every encouragement to develop proposals which provide the opportunity to judge the success of preventive care workers in influencing young people and helping them to tackle the various difficulties and temptations that they encounter in adolescence.

As my hon. Friend is aware, the intention of the Schools Outreach preventive care project is to place a preventive care worker in a school or a number of schools. Through their establishment of long-term relationships with young people, the care workers aim to discourage the development of problems in relation to crime—including vandalism — truancy, drug and alcohol abuse, family disintegration and child abuse.

The prime purpose of the work is to promote the physical and mental health and emotional well-being of young people, which will act as a basis for responsible and fulfilled citizenship in adult life. This is achieved through a blend of work in the classroom with groups of pupils, one-to-one counselling of individual pupils, and involvement in extra-curricular activities organised within the school. It is also intended that preventive care workers will seek, through links with parents, families, local youth centres and other local care agencies, to encourage strong ties between schools and the surrounding community. Over a period, it is hoped that care workers will be able to earn the respect and affection of the children, as well as the trust of parents and staff, helping each child towards his role as a worthwhile member of society.

Preventive care workers aim to supplement, but not be a substitute for, the efforts of parents and the teaching profession, and help in particular where either the home or the school is unable for whatever reason to provide the necessary support a child requires. They will not assume the responsibilities of existing agencies such as educational welfare services the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, educational psychologists and others. Their role rather will be a long-term one in helping the development of young people and preventing their future involvement in a range of destructive activities, both to themselves and to society at large.

Those aims are noble and worthy enough, but they bring with them the prospect of saving the public purse many thousands of pounds. The social and personal costs of a young person going off the rails during adolescence are of course enormous if that should lead to a lifestyle of delinquency, crime, or physical self-destruction through alcohol or drug abuse. The financial costs to society are also considerable. As Mr. Bailey has rightly pointed out in submitting his proposal for Government funding, if every preventive care worker succeeds in discouraging just one child from becoming involved in crime, or drug abuse, the financial savings to the taxpayer and to both local and central Government could be immense.

As my hon. Friends are aware, there is something of a history to the proposals from Mr. Bailey for Government funding of his work. I think that it is worth explaining the background. Mr. Bailey first submitted an application to the Department for funding in April 1986 for a two-year pilot project based in the west midlands. The cost of the proposal amounted to £254,000. That was intended to cover the establishment of an administrative and training headquarters for the pilot project, as well as covering the cost of employing and training preventive care workers to be deployed in 25 schools.

Given the pressure on the resources available to the Department, Mr. Bailey subsequently submitted a revised application with the cost scaled down to a total of £199,000, but despite the considerable sympathy which both I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had for the aims of the proposals, the pressure on resources meant that we could not fund the project at that time. However, in writing to Mr. Bailey to explain our decision I made it clear that it was based primarily on financial considerations. He was therefore invited to resubmit an application for funding, beginning in the financial year 1988-89.

Given that the Department had not been able to find resources for the project in 1987, Mr. Bailey had to seek alternative funding from elsewhere if his project was to make a start that year. It is a testimony to his personal commitment and powers of persuasion that he was able to obtain funding from private sources amounting to more than £90,000 in 1987-88. He has also obtained private funding for subsequent years amounting to a further £80,000.

Following discussions with DES officials, a revised application for Government funding was submitted by Mr. Bailey in August 1987. On that occasion the request was for a total of £566,000 to cover the final three years of a four-year pilot project. This application coincided with one from Mr. Bailey to the Department of Trade and Industry for funding of two preventive care workers in the Handsworth area of Birmingham as part of the inner cities programme. Having taken advice from my Department on the application, the Department of Trade and Industry were able to provide a total of £32,000 for the work proposed in Handsworth.

A decision on the revised proposal for DES funding was finally issued in December last year. Consideration of the proposal, and indeed the original application, took much longer than I would have wished. I assure my hon. Friends that the prime reason on both occasions was the need to ensure that they received detailed and thorough consideration within the Department.

As I am sure my hon. Friends will appreciate, the competition for resources within my Department has been particularly fierce of late, especially given the range of new initiatives resulting from the proposals contained in our Education Reform Bill. Many worthwhile proposals have been casualties of that competition. We have nevertheless been able to offer funding for the preventive care project, although at a reduced level and subject to certain conditions. We have been able to offer Mr. Bailey a total of £150,000 funding over three years. That is subject to certain conditions that we feel bound to impose, primarily to ensure that public money is well spent.

The most important condition that we have had to impose is that Mr. Bailey should obtain a guarantee from a local authority that it would be prepared to make a financial commitment to the project over the three-year pilot period. The authority would also need to be willing —subject to a favourable evaluation of the project—to continue to provide finance at the level supported during the pilot period to ensure the continued employment of preventive care workers for a minimum of three years after the completion of DES funding. We also sought further information from Mr. Bailey on the question of overlap between the work of other welfare agencies, teachers, and preventive care workers with regard to their role in pastoral care. Lastly, we had some concerns with regard to the plans for training of care workers prior to their going into schools.

The most important condition is the question of local authority funding. The others are matters of detail that could, one hopes, be resolved by further correspondence between the Department and Mr. Bailey. Indeed, Mr. Bailey has already been in touch with the Department spelling out how he believes the work of preventive care workers will relate to that of other welfare agencies and to the pastoral work of teaching staff in schools. He has provided us with much of the reassurance we require on this point. As I have suggested, however, the subject of funding direct from a local education authority is more of a problem.

Let me try to explain why that is such an important consideration for the Department. It follows from two elements of the proposals as submitted by Mr. Bailey. First, it has been presented as a pilot project, requiring DES funding for a limited period. By definition, a pilot project, if judged successful, is intended to form the basis of a longer-term exercise, normally on a much larger scale. There is no question of DES funding being available after the pilot project has been completed, so the finances for continued employment of preventive care workers would have to come from elsewhere.

Although Mr. Bailey continues to be extremely successful in securing private funding for his work, I am sure that he would be the first to acknowledge that his work cannot be totally reliant on private funds. That brings me on to the second element of the project, which is the need for relationships with young people to be built up over a period. To be able to form close relationships with youngsters, and to influence their long-term behaviour and development——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock on Monday evening, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at five minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 1 March 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

1. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in Southwark and Bermondsey have been unemployed for longer than a year; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick Nicholls): On 14 January 1988 the number of unemployed claimants in the Southwark and Bermondsey constituency who had been unemployed for more than one year was 3,048. That was 285 fewer than in January last year.

Mr. Hughes: Is the Minister aware that although unemployment has fallen a little since last year it is up by one third since 1983? Forty-six per cent. of those who are unemployed have been out of work for more than a year. What hope is there for people in constituencies such as mine that the inner-city initiatives will produce help for local residents and not for so many of the commuters who come in from ouside inner-city areas?

Mr. Nicholls: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, but I cannot help feeling that he is putting too gloomy a gloss on the matter. Unemployment has fallen by 12·9 per cent. in Southwark and Bermondsey during the past year. The travel-to-work area that includes the constituency has a lower rate of unemployment than the national average. If one considers the work done by the London Docklands Development Corporation, there is every reason to suppose that the jobs that are being attracted to the area and preserved and created there are certainly not all going to visitors. There is every reason to suppose that they are benefiting local people.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: I am reassured by what my hon. Friend has said about the Southwark and Bermondsey constituency. Can he confirm that these promising signs prevail in the Southwark borough as a whole, and, in particular, in my constituency of Dulwich?

Mr. Nicholls: Whatever signs one looks at in the area, the position is hopeful. Job clubs in Southwark have helped about 225 people into jobs, the equivalent of 3,520 in Greater London. The YTS in Southwark is currently helping 555 people. The whole pattern is clear: the benefit that the whole country is enjoying is reflected in areas such as the constituencies of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden).

Companies (Tourists' Visits)

2. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to encourage industrial companies to open their premises to tourists; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. John Lee): I shall continue to take every opportunity to promote the potential benefits to be gained from industrial tourism and am particularly pleased at the support expressed by Sir David Nickson, the president of the CBI, at my recent meeting with him. I welcome his proposal for a conference to be arranged by the CBI on this topic in September this year.

Mr. Couchman: Everyone likes to watch other people at work. Who has not stopped to watch the activity on a building site or visited a local craft factory, such as a pottery or glassworks? Will my hon. Friend use his considerable influence to open up more mainstream industrial processes — for instance, car and furniture manufacturing — to industrial tourism? Who knows that might even help us to sell a few more British goods.

Mr. Lee: As one who voted for the televising of the House, I believe that people do want to watch other people at work. In more serious vein, there is considerable potential for opening up more of our industrial factories to tourists. I want to encourage firms to progress from open days, or allowing only limited parties to go around, to embracing the concept of visitors and constructing walkways and viewing points, with proper visitors' entrances and access.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Minister take a personal interest in the project being proposed by Jennings Breweries in Cockermouth in my constituency? It wants to turn part of the brewery into a sort of museum, but there appears to be some resistance from the councillors on the parish council. Will the Minister put it to them that Jennings' proposals are in the interests of the people of Cockermouth, and will he intervene?

Mr. Lee: I spend a great deal of time up in the Lake District and in areas covered by the Cumbria tourist board. In the next two or three weeks I hope to visit the Cumberland Pencil Company in Keswick. I shall certainly take on board the hon. Gentleman's points about Jennings and look into the matter. In due course, I may be able to visit the brewery, too.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Will my hon. Friend have a word with our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy to ensure that nuclear and coal-burning power stations have facilities for visitors and viewing galleries? Does he agree that as the sites are often on coasts and estuaries, they may become significant tourist attractions during a typical English summer?

Mr. Lee: My hon. Friend is right. He has opened up a new range of tourism opportunities for the electrical industry and coal mines. I should like to place on record the great success that British Nuclear Fuels has achieved at Sellafield, which receives 100,000 visitors a year.

Labour Statistics

3. **Mr. Dennis Canavan:** To ask the Secetary of State for Employment what has been the percentage increase in unemployment since May 1979.

15. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the level of unemployment.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. John Cope): Between May 1979 and January 1988 the seasonally adjusted level of adult unemployment increased by 122 per cent. on a consistent basis. The figure has now fallen by 647,000 since July 1986—which is the largest sustained fall on record—to 2,563,100, which is the lowest figure since April 1982.

Mr. Canavan: Is the Minister not ashamed to come to the Dispatch Box to give those figures? Why is his boss, the Secretary of State for unemployment, swanning around the United States of America? No doubt he is cooking up some workfare scheme for the unemployed instead of coming to the Dispatch Box to tell us how the Government will create real jobs for unemployed people and get unemployment down to the level that they inherited from the last Labour Government.

Mr. Cope: My right hon. Friend is in the United States to promote the "Invest in Britain" campaign, which will help with jobs for this country. I am proud of the fact that unemployment has been going down strongly for the past 18 months in all regions, particularly in the hon. Gentleman's constituency in Falkirk, where it has been decreasing faster than the national average.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: As the spectre of unemployment recedes, presumably to the political disappointment of many Labour Members, does my hon. Friend agree that one of the major challenges with which industry and the Government are faced is skill shortages? Can he offer some hope that this matter will be dealt with?

Mr. Cope: Yes, I can. However, when employers talk to me about skill shortages I always ask them how many people they are training. It is surprising how few have made the connection. We now have the new training programme that was announced by my right hon. Friend the other day, which will help considerably in this regard.

Mr. James Lamond: Has the Minister noticed the statement that was issued yesterday by the Society of British Aerospace Companies Ltd. It challenges the Government's assertion that 2·3 per cent. of gross domestic product is spent on research and development. Its calculations show that only 1·9 per cent. is spent, which is considerably below the amount spent by our nearest competitors. Is not that failure to invest in research and development reflected in the increased levels of unemployment from which we have suffered since 1979?

Mr. Cope: My Department does not deal with these figures, and I have not studied the report that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. I was talking about investment in skills, which is important, and which we are keen to encourage.

Mr. Burt: Is my hon. Friend aware that some parts of the country that have been associated with traditional manufacturing industry and high levels of unemployment have experienced some of the most spectacular falls in unemployment? Will he pay tribute to the spirit of enterprise that has been shown in my constituency of Bury, North, where the level of unemployment is down to 7 per cent.? Will he pay tribute to the hard-working staff of the job centres in Bury and Ramsbottom, whose efforts have contributed to that fall?

Mr. Cope: Yes, the staff in jobcentres in my hon. Friend's constituency and elsewhere have played a large part in the success. It is also a very good thing that over the year unemployment has been falling fastest in the west midlands, Wales, the north-west and the north, which are the most difficult regions.

Mr. Meacher: Is the Minister aware that the Government's own "Labour Force Survey", just published, shows that in the year to mid-1987 the number of new jobs created was just 31,000, while the Government claim that over the same priod unemployment was cut by 221,000? Does that not prove that the Government's much vaunted big cut in unemployment is largely bogus and has much more to do with deterrent restart interviews and tighter availability for work rules than with any genuine creation of new jobs?

Mr. Cope: On the contrary, we have been creating new jobs very rapidly in recent years. The hon. Gentleman will see that if he compares our figures with those for overseas. Since June 1983 more new jobs have been created in this country than in the whole of the rest of the European Community put together.

Tourism

4. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of tourists visiting the United Kingdom in 1987.

Mr. Lee: By November 1987 the tourism industry in the United Kingdom had achieved a record, with 14·9 million visitors to the country. This figure is a 9 per cent. increase on the equivalent period in the previous record year of 1985. The total for the whole of 1987 will be released tomorrow.

Mr. Bruce: I thank my hon. Friend for that excellent news. Can he estimate what contribution tourism made to the economy in 1987 and how our record compares with that of other Western nations? What is my hon. Friend's Department doing to help the English tourist board to move the many tourists who arrive in London to the regions? In my experience, Americans who come to south Dorset from London do not want to go back because of the wonderful welcome that they receive in places such as Weymouth and Swanage.

Mr. Lee: Let me take the latter part of my hon. Friend's question first. The English tourist board is working hard with the regional tourist boards to encourage American visitors to move into the regions rather than stay in London, Edinburgh and Stratford.

My hon. Friend asked about the contribution that tourism makes to the economy. There are a number of factors to be considered. The industry sustains 1·4 million jobs and the figure is growing at the rate of nearly 1,000 a week. We calculate that tourism now generates around £1·5 billion worth of new construction. In terms of overseas visitor tourist earnings, tourism is about 25 per cent. more important than aerospace, and four times more important than motor vehicles. Finally, my hon. Friend asked about other Western countries. We are fifth in the dollar earnings league in tourism, behind the United States, Spain, Italy and France.

Mr. Duffy: Is the Minister aware that as tourism grows the number of official bodies proliferates and the

arrangements could probably benefit from rationalisation? Is he also aware that some of the current problems arise from Government policy? For example, how are tourists to explore those delightful but remote villages in south Humberside and north Humberside when there are no longer rural bus services because of Government policies?

Mr. Lee: The hon. Gentleman knows that his specific question is for another Department. On his earlier point, while there may be a proliferation of tourism bodies in certain areas, a welcome feature of recent years has been the increasing partnership in the industry between the public sector — the regional tourist boards — and the private sector.

On the question about transport, we are blessed with a pretty good motorway network which helps the regions, particularly the north, the north-west, Yorkshire and Humberside.

Labour Statistics

5. **Mr. McLoughin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of job vacancies registered with jobcentres in the east midlands.

Mr. Nicholls: On 6 January 1988 the number of unfilled vacancies, excluding community programme, registered at jobcentres in the east midlands region was 11,300. This was an increase of 18·1 per cent. on the figure for January 1987.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer, which is very encouraging. It shows up some of the protestations from the Opposition, especially bearing in mind that there are fewer than 20 Labour Back Benchers in the Chamber for employment questions.

Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the important aspects of creating jobs is the creation of employment opportunities within areas? Is he aware that Derbyshire county council levies the highest shire county rate, and does he agree that that is a great disincentive to the creation of jobs in the county?

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The fact that the figures can look so promising in spite of that is a tribute to the efforts of the people who live there. It is a pity that the county council does not seem to devote as much time to considering the implications of a high rate for job prospects as it does to other activities, such as removing the Latin mottoes from local schools and replacing them with propositions relating to nuclear-free zones.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that Derbyshire county council would have been able to do much more if, in the last financial year, the Government had not taken £20 million from it, thus creating difficulties for every ratepayer in Derbyshire?

While the Minister is on the subject of jobs in the east midlands, will he tell us why, when I was asking questions a few years ago about the massive unemployment in the area, he said that it was not the Government's fault? It is not the Government's fault when the unemployment figures are going up, but when they come down — marginally — the Minister claims the credit.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman asks me, by implication, to comment on unemployment in the east midlands, and I am happy to do so. East midlands unemployment was down by over 35,000 in the last year. That is a rate of 8·3 per cent., and compares favourably with the United Kingdom rate of 9·2 per cent., adjusted. On the other hand, I appreciate that if Derbyshire county council cannot understand the virtues of living within one's means, it is highly unlikely that the hon. Gentleman will understand them either.

Employment Opportunities (Lancashire)

6. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on employment opportunities in Lancashire.

Mr. Nicholls: On 8 January the number of unfilled vacancies registered at jobcentres in Lancashire was 5,716. This compares with 4,790 in January 1987. Only about one third of all vacancies nationally are notified to jobcentres. In the same period, unemployment in Lancashire has fallen from 79,344 to 65,623. All my Department's employment, training and enterprise measures are available in Lancashire.

Mr. Jack: I am encouraged by my hon. Friend's answer, as it bears out the fact that in my constituency of Fylde unemployment has dropped to about 7·5 per cent. Already, however, employers are experiencing shortages in both semi-skilled and highly skilled jobs. Can my hon. Friend tell me which items in his new training package he feels will contribute to addressing the problem? Does he feel that the voluntary sector has a role to play in that work as well?

Mr. Nicholls: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right to suggest that the voluntary sector has a role to play. Certainly, employers in the Fylde area report particular skill shortages in administration, legal secretaries, computer staff and so on. The new adult training programme will be very much locally conceived and locally delivered, precisely so that it can take account of particular skill shortages and requirements in particular areas.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Does the Minister honestly believe that employment prospects in Lancashire and the north of England generally can be as good as they are in the south-east, unless the Government are prepared to take proper steps? For instance, a development agency for the north-west would ensure that we received the investment that is needed to achieve decent quality employment in the areas.

Mr. Nicholls: The short answer is yes. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State has already said today, the rate of unemployment is falling, not only in the more prosperous regions, but throughout all the regions. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to examine any of the indicators for the areas about which he is concerned, he will find that that good news continues. For instance, unemployment in Lancashire has fallen from 14·8 to 12·2 per cent. Although we may wish that it had fallen still further, the point is that in the present economic environment it is clear that all regions not simply the more prosperous areas will benefit from falls in unemployment.

Tourist Priority Sites

7. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Employment if he will create a list of tourist priority sites for the encouragement of investment therein.

Mr. Lee: The Government have no plans to create a list of tourist priority investment sites. However, in its development strategy, "Vision for England", the English tourist board has highlighted the many opportunities that exist for investment in a wide range of tourism developments.

Mr. Adley: Although politics is about priorities, and "unique" is perhaps the most overworked word in the English language, does my hon. Friend agree that the Settle to Carlisle railway line is a unique priority for salvation as we approach the moment of decision?

Mr. Budgen: Salvation?

Mr. Adley: Yes. It is a good word and perhaps my hon. Friend should learn it.

As the Department of Transport—I recognise that it has immediate ministerial responsibility for the decision—struggles to find a solution to the problem, will my hon. Friend recognise, not only that the River Ribble rises in the constituency of my right hon. and learned Friend the Patronage Secretary and that he has an interest in all this, but that my hon. Friend, as the Minister responsible for tourism, should do everything that he can to ensure that the line is not closed? Therefore, will my hon. Friend assure me today that he will speak to Department of Transport Ministers urgently to ensure that the tourism opportunities of the line are considered as part of the case against its closure?

Mr. Lee: I am aware of my hon. Friend's enthusiasm for both railways and tourism, and I understand his passion and conviction for the Settle to Carlisle line. I should emphasise that, as my hon. Friend has already said, this is primarily a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. However, I assure my hon. Friend and the House that I have certainly ensured that the tourism considerations are taken into account. Indeed, I know the River Ribble well and I fish its headwater whenever I get the opportunity.

Mr. Cryer: Will the Minister ensure that the Jarvis plc—MSC report on the Settle to Carlisle line corridor is brought to the attention of the Department of Transport? That report represents an important initiative by the Minister's Department regarding that line and its retention. Some of us suspect that the Department of Transport is planning to close the line. While the Minister is about that, could he look at the basis of this question—investment in tourist projects? He has spoken a great deal about job creation and so on, but why does the Department not put its money where its mouth is, for example, in projects such as the transport museum and associated tramway in my constituency at Low Moor in Bradford?

Mr. Lee: I believe I am correct in saying that the Department of Employment has funded, via the MSC, the Jarvis report to which the hon. Gentleman referred. As I said in answer to an earlier written question, that report will be published shortly. The hon. Gentleman should rest assured that the tourist implications have been and will be taken into account.

Mr. Alison: Is my hon. Friend aware that a trip over the Ribblehead viaduct on the Settle-Carlisle line, perhaps in a Pullman train pulled by one of our great historic steam locomotives such as a Great Western King or an LMS Duchess, blasting its way up to Aisgill summit is one of the world's greatest international tourist attractions? In comparison to that experience a trip even to Venice on the Orient Express is as a mere trip on Brighton pier. Will my hon. Friend both sample and save the Settle-Carlisle route?

Mr. Lee: I hear what my right hon. Friend says. Of course, all of us would like to see trains continuing to run across the viaduct, but, as a fisherman, I hope that they are not too heavy and do not disturb the fishing too much.

Mr. Martlew: Will the Minister join me in welcoming the fact that Carlisle city council and the Cumbria county council are continuing to finance the Carlisle-Settle line despite the fact that the county council is threatened with rate-capping? Does the Minister agree that the closure of the line would have a detrimental effect on the efforts made by Carlisle city council to promote tourism? Will the Minister, once more, speak to the Secretary of State for Transport and make those facts known to him?

Mr. Lee: All I would say at this stage is that I am aware that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Transport, is having discussions with a number of authorities, including, I believe, Carlisle.

Sir Dudley Smith: Is my hon. Friend aware that, certainly within the heart of England, there is plenty of scope for tourist development? Will he have a word with some of his colleagues in other Departments to ensure that the integrity of those areas is maintained, so that Britain remains as we know it today?

Mr. Lee: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend's sentiments. Only last night I was in Malvern, in the Heart of England tourist board area, and tomorrow I hope to be in the Forest of Dean.

Mr. Meacher: Is the Minister aware that tomorrow's official tourism figures will show the biggest annual trade deficit in tourism for Britain for three decades? Is he aware that the Government's policy of high interest rates has sapped tourism as destructively as it has sapped our manufacturing industries? Is he further aware that the Chancellor's policy of tax cuts plus high interest rates is the exact opposite of what the British economy in general and tourism in particular really need, which are lower interest rates and a lower pound to boost exports, while keeping import prices as high as possible?

Mr. Lee: I am delighted that the official employment spokesman for the Opposition has, at long last, asked a question about tourism. That emphasises the importance of the industry. How he can possibly say, when our tourist industry is vibrant and buoyant, that the Government's policy has sapped it, I find totally incomprehensible.

YTS

8. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently on YTS schemes; what percentage of trainees on YTS schemes found jobs on the expiry of their training in the latest year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: At the end of January 1988 there were 413,000 young people in training on YTS.

Results from the Manpower Services Commission's follow-up survey of YTS leavers show that, of those young

people who left YTS schemes between April 1986 and August 1987, 60 per cent. were in a job and 14 per cent. were in further training or education when surveyed within a year after leaving.

Mr. Greenway: Has my hon. Friend heard it said that YTS schemes are a source of cheap labour for employers, but do not the figures he has given deny that? Will he always ensure that the educational and training contents of schemes are well up to standard? Will he give the figures for Ealing in terms of YTS trainees in work?

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend is right to point out that some people still seek to criticise YTS by suggesting that it is no more than cheap labour for employers. Anyone in that frame of mind has only to talk to many families throughout the country to find out that that is not the position. My hon. Friend is entirely right to say that standards of training must be maintained within the YTS, and they certainly are maintained. As for his own constituency, the figures are even more encouraging than the national average. In Ealing, 64 per cent. of YTS trainees went into jobs and 14 per cent. went into some other form of training.

Ms. Short: Is the Minister not being a little smug? Should we all not be concerned if 40 per cent. of our young people are unemployed after two years' training on YTS? Given that in some parts of the country the proportion is very much higher, should not the Minister be making plans to provide work opportunities for those young people? We know that in the Minister's target group for the new adult training scheme, among 18 to 24-year-olds, 25 per cent. have O-levels, 20 per cent. have A-levels and 6 per cent. have degrees, yet they are long-term unemployed. Does the Minister not realise that what is needed is not just more training but jobs for young people so that they can make a worthwhile contribution to their local communities?

Mr. Nicholls: I might have had slightly more patience with the hon. Lady had she not used every other occasion to denigrate and rubbish the YTS scheme. The figures are an average, and obviously an average is a combination of high and low target averages. On average, more than 74 per cent. of people go on to jobs, further training or education. By definition, if they had not been on the YTS scheme, presumably they would not have been able to get a job. Both sides of the House ought to be united by the recognition of what is being done for young people, in the hon. Lady's constituency and in mine. She should welcome that, not try to rubbish it.

British Venture Capital Association

9. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to meet the chairman of the British Venture Capital Association to discuss investment in smaller business; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: I met Mr. Lionel Anthony, chairman of the British Venture Capital Association, on 18 January. We had a wide-ranging discussion on ways in which venture capital investment in smaller businesses might be further encouraged, particularly in areas outside the south-east. In addition, I spoke at the BVCA conference in Manchester on 19 February.

Mr. Rowe: Does my hon. Friend agree that the success of the Venture Capital Association and other funds, in producing more resources for smaller firms, is very much to be welcomed? Does he agree that the real anxiety centres on sums much smaller than is commonly invested by venture capital funds? Is he considering introducing, for example, an improved investment fund which would enable sums as small as £25,000 to be found for small firms that wish to expand?

Mr. Cope: I certainly agree with the first part of what my hon. Friend had to say. Britain's venture capital industry is the most advanced in Europe and has done well. On smaller amounts of finance below that provided by the venture capital industry, I remind my hon. Friend that in the first three years of the business expansion scheme half the firms involved raised amounts of less than £50,000, and nearly two thirds raised less than £100,000. We are always ready to consider further initiatives in this area.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister knows full well, if he talks to the chairman, that there is an equity gap below £250,000, according to some sources, or below £100,000 according to others. However, the fact is that after nine years of this Government there is still a great shortage of investment, particularly outside London and the south-east. Is it not about time that the hon. Gentleman talked to his opposite numbers in the Department of Trade and Industry who have recently shelved a report on innovation centres, because one of the real ways in which small industries and firms can get moving in the high-tech area is if innovation centres are bonded with the ability to provide loans and equity capital? Is it not about time that the Government and those Departments got their act together for small business?

Mr. Cope: As I have already said, I recognise the problems of raising small amounts of equity capital, but that is what the loan guarantee and the business expansion schemes, and the other schemes that we have introduced, are about. As I have said, we shall go on considering further suggestions that are made.

Small Firms Service

10. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of the small firms service.

Mr. Cope: The small firms service, through its information and counselling arms, works to promote viable and profitable small businesses. In 1986-87, in England, it handled over 283,000 inquiries and gave 38,210 counselling sessions. With the development of the local enterprise agencies, it is increasingly developing its counselling activities with established business. Copies of the annual report on the service for 1986-87 were placed in the Library in July.

Mr. Stevens: I am sure that my hon. Friend's support for small business is greatly welcome, but will he say, following his announcement that there will be direct access to the small firms computer database, how that will operate and what benefits there will be for the chambers of commerce and local enterprise agencies?

Mr. Cope: I intend as soon as possible to make this database, which the small firms service operates, available

in computerised form or hard copy form to other organisations in the small business advice area. We are working out the detailed arrangements now and I shall announce them as soon as I am able to do so. The database is already consulted by organisations such as local enterprise agencies and chambers of commerce ringing up the small firms centres. I want them to have direct access so that questions can be answered quickly, authoritatively and easily.

Mr. Bellingham: Excellent though the small firms service is, is it not the local enterprise agencies that have contacts at grass root level, so that it is imperative that they work closely together? What specific steps will my hon. Friend take to encourage close integration between the two?

Mr. Cope: We encourage close integration. The database is a further step in that direction, and, for that matter, so is the integration of counsellors, on which we have been carrying out a pilot experiment in the Yorkshire and Humberside region, which we hope to develop further throughout Britain. Many of our small firms service counsellors operate from time to time in premises supplied, for example, by local enterprise agencies, and we are keen to encourage such co-operation.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Minister agree that the small firms counselling service was started by the Labour Government? What progress has been made by the small firms service in general, against the blows produced by the Government's general economic policy, in stemming the loss of 2 million jobs in manufacturing industry since 1979 and providing jobs in small firms, for example, in engineering and machine tools? Is the small firms service making a positive contribution towards providing proper long-term jobs in the small firms sector?

Mr. Cope: I think that it makes its contribution. In the nature of things, it is very difficult to measure exactly what piece of advice led to the creation of an individual job, let alone to produce statistics overall. But certainly manufacturing, including engineering manufacturing, is well represented among the firms to which the small firms service gives advice.

Inner Cities

11. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the measures currently being taken by his Department to improve levels of employment in the inner cities.

Mr. Cope: The Department of Employment and the Manpower Services Commission provide a wide range of programmes which aim to equip individuals in inner cities and elsewhere with the skills and motivation to compete for available jobs and to stimulate enterprise and the growth of small businesses. The level of commitment is reflected in the estimated expenditure by the Department and the commission of over £1·1 billion in the areas of the 57 urban partnership authorities.

Mrs. Hicks: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the inner-city officer in the jobcentre in Wolverhampton will be concentrating his help and energy on those unemployed people in some of the most deprived areas in my constituency, such as Low Hill and Heathtown, as part of the Government's initiative in reducing inner-city deprivation?

Mr. Cope: Yes, indeed. I had the pleasure of visiting the task force in my hon. Friend's constituency in Wolverhampton recently and certainly those areas, among others in Wolverhampton, are part of his special task.

Mr. Battle: Will the Minister confirm that many of the employment opportunities to which he refers are temporary, part-time and low-paid, and create an illusion of economic prosperity, rather than the reality, for many people living in inner-city areas?

Mr. Cope: Of course many of them are part-time, but many of them are full-time.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that the inner cities could very well benefit from a substantial share in the extra revenue from tourism in this country, and what steps does he propose to take to ensure that this comes about?

Mr. Cope: We attempt to encourage tourism in all parts of the country, but my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment, the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee), who deals with tourism, has a particular interest in creating employment in this way in the inner cities.

Mr. Strang: Does the Minister accept that the need in these areas is local jobs for local people, as opposed to developments which are attractive to outsiders? When are the Government going to accept that elected local councillors have a crucial role to play in the regeneration of our inner-city areas?

Mr. Cope: We believe that co-operation between Government agencies, local authorities and the private sector is very important to the creation of local jobs. The hon. Gentleman is quite right in saying that it is local jobs that we require as much as anything, but obviously other jobs have their part to play.

Confectionery Industry

13. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate how many of those employed in the confectionery industry are full time and how many are part time.

Mr. Lee: In December 1987 there were an estimated 177,000 employees in employment in the confectionery industry, of whom 42,000 were women working part time. I regret that current estimates of the number of men working part time in this industry are not available, but in 1984 there were about 4,000.

Mr. Gregory: Does my hon. Friend agree that those figures are indeed encouraging, but that they could be increased, according to the Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Alliance, by some 2,250 if confectionery were re-rated in alliance with foods? Will he undertake to ask his right hon. Friend the Chancellor, even at this late hour, to look upon this favourably, especially since some further 6,000 people would be employed in ancillary industries?

Mr. Lee: No day of employment questions would be complete without a question from my hon. Friend about confectionery, employment and VAT. I shall certainly draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer the point made about the projections from the Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Alliance.

Mr. Janner: Does the Minister not accept that the figures for the travel-to-work areas are totally misleading, partly because the travel-to-work——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is about confectionery, I am afraid.

American Tourists

14. **Mr. Ken Hargreaves:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Employment if he will make a statement on the number of American tourists who visited the United Kingdom in 1987.

Mr. Lee: Figures for the full year are not yet available, but in the first 11 months of 1987, 3,380,000 residents from North America visited the United Kingdom. This compares with 2,672,000 in the same period of 1986 and 3,634,000 in 1985.

Mr. Hargreaves: Does my hon. Friend agree that the increase in American tourists indicates that the downturn in the value of the dollar has had little effect on the numbers visiting this country and that even more people are likely to come this year? Will he encourage American tourists by telling them that the world does not end at Watford and that there are parts of Lancashire well worth visiting, not least Hyndburn and Pendle?

Mr. Lee: As a fellow Lancastrian, may I wish my hon. Friend a reet good happy birthday? I am working closely with the North-West tourist board and Lancashire county council to encourage more tourism to Lancashire. With regard to Hyndburn and Pendle, I refer tourists to an excellent article which appeared in last month's *Lancashire Life*.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 1 March.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having meetings with Secretary Shultz and with King Hussein later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty The Queen.

Mr. Patnick: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Is she aware that because of the high non-attendance rate of patients, currently at 20 per cent., the waiting list for appointments at Sheffield's Hallamshire hospital ophthalmology, ear nose and throat clinic is now several months? That is typical. Is that something that my right hon. Friend will take into consideration during the review of the National Health Service?

The Prime Minister: I am aware that from time to time people who are called for operations do not turn up, for one reason or another. I hope that local health authorities will look into the matter. We shall, of course, have a wide-ranging review and take this into consideration. I know that some local health authorities, finding that this was a great trouble which caused operating theatre facilities and skills not to be fully used, established a list of people who could come in at short notice, and thus they have been able substantially to reduce their waiting lists and the time taken to have operations. That is a good practice.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister stand by her manifesto commitment to bring more help to low-income families?

The Prime Minister: Of course we stand by our manifesto commitment. It is only because of the excellent growth that has been achieved by the Government that we are able to do that.

Mr. Kinnock: How can the Prime Minister sustain that claim when her own Minister for Social Security and the Disabled admits that, as a consequence of the social security changes coming into effect next month, a family with one parent in work, earning £100 a week, will lose £10·15 in cash, a lone mother in full-time work earning £80 a week will lose £12·60 in cash and all families with one wage earner earning less than £140 a week will lose some money? Is this what the Prime Minister meant, when she spoke about helping low-income families?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, the overwhelming majority of low-income families will gain — *[Interruption.]* — from the social security changes. I think the right hon. Gentleman is referring to a particular list, which depends very much on whether or not they pay average rent. Many people in low-income families do not.

Mr. Kinnock: Is that all that the Prime Minister has to say to scores of thousands of people who are working, who earn relatively low incomes and who have one or two children? Are not those the very people whom the Prime Minister tells to stand on their own feet? How can they do that when she is deliberately dragging them down?

The Prime Minister: We are far from deliberately dragging those people down. They have much better prospects now, and they have had much better prospects, with increased tax thresholds, which they did not have under Labour. I am delighted, therefore, that we have a new recruit to the cause of reducing tax rates.

Mr. Boswell: Would my right hon. Friend care to tell the House how much low-income families have already benefited from the fact that tax allowances have gone up much faster than the rate of inflation?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir. We have put up the tax thresholds very much. That has been one of our priorities, as well as reducing the standard rate of income tax, all of which is very helpful, particularly to people on low incomes. I cannot go any further, for reasons of which my hon. Friend is well aware.

Mr. Molyneaux: Is the Prime Minister aware that Northern Ireland Ministers plan to introduce legislation imposing certain penalties, including contract compliance and grant denial, on firms alleged to be guilty of job discrimination? Does the Prime Minister intend to extend that legislation to the whole of the United Kingdom to satisfy the grievances, complaints and allegations of various minorities here in England?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would welcome all efforts to ensure that there is no discrimination. It should be a matter only of merit

as to who gets a particular job and I hope that he will welcome that piece of legislation for Northern Ireland very warmly.

Mr. Conway: Will my right hon. Friend arrange to have a Health Minister visit the county of Shropshire to comprehend the importance of cottage hospitals to such an immense geographic area? At the same time, will she remind those who harp on about the level of hospital spending that the Government are financing the building of a £26 million giant hospital in the centre of the county? There is no cut in health spending in Shropshire.

The Prime Minister: I congratulate the district health authority, which has such excellent results. Since we announced a review of the Health Service we have been receiving details from a considerable number of authorities which say, "We have no cuts in ward services and no cuts in beds. We are not short of money because we are managing our resources well. We have excellent capital improvement, far better than we have ever had under any previous Government. We have more money, more staff, more doctors and more nurses."

Q2. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 1 March 1988.

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Archer: Is the right hon. Lady planning to find time in her busy schedule to see a playback of the recent "World in Action" film "The Taming of the Beeb", in which she is portrayed as responding to criticism by declaring that the BBC must put its house in order? In view of the recent poll showing that the BBC is now seen as a Government poodle, is she satisfied that it has put its house in order? Is she now planning to send a similar message to the Church of England, the Bar Council, the Law Society, the British Medical Association, the British Dental Association, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and Conservative peers?

The Prime Minister: I have great faith in both the chairman and deputy chairman of the BBC.

Mr. Budgen: In view of the recent discussion about the effect of high wage settlements, will my right hon. Friend state whether it is now her view that high wage settlements are a cause of inflation, or a consequence of inflation?

The Prime Minister: High wage settlements allied to high increased productivity do not have any effect on inflation. It is not a question of a wage settlement, but of a wage settlement in relation to what is obtained for it, and I am sure that my hon. Friend is very much aware of that.

Q4. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 1 March 1988.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cran: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Europe without nuclear weapons would be very much at the mercy of the Soviet Union, particularly because of the Soviet Union's preponderance of and superiority in conventional and chemical weapons? Will she therefore give an undertaking to the House this afternoon that, when she goes to the NATO summit in Brussels at the end of this week, she will urge her colleagues not to negotiate on the question of nuclear weapons in Europe until, on the one hand, we have parity of conventional forces in Europe and, on the other hand, we have been able to obtain agreement to negotiate away chemical weapons?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend that nuclear weapons will continue to play a vital part in our defence in deterring any potential aggressor. The history of two world wars shows that conventional weapons alone are not enough to deter war. I agree with my hon. Friend that after the coming 50 per cent. reduction in strategic ballistic missiles between the United States and the Soviet Union, the next arms control that should be negotiated should be to get conventional and chemical weapons down to parity. Only then should we return to consider nuclear weapons further.

Q5. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 1 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Alton: Following the explosion at Crossmaglen last night and the revelation by Sir John Hermon that surface-to-air missiles, provided by Libya, are now in the hands of the Irish Republican Army, does the Prime Minister agree that the best way to counter terrorism is through the strengthening and consolidation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement? Does she also agree about the need to establish a joint security commission, and that justice and security must march hand in hand?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we should continue to try to achieve increased security co-operation through the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and it is in the interests of those north of the border and in the interests of the Republic south of the border to do so. I do not agree that it would be wise to set up a security commission. I believe that justice north of the border is for the United Kingdom, and south of the border for the Republic.

Mr. Sackville: Does my right hon. Friend agree that direct international flights into our regional airports are vital to the continued economic regeneration of those regions? Will she remind her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport that three American airlines have made new applications for flights into Manchester, and that those negotiations should not become buried in matters related to landing charges at Heathrow or any other matters that do not directly concern Manchester?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree that it is important, for the prosperity of regional airports and to ensure that there is not too much congestion in the south, that international flights fly straight into regional airports. My hon. Friend will be aware that we have been active in helping Manchester to get more international flights. Indeed, when I have been on overseas missions I have been active in trying to get more. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will be seeing people tomorrow about the matter that my hon. Friend has raised.

Q7. **Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 1 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Peacock: Will my right hon. Friend take the time today to consider whether an amendment might be introduced to the Local Government Bill to prevent Haringey council giving grants to a bookshop which is selling a disgusting comic called "The Scum", which mocks the death of PC Blakelock, who was killed only yards from that shop on the Broadwater farm estate?

The Prime Minister: Many people would be utterly revolted that any such thing should be on sale, let alone on sale from a bookshop which received a grant from a local authority——

Mr. Tony Banks: Is it true?

The Prime Minister: If the report is correct, many people, including, I hope, most Opposition Members, would be utterly revolted by that. What is certain is that measures in the Local Government Bill will strengthen the ban on party political propaganda at public expense and will require local authorities to take proper account of the publicity code of practice that will shortly be placed before Parliament for approval.

Mr. Frank Cook: The Prime Minister has always taken every opportunity to condemn any act of terrorism, with the notable exceptions of the invasion of Grenada — [HON. MEMBERS: "Question".] — the support for the Nicaraguan Contras and, of course, the air raid on Libya, which was launched from Alconbury and Lakenheath. In view of the recent incontrovertible evidence of South African involvement in terrorism in Angola and other front-line African states, will the Prime Minister tell the House this afternoon whether that is a form of terrorism that she condones or condemns?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is aware that one always condemns utterly terrorism and violence, wherever they occur. They are not a way of solving problems. He will also be aware that there are many peace movements under way in connection with Nicaragua. We wish them success.

Q8. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 1 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Does my right hon. Friend agree that tax harmonisation, which is being aggressively pushed by the European Commission, is not necessary for Community free trade and that, in fact, more genuine free trade has existed between states with very different taxation systems? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that tax decisions affecting this country are taken by this House?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that tax harmonisation in the European Economic Community is not necessary for the completion of the single market in 1992. With regard to VAT, there are two quite distinct cases, one under the existing law, which is a directive approved by the Labour Government in 1977 and which became the existing law of the Community—and there have been recent cases decided under that — and the other, which my hon. Friend raises, which is a possible change in the law. In this case I have made it absolutely clear that we should vote against any legislation which deprived us of the ability to make our own decisions on the future of zero-rating for value added tax. Any such change could not go through the European Council except with unanimity, so we would be in a position to determine our own future.

Rover Group

3.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Trade and Industry (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the Rover Group.

As the House is aware, it is the common objective of the Government and of the Rover Group board to work for the return of the remaining businesses to the private sector. The Rover Group chairman, Mr. Graham Day, has in recent months been considering the options for achieving this.

I should inform the House that an approach has now been received from British Aerospace plc, which has declared a serious interest in acquiring Government shareholding in Rover Group, subject to the satisfactory outcome of negotiations which are now being put in hand. British Aerospace has asked that the negotiations be on an exclusive basis, and the Government have agreed to this, provided that negotiations are concluded by the end of April. If not, we would then be free to look at other options.

I shall, of course, report the outcome of these discussions to the House at the earliest opportunity. In the meantime, I am sure that, like the Rover Group board and the Government, the House will welcome this interest.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): Does the Minister accept that his statement makes up in unexpectedness for what it lacks in industrial logic? What is the industrial logic behind such a merger? Is this not a further example of the sort of conglomerate merger which has served British industry so ill in the past?

What can British Aerospace bring to such a merger? It has no expertise in making commercial and motor vehicles, and its experience of selling into international defence markets hardly fits it to tackle the problem of selling into mass markets for motor cars.

Did the Minister take a hand in urging British Aerospace to the negotiating table? Will he explain what provision will be made to ensure a minimum British share in the joint enterprise? Will the minimum requirement for a 15 per cent. shareholding in British Aerospace, plus a golden share, together with the requirement that all directors be British citizens, be maintained in the joint enterprise? If so, what will be the position of Mr. Graham Day?

What is the significance of this merger for the link with Honda? If Honda withdrew, would British Aerospace be prepared to make up, through a capital investment programme, the deficiency that would be left? Have these developments been discussed at all with Honda? If so, what was its reaction?

Why has this statement been made only a matter of days before the Rover Group's annual results are expected, and what will happen to the Rover Group's accumulated debt if the merger goes ahead?

What guarantees will the Government obtain from British Aerospace about the maintenance of employment, about employee rights and about future investment plans for a new model range?

Does the Minister accept that there is more at stake than a clever solution to a short-term problem of his own creation? What is at stake is the viability of a fundamental British industry, the survival and future of a crucial British technology and the continuation of thousands of British jobs in the Rover Group and British Aerospace.

Mr. Clarke: What I have announced is the opening of negotiations between the board of British Aerospace and the board of the Rover Group. I prefer the industrial logic of those who will be involved in the negotiations to the so-called industrial logic of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who speaks for the Opposition. He makes a comparison between the proposed merger and some of the conglomerate mergers of the past. He is no doubt thinking back to those conglomerate mergers which were arranged by Governments of which he was a supporter, which at times led to a considerable lack of success. We have moved away from the position where politicians such as he draw their grand conclusions one way or another about the desirability of conglomerate mergers.

The proposal was no result of any urging from the Government. It arose from discussions which began last month between the board of British Aerospace and Graham Day of the Rover Group, and the Government have come to Parliament at the earliest possible stage to inform the House that the negotiations are about to start seriously.

The logic of the merger was no doubt considered by the board of British Aerospace, which has obviously decided, in the interests of its company, to make this approach. It is not a surprising combination because quite a lot of similar combinations occur in the outside world among international companies in the same area. General Motors has a stake in Hughes; Fiat has aerospace interests; Saab has aerospace interests; and, as the House probably knows, Daimler-Benz is in discussions with Messerschmitt-Bolkow-Blohm in Germany. It is for the companies to decide in the course of negotiations the extent to which their interests fit well together and their businesses will prosper.

My understanding from British Aerospace is that it is anxious to retain the services of Mr. Graham Day, but obviously at this stage he is involved with his colleagues in the Rover Group in the negotiations that are about to start.

We have informed Honda that the negotiations are about to start, by contacting the Japanese ambassador in London and by our ambassador in Japan contacting the Japanese Government. The first reaction from Honda is favourable. Certainly the Government would wish the co-operation with Honda to continue, and I believe that to be the wish of British Aerospace and the Rover Group.

The timing of the announcement was dictated by our need to inform Parliament as quickly as possible. The hon. Gentleman asked why we have made the announcement today. We made it today because it was the earliest opportunity, once we and the companies had decided that a serious process of negotiation should begin. It is as a result of those negotiations that all the other matters touched on by the hon. Gentleman will need to be addressed.

Obviously, the long-term employment prospects in the company depend on the success of the Rover business and its success in the market place. We will be in a position to judge, when the negotiations are completed, whether the merger is to proceed; we will then be in a position to judge whether it is in the interests of the business for the merger to go ahead.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I remind the House that we have a heavy day in front of us, with an adjourned debate on Irish affairs, which must end at Ten o'clock? Will hon. Members put one question at a time?

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that most sensible people will wish the negotiations well: that the long-suffering taxpayers have had to hold on and support this very expensive baby for far too long; and that the sooner the remaining 97 per cent. shareholding is returned fully to the private sector, the better it will be for everybody concerned?

Mr. Clarke: The Government have always made it clear that it is our view that the company should be returned to the private sector as soon as possible, so I agree with my hon. Friend: if the negotiations come to a successful conclusion I have no doubt that all those with a serious interest in the well-being of the British car industry will be satisfied with the outcome.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): But has the Minister forgotten that last year British Aerospace needed Government money to finance the development of the Airbus? What assurances will he request to ensure that taxpayers' money is not recycled to buy the new Rover Group?

Mr. Clarke: I am astonished that Opposition Members, who allegedly have an interest in British industry, should suddenly start making denigrating remarks about British Aerospace — the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) did that, too. British Aerospace is, I believe, the major exporter of manufactured goods from this country. It received launch aid from the Government last year as part of the launch of a new range of Airbus products. They are selling well, and it is an extraordinary reaction for the Opposition suddenly to start attacking — for some reason — the management or business prospects of one of our major industrial companies. In the end, it is for the two companies to decide for themselves what is in the best interests of their businesses; I prefer their judgment to that of those on the Opposition Front Bench or Back Benches.

Mr. Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): While welcoming the early announcement to the House and the early action being taken by the Government to return the company to private ownership as a company, may I ask the Minister to make it clear that the deadline of 30 April is only for the exclusive period of negotiations with British Aerospace and that any other offer made, before or subsequently, would have to be considered by the Government?

Mr. Clarke: That is the case. British Aerospace asked to have exclusive rights of negotiations. It was the opinion of the Rover Group board that it was in the interests of its business that there should be exclusivity in the negotiations, and the Government agree. Before any deal is finalised, if one emerges from the negotiations, we should have to consider any other offers that were forthcoming.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): British Aerospace, which must have been watching the Saab advertisements on television, might be a perfectly acceptable bidder for the Rover Group if it could put forward a reasonable scheme that will help the company, but the exclusive arrangement gives rise to many worries. Is it the Government's view that there is no other bidder around that might be able to put the British car industry on a sound footing? If there is, why should it be kept out? If there is not, why the exclusive deal?

Mr. Clarke: I share the hon. Gentleman's view that British Aerospace could be an acceptable bidder in everyone's interest — those of the taxpayer, and of Austin Rover as a business, and hence of its employees, too. Because of that, the negotiations are starting and we must all await their outcome. I have just explained to my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Miller) the background to our agreement that negotiations should be exclusively with British Aerospace at this stage. We believe that that would be in the interests of the Rover Group business in particular, and that is also the view of the board.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, contrary to the moanings of Opposition Members, there will be a feeling of excitement among the many car workers throughout the west midlands at the announcement that the negotiations are to go forward? Is he aware that they will look on this as an opportunity of bringing together two excellent engineering disciplines to make a formidable engineering force in this country, and think it will be a great opportunity for both industries?

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Where is the logic?

Mr. Clarke: I share my hon. Friend's reaction. Car workers in the west midlands will be amazed to hear a few snide remarks made about British Aerospace, coupled with cries from the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) of, "Where is the logic?" That is the Opposition's reaction to the announcement.

In other countries, these sorts of business have come together with great success. British Aerospace is seeking to diversify its business, as it showed by its successful acquisition of the ordnance factories. We must now see whether the negotiations produce an acceptable result, which we shall consider in due course.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Is it not true that the British Leyland group was a private enterprise disaster that was rescued by over £2·5 billion-worth of taxpayers' money? If the Rover Group is on the road to success, why should the taxpayers be denied the fruits of that success, having poured billions of pounds into the venture? Why should they be denied the fruits of their investment? Will the Minister say how components suppliers will be involved in these negotiations? Will they be involved in the negotiations at all? Hundreds of thousands of jobs are involved, including those at Holworth and Grandage, which is in my constituency and which supplies 95 per cent. of the Rover Group's pistons? Will it be told to stand on the sidelines while a large part of its market is frittered away in these negotiations?

Mr. Clarke: It is true that the company has lost an enormous amount of money over recent years, and there are accumulated trading losses on its books. I trust that the hon. Gentleman is glad to see that the financial position of the Rover Group is improving. As he knows, towards the end of last year it announced that it expected to declare a trading profit for the financial year ending in 1987.

[Mr. Clarke]

Negotiations are now going on about the commercial future of the company. Obviously, we must see where those negotiations lead. A deal will be concluded satisfactorily if something emerges that is in the interests of the Rover Group and British Aerospace, and therefore of all those whose interests depend on it.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that today's announcement is a reflection of the achievement of management and workers at British Aerospace, who have enabled the company, post-privatisation, to be able to declare such an interest?

Mr. Clarke: Certainly — British Aerospace has been doing extremely well. It is one of this country's blue chip companies that should expect the support of hon. Members in its present business activities. If it puts together a good deal, it should expect that support for its continuing activities as a major manufacturing company.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): Will the Minister accept that the concern of Labour Members and the workers who will be affected in the car and aerospace industries is about the capital for development for car models and aerospace projects for the future? What guarantees will the Minister be seeking as an outcome of these negotiations to ensure the future of models and jobs at Cowley, Longbridge and other plants?

Mr. Clarke: It is obviously the responsibility of those engaged in the management of a company to consider the future capital needs of the business and how they intend to meet them. No doubt the management will be addressing those problems in the course of these negotiations. The capital needs of businesses of this kind are best served when they are in the private sector competing successfully as private sector companies. No doubt the future capital needs of both businesses will be very much in the minds of those taking part in the discussions that are about to start.

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): Will my right hon. and learned Friend comment further on the complementary skills that this merger might bring after successful negotiations? Will he comment on the help that it will give component manufacturers supplying British Aerospace and Austin Rover, such as those based in Coventry and Birmingham, which are now being helped by the upturn in the economy?

Mr. Clarke: Obviously, it is for British Aerospace to explain its judgment that there is a clear relationship between the two businesses and that they could successfully complement each other. I know from my contacts that British Aerospace believes that to be the case. It thinks that it is a good opportunity to diversify, and that there is a great deal of synergy between the engineering skills used by both companies. They are both major manufacturers of engineered products, and in other countries similar groups seem to have sat together very well. We must wait to see whether a successful negotiation can be concluded to bring the two companies together on acceptable terms.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Is it not clear that, despite the Government's climbdown of a couple of years ago, Mr. Graham Day was brought in by the Government more as an undertaker than a physiotherapist, to prepare for the privatisation of the Rover Group? One of the key preparations for that privatisation occurred last year when he authorised the theft of £80 million of workers' deferred wages from the pension fund to make the balance sheet look more attractive for this bid from British Aerospace. To repeat the question that some of my hon. Friends have asked, what guarantees will the Minister seek from British Aerospace for continuity of employment? Experience of Leyland privatisations in Coventry at Self-Changing Gears, Alvis and Climax shows that workers have paid the price in unemployment.

Mr. Clarke: Graham Day was brought into British Leyland because of his considerable and undoubted managerial and business skills. His managerial skills and those of his team are one of the assets of the company and will no doubt be considered by the other company expressing an interest in acquiring it. I should certainly very much prefer Graham Day, with his judgment and skills, to anyone who might be appointed by Opposition Members on the advice of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) to take over responsibility for a major industrial company.

In this industry, as in any other, continuity of employment depends on success in the market place; as my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) pointed out, those who depend on the companies for their business well-being are going through a very satisfactory time.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Will my right hon. and learned Friend remember that commercial logic as exemplified by the Labour party's policy includes Meriden and Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, and forcing Bristol Commercial Vehicles into the hands of British Leyland, which promptly closed it down? Does he not agree that it is regrettable that Opposition Members seek to denigrate British Aerospace—a company that produces goods that the world wants to buy and employs many thousands of our constituents?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend, and we must never return to the days when politicians decided that their judgments of commercial logic made more sense than those of business men and tried to draw companies together. We are now witnessing a knee-jerk reaction from Opposition Members. They are scratching about to try to find criticisms of British Aerospace to put a damper on the negotiations. We shall leave the negotiations to take their course. In the end, our decision will be based on a judgment of the best interests of taxpayer, business and employee.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): The only reason why we are discussing Austin Rover is that public money kept volume car production going in that company. Furthermore, the Minister will recall that only last week his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who is sitting beside him, reminded the House that nearly £3 billion of taxpayers' money went to support Austin Rover. What guarantee can the Minister give that the taxpayer will get a decent return on the money invested before the company is privatised?

Mr. Clarke: We shall have to await the results of the negotiations. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that when the negotiations are concluded we shall have to ensure that the interests of the taxpayer are properly protected.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): How?

Mr. Clarke: We shall accept an offer for the Government's shares only if we are satisfied that the taxpayers' interests are protected. In measuring those interests, one needs to consider the value of the business now. It is an extraordinary proposition to look back over the years and say that, because £2·9 billion was lost and had to be found by the taxpayer when that sum would otherwise have gone into public services of one kind or another, that is somehow a measure of the value of the business today. I invite the hon. Gentleman to reflect on the position and to accept my undertaking that, when the negotiations are concluded and a proposition is put to us, we shall ensure that the taxpayers' proper interests are safeguarded.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): If the discussions with British Aerospace did not come off, would the Government welcome a further approach from Ford or General Motors for the Rover Group?

Mr. Clarke: At the moment, we have agreed to negotiate only with British Aerospace. Obviously, if other companies come forward with propositions, we shall consider the options before us and, after the period of exclusivity that has been agreed—if the matter is still open—we shall consider whatever options are available.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the denigration of British Aerospace by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) is unlikely to strike a chord with the Tornado workers in Lancashire, who are working on a £5 billion Tornado contract won by British Aerospace? Surely all those in the defence industry recognise the expertise of British Aerospace and that we are now the third biggest manufacturer of defence equipment in the world. That is something from which the car industry, of which British Leyland is part, will benefit considerably.

Mr. Clarke: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, and I share his surprise. I suspect that the reaction of Leyland workers will be similar to his and mine when they consider British Aerospace as prospective bidder for their business. It is one of our flagship companies and the major exporter of manufactured goods from this country. It is extraordinary for Opposition Members to imply that it is not a welcome suitor for an extremely important car business.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Minister reflect on the particular problem of the Rover-owned huge British Leyland site at Bathgate, which until 10 years ago was the biggest machine shop under one roof in Europe? To try to solve that difficult problem, would the Minister arrange for staff from his Department to meet British Aerospace, Rover, West Lothian district council and Lothian regional council before the buildings deteriorate any further?

Mr. Clarke: Bathgate stands rather as a monument to past political decisions on investment made by people who share the industrial logic of Opposition Members. I agree, however, that its closure was something of a disaster, and the redevelopment of the site and the establishment of new industry and employment for the people of the area is extremely important. That is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, but my understanding is that there is indeed a prospect of redevelopment of the former site. I shall check that information, and perhaps my right hon. and learned Friend will be in touch with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that many people, particularly in the west midlands, will be saying that, if the £2·9 billion that was handed out as a subsidy to keep the ailing Rover Group going finds its way into the pockets of the new group — *[Interruption.]* It will do so eventually. Is the Minister aware that those people may well say that they ought to have some of the money for the National Health Service in the west midlands?

Is the Minister further aware that, if British Aerospace could be fattened up with £400 million before it was sold off, some people might also say that, if they are going to build one of those gull-wing cars, they ought to be asking John De Lorean for some advice?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman must realise that the £2·9 billion is not sitting there as some kind of nest egg put carefully aside by the taxpayer. It has all been lost.

Mr. Corbett: A lot of people want it back.

Mr. Clarke: A lot of people who have lost money want it back, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) points out. But, sad to say, it is not there to be got back. The people of the midlands, as the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has said, will no doubt reflect on what might have happened if the money had been available for the Health Service, or indeed for many other purposes.

The point of our present position is that Britain's industrial economy is reviving. The Rover Group is reporting improved financial prospects. We have a negotiation in hand that may lead to the return of the Rover Group to the private sector. All this is opening up the prospect of our never again putting taxpayers' money down the drain in the way that we did in the past, to the tune of £2·9 billion.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall endeavour to call hon. Members who have been standing, if they are brief, but I think that we must end these questions by 4.15.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Given the excellent track record of British Aerospace, and despite what has just been said, will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that this is potentially excellent news for the west midlands? Is he aware that it is very important that the Rover Group should survive, not least because of the car components industry in the centre of England?

Mr. Clarke: I can assure my hon. Friend that everyone in the Government realises the key importance of the Rover Group to the economy of the west midlands. Our desire throughout has been to try to create a climate in which the Rover Group can return to profitability in due course, and be successful as a car manufacturer. We shall look at the deal from the point of view of the interests of the taxpayer, those of the Rover Group business and everything that flows from that.

It must indeed be very good news in the west midlands that the Rover Group is regarded as a potentially attractive acquisition by British Aerospace, and that serious negotiations can now begin.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): As the satisfied owner of two Austin Rover motor cars—a

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

rarity in the House, perhaps—and also as a pilot, may I say to my right hon. and learned Friend what an ideal merger this seems to me? Does he not agree that the financial strength of British Aerospace, its international marketing expertise and its engineering excellence make it not only the ideal but the No. 1 partner for Austin Rover?

Mr. Clarke: That is certainly the view of the British Aerospace board, and of the Rover Group. I agree that the sales record of Airbus in the civil sector, and that of British Aerospace in the military sector, show that the company is indeed attractive, and that we in this country should be proud of it.

We shall wait to see whether the merger takes place. In other countries, however, mergers between companies of this kind have been successful. I do not think that when General Motors and the Hughes Corporation of America joined up they were impeded by Socialist members of Congress crying out about the industrial logic.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the Rover Group does not have a cat in hell's chance of succeeding as a separate, individual private company? Will my right hon. and learned Friend explain to the Opposition that the £2·9 billion has gone for ever and that the company can only succeed in the future either under the umbrella of another established company or by being irrevocably linked with the taxpayer's pocket? If the merger talks do not succeed, will my right hon. and learned Friend look actively for other partners to take part in negotiations, so that the Rover Group will have a real chance of an independent future?

Mr. Clarke: I am extremely interested in the views of my hon. Friend, who has a considerable knowledge of the car industry and engineering generally. It is certainly true that British Aerospace is small in comparison with the companies with which it competes — McDonnell Douglas, Boeing, Lockheed and so on. Rover Group is also quite a small company compared with its competitors in western Europe and elsewhere. No doubt size was one of the factors which led the two companies to contemplate entering into the present negotiations. I agree with my hon. Friend that the £2·9 billion has gone and it is a mark of past losses. We do not wish to see any repetition of that scale of loss-making.

Mr. Philip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Is it not a tiny little bit ironic that the Opposition Front Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), should be whining about supposedly Government-inspired megamergers, when it was a Labour Government in the 1960s who forced together BMC and Leyland in the first place? Does my right hon. and learned Friend not prefer the industrial logic and experience of business men and industrialists to the ludicrous lack of logic of Opposition Members, most of whom have had no industrial experience whatever?

Mr. Clarke: I am entirely horrified by the prospect of the hon. Members for Dagenham and for Great Grimsby getting their heads together and deciding what suitable partners, if any, they would choose for the company. I agree with my hon. Friend that the method that we are now adopting, which is to see how commercial negotiations proceed between the boards of the two companies, is a far more satisfactory route.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Is it not thoroughly good news that Rover may be teaming up with a British company which spends millions of pounds every year on research and development and which can attach the same importance to the technology of Rover's product development?

Mr. Clarke: It is thoroughly good news, and the deafening silence now apparent on the Opposition Benches suggests that that thought may have occurred to them after the first rather reckless 10 minutes.

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn, Hatfield): Will my right hon. and learned Friend——

Mr. Nellist: What about the pensions?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has asked his question. He may not have had it fully answered, but he has asked it.

Mr. David Evans: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that this is very exciting and positive news? British Aerospace management has the capability and expertise to design, manufacture and sell in major world markets and it will, I hope, make Rover Group a most successful company, certainly equal to British Aerospace.

Mr. Clarke: That certainly could be the outcome of negotiations. I agree with my hon. Friend that, if negotiations come to a successful conclusion, it could represent the beginning of an extremely exciting phase in the business of both companies.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for coming to the House so early to make this announcement. Does he agree that the application of British Aerospace technology and quality control will do much to enhance the recovery of the Rover Group? Does he also agree that the prospects of merger create exciting prospects for employment? As robotics reduces the demand for labour in the car industry, that skilled labour can be actively and beneficially redeployed within the aerospace industry.

Mr. Clarke: As I understand it, British Aerospace is also interested in some of the engineering skills within the Rover Group. What the two companies are exploring is, I believe, the extent to which there is—to use the in phrase—natural synergy between the two businesses that could benefit the companies and prospects for employment within them.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that one of the disadvantages of a board choosing its own bidder is that board members can secure their own positions? Does he agree that the Rover Group board has not exactly covered itself with glory? Would it be an advantage to allow the market to decide —in other words to allow all comers to make a bid at this stage?

Mr. Clarke: In the end, the Government are the owner of 99·8 per cent. of the shares, and we shall have to make our judgment about the sale of the shares subject to the outcome of the negotiations. We will do that at the proper time. I have already said that, if other people wish to come forward with proposals at this time, we shall have to

consider them before we come to any final decision. If the current negotiations are unsuccessful, it remains the committed policy of the Government to return the Rover Group to the private sector during the lifetime of this Parliament. If the negotiations are successful, privatisation may come about very early in the lifetime of this Parliament; I am sure that my hon. Friends will welcome that.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, in any deal that may be struck with British Aerospace or any other suitor, an important feature for the taxpayer and the Government should be to ensure that contingent or direct liabilities currently falling upon the taxpayer are removed from the public sector?

Mr. Clarke: Once the business is privatised, we would obviously not be incurring any future liabilities from it. That should come as a considerable relief to the taxpayer, bearing in mind the history of the company, of which, surprisingly enough, Opposition Members keep reminding us during these exchanges.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): To what extent would the pension fund contribution to the balance sheet—referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist)—be a consideration for those who might be interested in this particular deal?

Mr. Clarke: At the moment, what I have announced is the opening of negotiations. The balance sheet is one of those things that must be looked at during the course of negotiations. To the best of my knowledge and belief, no asset in the pension fund played a significant part in the approach from British Aerospace.

Mr. Pat Wall (Bradford, North): Will the Minister, who trumpets the revival of British industry the day after a £950 million deficit in the balance of payments, explain in more detail his attitude to the use of £80 million of the workers' pension fund to dress up the books of part of a company that had to be rescued from private enterprise in 1975? The books were dressed up to make the company more attractive for privatisation. Will the Minister give a guarantee that when he approves any merger, if it takes place, the workers' pension fund will not be used again for such activity?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman must take up the question of the accounts and the pension fund arrangements with the management of the Rover Group. A pension fund, accumulated as a result of the contributions from the employer and the employee, is used to defray the pension obligations that have been incurred by the company. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, in recent years, a number of pension funds have been in surplus. As far as I am aware, the Rover Group has not done anything with its pension fund surplus that is out of line with commercial practice in other companies.

Mr. Gould: Is it not totally unsatisfactory that, throughout the past 37 minutes, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has disclaimed any responsibility for the outcome of the negotiations that he has announced today? Does he not accept that it is not just a matter of market forces and private negotiation? The Government, as the virtual sole owner of the Rover Group, cannot simply shuffle off their responsibilities in this way. Bearing that in mind, what responsibilities does he acknowledge, and how does he propose to discharge them, with regard to such items as the maintenance of employment, the protection of employee rights, including the pension rights mentioned by my hon. Friends, and the crucial maintenace of an investment programme for new models? Does the Minister intend at this stage to wash his hands of those questions, or will he now face up to his responsibilities?

Mr. Clarke: What I have announced today is that serious negotiations are about to start. I have not sought to anticipate the course of those negotiations. Obviously the Government will not come to a judgment about the outcome of the negotiations until they have made more progress and they have been completed.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Where is the logic in that?

Mr. Clarke: We have the logic mentioned again by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby.

The hon. Member for Dagenham appears to believe that, once we announced the start of negotiations, he, in his wisdom, together with his hon. Friends, should immediately start jumping to their conclusions about various aspects that may or may not be raised. I believe that the Government have acted with the utmost propriety by notifying the House straight away that negotiations are about to start. We are waiting to see what those negotiations will produce and we will judge them at the right time. We shall judge them according to the interests of the taxpayer, Rover Group business and its employees. That is the proper way to proceed. All those who want to behave with a sense of responsibility and who have the genuine interests of the Rover Group and British Aerospace at heart should behave in the same way. I hope that, on reflection, the Opposition will do so.

Cervical Cancer (Testing and Treatment)

4.9 pm

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a body known as the National Cervical Cancer Service, which will be responsible within the National Health Service, for managing a national system for making cervical cancer tests available once every three years to all women aged between 20 and 65 years, and for supervising the provision of treatment for cervical cancer; to provide for the making of tests by doctors acceptable to the women concerned; to provide through the National Cervical Cancer Service for action to make women aware of the need for such tests; and for purposes connected therewith.

The Bill would require the establishment of a nationally managed computer-based system of testing for, and the subsequent swift treatment of, cervical cancer for all women between the ages of 20 and 65, for all women to be tested once every three years, and for that service to be adequately and fully funded by the DHSS.

The Bill is simple, but it could virtually eliminate 2,000 needless deaths of women throughout the United Kingdom every year. I know that women in my constituency are dying needlessly of cervical cancer. It is certain that women are dying needlessly in every constituency in the United Kingdom, as 2,000 women every year die of cervical cancer, although, detected in its early stages, it can almost always be cured completely.

The smear test is simple, only slightly uncomfortable for the women concerned and can be carried out by a GP or a trained nurse. The resultant smear is captured on a glass slide and sent for analysis to a cytopathology laboratory. Examination there can reveal that a patient has nothing to worry about or that she should report to the appropriate hospital for straightforward treatment that almost always results in a complete cure.

It is a public scandal that women have to wait five months for colposcopy clinical tests and nine months for laser tests for that treatment. Despite that comparatively simple cycle of test and treatment, some 2,000 women die of cervical cancer every year in Britain.

Investigation shows that more than 60 per cent. of those who die have never had a cervical smear test. Obviously, the current system is not working, although the Government aim for the testing of every woman in the United Kingdom between the ages of 20 and 65 once every five years. The cost of carrying that out effectively is estimated at some £30 million, and it should give 70 per cent. protection to those at risk. However, testing the same age range of women once every three years would give 90 per cent. protection and would cost only £20 million more.

That is a small cost, by comparison with a weapons system, which we should hardly begrudge a vital area of preventive medicine. Such a screening policy almost certainly could be implemented within the existing National Health Service budget if the screening programme were to effectively managed on a national scale, supported by compatible computer sytems in doctors's surgeries and in FPCs and cytopathology laboratories equipped with specifically designed information technology systems.

Currently, the British programme is not effective because the majority of smears have been taken from women in the lower-risk categories. That is because most smears are taken during obstetric and contraceptive consultations which normally arise in the cases of women under the age of 40, the age group least at risk.

The five-year gap between screenings, the poor management of call-recall systems, the reliance upon manual records instead of computerised systems, the reluctance of many GPs to carry out preventive medicine, the natural fear of women faced with the word "cancer" and poor eductional programmes, all lead to women neglecting or forgetting to obtain a smear test.

However, the computerisation of family practitioner committee lists and of some GPs' patient records means that an operational database is being built up, but it is taking place in a piecemeal, undirected fashion which negates its potential. For the scheme to work successfully, there needs to be a nationwide scheme based upon compatible computer systems with common operating standards and management procedures.

There is also a need to equip cytopathology laboratories in every health authority with specific computer systems that will handle all data arising out of the prevention of cervical pre-cancer and will embrace fine needle aspiration cytology, endoscopic "brushes" and general cytology such as sputum and other body fluid samples. Such a computer system should be capable of being extended to handle breast data. Those systems should interact with the FPC computer systems.

So far, less than 25 per cent. of Britain's 200 cytopathology laboratories are equipped with adequate computer systems. That lack of provision seriously hampers the successful operation of Britain's national screening programme and contributes significantly to the figure of 2,000 women dying needlessly every year.

The Government appear to believe that they have done all that is necessary by at long last computerising FPCs. However, because of the Government's negative attitude towards funding, FPCs have been unable to recruit and maintain staff of a standard high enough to deal effectively with the vast data handling. Existing patient records have a serious error rate of 30 per cent. Data entry is likely to be slow and to require constant revalidation. FPCs are commending call programmes without reference to existing GP-based systems in their areas. That causes repetition of testing and alarm to women recently tested by their GPs.

Furthermore, the FPC computer systems have not been designed to handle interaction with a cytopathology laboratory computer system. In due time, and with improved management, all those barriers to a successful call-recall system may be overcome, but it could take several years—an unacceptable delay, considering those 2,000 needless deaths every year.

Current cytopathology laboratory computer systems, such as the one already operating at Southampton's general hospital can handle call-recall systems via GPs and, keep FPCs informed so that records can be updated. They can do that in addition to their laboratory-related work.

In order to increase the productivity of all United Kingdom cytopathology laboratories so that none fails to meet the Government guideline of turning round smear screenings in under a month, and so that significant improvements in the call-recall system can be achieved prior to the eventual tardy implementation of the national FPC system, the Government should establish a body entitled the national cervical cancer testing service.

That body should be established under the authority of the Department of Health and Social Security, which will have responsibility for establishing, managing and implementing a nationwide common system for the testing for cervical cancer once every three years of all women between the ages of 20 and 65. That service would be responsible for ensuring that all women whose health was found to be at risk would receive adequate and timely treatment.

That body would be charged with meeting the following basic requirements: the provision of adequate resources for taking, examining and reporting on cervical smears and the provision of adequate, computer-based clerical systems for the making and keeping of examination appointments.

In Scandinavia, it is national policy to treat all symptoms of illness detected during screening for cervical cancer even if they are not cancerous conditions. That has raised the general health level of women considerably.

The Government have given guidance in their new DHSS health circular issued on 12 January 1988 that their objective is to reduce mortality from cervical cancer by regularly screening all women at risk to identify and treat conditions that might otherwise develop into cancer. It goes on to ask district and regional health authorities to implement the circular's provisions.

As usual, the Government are long on exhortation and short on properly financed action. I remind those Ministers responsible that each of the 2,000 needless deaths of women each year costs the United Kingdom some £15,000. That sum does not take into account the considerable additional costs that arise in state support——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman now bring his remarks to an end?

Mr. Wray: If humanitarian grounds do not move the Administration, perhaps the prospect of financial savings will. I beg my colleagues to support the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Jimmy Wray, Ms. Joan Ruddock, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Ms. Harriet Harman, Ms. Clare Short, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Alfred Morris, Mr. Eddie Loyden, Mr. Jimmy Hood, Mr. Don Dixon, Dr. Lewis Moonie and Mr. Alan Meale.

Cervical Cancer (Testing and Treatment)

Mr. Jimmy Wray accordingly presented a Bill to establish a body known as the National Cervical Cancer Service, which will be responsible within the National Health Service, for managing a national system for making cervical cancer tests available once every three years to all women aged between 20 and 65 years, and for supervising the provision of treatment for cervical cancer; to provide for the making of tests by doctors acceptable to the women concerned; to provide through the National Cervical Cancer Service for action to make women aware of the need for such tests; and for purposes connected therewith. And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 13 May and to be printed. [Bill 107.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting—

(1) notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (1) (b) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), if proceedings on the draft Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 and 1987 (Continuance) Order 1988 have not been previously disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at Ten o'clock put the Question thereon; and

(2) Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the Motion in the name of Mr. Secretary King relating to the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 with the substitution of One o'clock, or three hours after it has been entered upon, whichever is the later, for the provisions in paragraph (1) (b) of the Standing Order.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

Unemployment Benefit

4.21 pm

The Minister for Social Security and the Disabled (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I beg to move,

That the draft Unemployment Benefit (Disqualification Period) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 19th February, be approved.

As the House will be aware, disqualification for unemployment benefit in various circumstances that are broadly termed "voluntary unemployment" has been part of the unemployment insurance scheme since 1911. Originally, disqualification was set at a maximum of six weeks and the Social Security Act 1975 maintained that figure while retaining the principle as well. However, the period was extended to a maximum of 13 weeks in 1986.

The present draft order has one clear purpose. It extends from 13 weeks to 26 weeks the maximum period during which someone may be disqualified for receiving unemployment benefit if his unemployment is brought about by his own action or failure.

Undoubtedly someone who is in whole or in part responsible for his lack of work should not be able freely to draw benefit. Under current legislation, a person may be disqualified from receiving unemployment benefit for a maximum of 13 weeks in various circumstances that are generally termed "voluntary unemployment". As I announced to the House on 10 November, we now intend to strengthen that sanction.

We propose to extend the period to a maximum of 26 weeks. At the same time, we are amending the regulations relating to members of the armed forces to bring them into line. They contain a provision whereby a person who was a serving member of the forces is disqualified from benefit for a fixed period if he is discharged, cashiered or otherwise dismissed. If the House approves the order, that period will cease to be fixed and will become a maximum of 26 weeks.

We also intend to continue the position that someone who is disqualified from receiving benefit in any of those circumstances will have any income support to which he may be due reduced for the same period. The relevant legislation for this will be introduced shortly with other income support changes in amendments to the Income Support (General) Regulations. I stress that in all those situations the 26-week period that I have mentioned will be the maximum that can be imposed.

As the law stands at the moment, a person is disqualified from receiving unemployment benefit if he loses a job through misconduct or leaves one voluntarily without just cause, or if he refuses a suitable job vacancy, fails to take advantage of a reasonable opportunity of receiving approved training or fails, without good cause, to carry out official recommendations to help him to find suitable employment. The current Employment Bill provides for the circumstances of disqualification to be extended to people who have lost a place on an approved training scheme through misconduct or have left such a place voluntarily without good cause and also to those who refuse without good cause to apply for or accept such a place.

In any case of voluntary unemployment, if a claim for supplementary benefit is made, entitlement is reduced, normally by deducting 40 per cent. from the claimant's personal benefit rate. Amounts for dependants are not so reduced. The deduction is at the lesser rate of 20 per cent. if any member of the household is either pregnant or seriously ill and the claimant's capital does not exceed £100. The £100 capital limit is being raised to £200 with the introduction of income support in April.

The maximum period for disqualification for the various situations of "voluntary unemployment" was increased to 13 weeks in October 1986. However, for people leaving the armed services, there was no such change. For them the period has remained at six weeks. People leaving the armed forces are not, and never have been, subject to a penalty for leaving voluntarily. Nor has the period of disqualification for people dismissed from the armed forces ever been other than a fixed period penalty, leaving no room for former service men to show good reasons for the imposition of a lesser disqualification period. Following discussion with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, we have decided that, in equity, former members of the forces should be subject to the same maximum—and flexible—penalty as other people.

The House will wish to know why, having increased the maximum period of disqualification to 13 weeks in 1986, we are now introducing a further increase. A main purpose of the voluntary unemployment sanctions is to discourage people from acting in a way which leaves them unnecessarily without work and a charge on the public purse. There will, I imagine, be few who will quarrel with the general principle.

Following the 1986 change, one would have expected the percentage of unemployed people claiming benefit in situations of "voluntary unemployment" to have fallen. On the contrary, the absolute number of instances where a disqualification or deduction was imposed rose, and that was at a time when, because of a strengthening economy, there was much work around and total claims for benefit from unemployed people were dropping significantly. The Government have concluded that more effective measures are required to discourage voluntary unemployment. Hence the increased maximum period that we are proposing.

Disqualifications are not imposed indiscriminately. Decisions on unemployment benefit and on the circumstances to which a disqualification or benefit deduction should be made are, as hon. Members on both sides of the House well know, taken by independent adjudicating authorities. The adjudication officers are the first tier of those authorities. Decisions are reached on the basis of applying the legislation governing the benefit, and the relevant case law, built up over the years, to the circumstances of the individual case. In ascertaining the facts, inquiries are made of the former employer, and the claimant is given the chance to comment on the employer's statement and to offer his own account of events.

The length of any disqualification is for the adjudication officer to decide. The chief adjudication officer's advice to local adjudication officers is that in each case

"a sensible discretion has to be exercised in such manner as the justice of the case requires. All the circumstances must be taken into account."

He also points out:

"the statutory authorities have a complete, unfettered discretion, provided it is exercised judicially."

Anyone who is dissatisfied with an adjudication officer's decision has the right of appeal to an independent

social security appeal tribunal, and from there, on a point of law, to a social security commissioner. In view of the quite proper independence of the adjudicating authorities, neither I nor any other Minister or departmental official can influence or interfere with their decisions.

This is a long-standing adjudication system which people who have experience of it believe to work well. We are not proposing any changes in the way in which the benefits will be administered or the decisions taken. Matters will still be decided by the independent adjudicating officers and there will still be the right of appeal against an adverse decision to an independent tribunal. Appeals can be taken on the length of a disqualification period as well as on the imposition of any period at all. All we are proposing now is to increase the maximum period for which the adjudicating authorities can impose a disqualification.

It is obviously not right, and never has been, under a Government of either party, that someone should be able to draw benefit without penalty if his unemployment is due to some action or omission on his part for which he has no acceptable reason. Someone dissatisfed with a job should not give it up lightly and expect to receive benefit. He or she should do everything reasonable to avoid becoming a charge on public funds, funds which are contributed to by many others who may be equally concerned to better their situation but who avoid precipitate or irresponsible action.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Knowing people who, in past years, have suffered from this sort of thing, could I ask the hon. Gentleman to explain precisely what he means when he says that a person should not lightly give up a job? Does he honestly believe that an ordinary working person who has to live on a weekly income gives up a job lightly? Could it not be that someone is working under very bad conditions? The employer might say that they are good conditions, but that worker cannot tolerate them any longer; so he leaves the job and finds himself in this situation.

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman is going back to the principle which, if he was here at the beginning of my remarks, he will remember I said has been established since 1911. Other amendments to it have been introduced. A reduction in social security benefits was introduced by the Labour Government in 1948. The principle has not been challenged before.

Mr. Heffer *rose*——

Mr. Scott: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will restrain himself for a moment. The principle is not at issue, and that is what the hon. Gentleman has raised. The point that we are discussing today is the maximum period that adjudicating officers ought to impose in a situation in which voluntary unemployment takes place. The hon. Gentleman seems to me to be challenging the principle, and I do not believe that that is at issue. What we are arguing about today is whether it is right that this period should be extended from 13 weeks to 26 weeks at a time when unemployment has been consistently falling for many months, opportunities for employment are growing, and yet the incidence of unemployment has been growing. In those circumstances, I believe that the Government are justified in taking this step.

Mr. Heffer: He does not understand.

Mr. Scott: Of course I understand.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): The Minister has now said twice that, since the increase to 13 weeks was made, the number of those registering as voluntarily unemployed has increased. He will be aware of the answer that was given in the House only last month, which showed that, in the first three quarters after the increase to 13 weeks, there was a steady decline in the number held to be voluntarily unemployed, from 113,000 in the first quarter to 98,000 four quarters later. The numbers are reducing, not going up, and the Minister really cannot mislead the House twice in the same speech.

Mr. Scott: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not accuse me of misleading the House, but will listen quietly for a moment while I explain to him exactly what the figures are.

A parliamentary question was answered and it was, in a sense, quite right to suggest that during the period covered by that answer the figures had been falling. Nevertheless, the aggregate over the three quarters since the maximum period was increased from six to 13 weeks had increased compared with the same period a year earlier. Over the nine months from October 1985, there were 306,000 disqualifications, compared with 310,000 in the corresponding nine months from October 1986. That shows an increase of just under 2 per cent. As I say, that has to be set against the background of the drop in unemployment, the increase in the number of vacancies, and therefore the increasing opportunities for employment. Disqualifications have therefore risen over that period from 8 per cent. to 9 per cent. of the total claims for that period.

Mr. Cook: Is the Minister seriously telling the House that we have to impose this 100 per cent. increase in the period of disqualification because of a mere 2 per cent. increase in the numbers registering as voluntarily unemployed—an increase of a mere 5,000 out of a total of 300,000? If that is the best that the Minister can do, he might as well pack up now and withdraw this order.

Mr. Scott: For the quarters referred to by the hon. Gentleman, the increase in the percentage of claims where disqualification applied was 26 per cent. That is the figure that he ought to have in his mind. Perhaps he would go back to his books and check the figures.

Mr. Cook: It is not; it is——

Mr. Scott: It is 26 per cent.

Mr. Cook: The Minister must not mislead the House. No figures have been introduced, either by the Secretary of State in Committee or in Written Answers, that suggest the increase of 26 per cent. to which the Minister is referring. He must produce an entirely different set of figures, which will be wholly incompatible with answers given in the House by his colleagues.

Mr. Scott: The increase was in the proportion of the cases in which disqualification was applied and therefore the independent adjudicating authority made a judgment that voluntary unemployment took place. That is the basis of the figure, and that is the principle on which this has been operated for many years under both Governments. The hon. Gentleman cannot duck away from that.

The whole House recognises that unemployed people face considerable difficulties, even in an expanding jobs

[Mr. Scott]

market such as we have at the moment. Our aim as a Government is to respond constructively and positively to the task of helping the unemployed back to work. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment is developing major initiatives in the area of employment and training to help people to find jobs and guide them to the training and other opportunities that will enable them to return to employment. It surely makes sense—perhaps I can even carry the Opposition Front Bench with me on this – to ensure that the benefit system does not offer people an acceptable alternative o' unemployment benefit when useful training or employment is available to them. It is important to continue to discourage voluntary unemployment, and the purpose of this order is to do just that. I commend the order to the House.

4.36 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): In the six months for which I have held this Opposition brief, I have never taken so much pleasure in rising to oppose an order in the House. I regard this order as brutal and vindictive, and the Minister's speech as intellectually indolent and morally in a state of paralysis.

This is not a fringe matter; 400,000 people suffer from this rule every year. That is a number equivalent to the population of Edinburgh or Bristol. Most of those who have the rule applied to them lose all entitlement to benefit. A minority succeed in getting social security benefit in place of unemployment benefit, and they then have 40 per cent. of that social security docked for the period of the penalty. What makes these numbers so scandalous is that there is clear evidence that in the majority of the cases the rule is applied in error.

Let me put the debate in perspective by talking not about numbers but about individual cases—and I hope that the House will acquit me of any abuse of my privilege on the Front Bench if I begin by referring to a constituency case that I dealt with just before Christmas. It concerned a constituent who was a bus driver in a company which had been privatised by the Government. He had been encouraged, under his right to buy, to purchase his public sector house. He was clearly a man of our time in a company which had been privatised, buying his public sector house.

That man found, because his overtime was cut, that he could not afford his mortgage payments. He therefore decided, rather than lose the house wen he was threatened with repossession, to pay the mortgage and not pay his rates. The local authority took action to enforce payment of the rates. They arrested his wages. The bus company, as a matter of principle, will not employ people who have their rates arrested. They dismissed him. When he turned up to claim unemployment benefit, it was withheld for 13 weeks on the ground that he had been dismissed for industrial misconduct.

Is the Minister prepared to justify that case? Is he prepared to say that the rule was properly applied in that case? Is he prepared to say that it is that sort of case that he has in mind when he comes to the House to double the penalty period to 26 weeks?

Hon. Members will have had circulated to them the document prepared by the Low Pay Unit on the basis of similar cases which have been sent to them by citizens advice bureaux throughout the country. Let me share with the House two such cases.

In the east midlands, a 17-year-old man resigned because he was expected to work over 12 hours per day, seven days per week. The adjudication officer imposed a four-week disqualification for leaving his job voluntarily. Is the Minister prepared to defend that case? Is he prepared to say that that is a case in which the penalty period should be doubled? Before he does so, I must tell him that it is an offence under the Factories Act 1961 to expect a person of that age to work those hours. Yet when that young man gave up the job, he incurred a penalty in the withdrawal of benefit.

One other case, from the same document, referred to a Buckinghamshire woman who was advised by her doctor to give up her job, which involved heavy lifting, following the threat of a miscarriage. She was disqualified from benefit. Is she the type of case which the Minister has in mind when he proposes that we double the period of disqualification? The fact that the Minister does not have the courage to get up and say that these are the cases which he has in mind suggests to me that even he is not prepared to defend the very people to whom the rule applies and who will now suffer twice the penalty because of the order.

Mr. Scott: First, what we are doing is increasing the maximum, not saying that that is the penalty which will be imposed in all cases, as the hon. Gentleman seems to suggest. Secondly, these are matters for the independent adjudicating authorities, as I made clear. The report has been drawn to the attention of the chief adjudication officer and it is for him to decide what note he takes of it and what guidance he issues to local adjudication officers.

Mr. Cook: Very well; let us move on to what the chief adjudication officer says.

Having listened to the Minister's speech, I find it difficult to credit that he bothered to read the annual report submitted to him by the chief adjudication officer. If he had done so, he would have seen that in 1985, in the cases inspected where the rule was applied, the chief adjudication officer found that one in four was defective. In his 1986 report, he found that the position had got even worse and that almost one in three decisions was defective. That is the independent adjudication proceedings to which the Minister has referred. When the Minister says that the system is adequate and competent, as he did in his speech, he appears to be leaving out the opinion of the chief adjudication officer, who plainly does not regard it as adequate or competent.

The Minister has to accept responsibility for the errors. One reason why there are so many defective decisions is that, staggering though it may be for the House to hear it, each adjudication officer is allowed 16 minutes to decide on each case.

Mr. Scott *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cook: The Minister shakes his head. It is there in the 1986 report of the chief adjudication officer, who said:

"In all the Area Adjudication Sections visited it was a constant complaint from AOs that the time allowance was unrealistically low in today's circumstances . . . Improvement in the quality of decision-making is unlikely to occur if the number of decisions expected from each AO is as high as present."

The Minister need not shake his head. It is his own people who say this.

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman should be more careful. He said that was the maximum period allowed. That is the average period taken. Obviously some cases are more complex than others. The hon. Gentleman must understand the difference.

Mr. Cook: The Minister has confirmed that the time taken on these cases is 16 minutes. I concede that that is the average rather than the maximum time, but it is still an average for each case. What is clear from the chief adjudication officer's report is that he was recommending more staff and longer time. The Minister has not provided that; he must take responsibility for that and for the fact that one in three decisions are wrong.

Moreover, the proportion of one in three refers to cases which are taken at random by the chief adjudication officer for investigation. If we consider the cases of claimants who had the confidence to appeal, we find that the figures are even worse. In the social security statistics for 1986, we discover that 22 per cent. of the cases where an appeal was lodged were changed on review; in other words, they were abandoned by the Department before they even got to the tribunal because they were so weak. Of the cases which continued to a tribunal, 29 per cent. were successful on appeal. In other words, in total over half of all the cases where an appeal was lodged were reversed. That was 1986,.

The figures for 1987 are even worse. We have the figures only for the first quarter of 1987, but they show that the number successful on appeal was not 29 per cent., as in 1986, but 46 per cent. If the number changed on review remains the same at 22 per cent., that means that two thirds of the cases where an appeal was lodged were abandoned before appeal, or were overturned by the tribunal.

Unless the Minister clambers back to the Dispatch Box and claims that the appeal provides the right of remedy, may I point out to him the answer given in another place last month which noted that it takes 17 weeks for an appeal to be heard? In other words, people cannot get their appeals heard and discharged within the present period of penalty of 13 weeks. It is only after the penalty period has been endured that they will succeed in getting their money backpaid. If the House is unwise enough to approve the order this evening, people will at least have their appeals heard within the 26-week penalty period.

Given all that evidence of official error and of unsuccessful cases at appeal, one is bound to say that the responsibility of Ministers might have been to concentrate on improving the rate of official decision-making, and at least on getting it up to a pass rate. Instead, Ministers have brought the order before the House to double the penalty period. As the Minister has fairly admitted, from 1911 to 1986, Governments of three different political colours all took the view that six weeks was an adequate maximum period. That period of six weeks survived through the mass unemployment of the thirties and through the very low employment levels of the fifties, when voluntary unemployment might have been regarded as a larger problem.

Moreover, during all that period it was always a temporary postponement and never a permanent loss, although I note that Ministers have given themselves the power to make this a permanent loss and to ensure that the six months are deducted from entitlement to unemployment benefit in the future.

The Minister stressed that 26 weeks and 13 weeks were maximum periods. I want to comment on the fact that the period of 13 weeks has proved to be not so much a maximum as the norm. Here I come to what I regard as one of the most objectionable features of the order — that both Ministers have sought to give the House misleading figures.

I start with the Under-Secretary of State. In reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), who had asked him what figures he possessed on the number of times when the full 13 week penalty was applied, he said:

"Information is not collected on the length of disqualifications and it could be obtained only at disproportionate cost." — [*Official Report*, 18 February 1988; Vol. 127, c. 698.]

I have before me a letter from Mr. Bowen, secretary to the management side of the Department of Employment Whitley council. The letter is dated 18 February 1988, the same day as the Minister's reply. The subject of the letter is

"Monitoring the voluntary employment changes — extension of period of disqualifications".

The letter says:

"The results of this survey will not be published."

That is hardly surprising. The Minister has just told the House that the figures do not exist.

"However, the following information was obtained from part of the survey:

(a) 75 per cent. of disqualifications were for the full 13 week period;

(b) The average length of disqualification was a little over 11½ weeks."

There are two conclusions from that letter. First, the Under-Secretary of State chose deliberately to suppress information which was available to the Government and which was in existence within the Government when he tabled that answer. It was a deliberate attempt to withhold information which the House required in making up its mind on the order. One can understand why the Government sought to suppress the information and not to publish it, because it shows that in three quarters of the cases the maximum penalty is applied. If we pass the order, we can expect that in three quarters of the cases the maximum 26 weeks' suspension will be imposed and that the average on that basis will work out at 23 weeks.

Why the change? The Minister sought to give as a reason for change the fact that the number had increased since the increase in the penalty period from six weeks to 13. There is a massive fault line in that logic. If doubling the penalty from six weeks to 13 weeks is accompanied by a rise in the number of people voluntarily unemployed, it scarcely makes the case for coming to the House and asking us to double it again. In any event, that is simply not true. The Minister is shifting his ground rapidly in respect of the basis on which he founds the order. He said:

"over the nine months from October 1986, when the maximum disqualification period was increased from six weeks to 13 weeks, the number of claims from people leaving work for this reason has increased". — [*Official Report*, 10 November 1987; Vol. 122, c. 155.]

As the Minister was obliged to admit to the House, that is now seen not to be true.

In the quarter to September 1986, 113,000 people were held to be voluntarily unemployed. Four quarters later, in the quarter to June 1987, that figure had fallen to 98,000. On 10 November, the Minister made a statement which was not true and which he was in a reasonable position to

[Mr. Cook]

identify as not being true. The grounds on which he made that announcement to the House and to the press are now seen to be wholly false.

Why, then, do the Government go to the trouble of persisting with the order when, logically, the case of 10 November having been exposed, they ought to withdraw it? The order will save them a bit of pin money, some £25 million in a full year. The unemployment unit claims that it will cut unemployment figures by some 20,000 a month, but — here I differ from my hon. Friends — surely not even this Government could go through the odium of producing such a mean and nasty measure for such meagre pickings.

The order fits in with so much else that we have seen from the Government over the past year, such as the withdrawal of benefit rights from 16 and 17-year-olds. It fits in with their strategy of blaming the victim for his or her problems. Conservative Members do not care whether it is the right or wrong decision or whether somebody is voluntarily unemployed. Provided that large numbers are held to be voluntarily unemployed, the measure will encourage a culture in which the unemployed are blamed for being unemployed of their own choice.

The victims will be the unemployed and their families. The measure will hit their families. The 40 per cent. deduction for 13 weeks, now to be extended to 26 weeks, is only on that part of the benefit for the claimant himself. It is not a 40 per cent. deduction from the payment for his dependants, but anyone who believes that one can claw away 40 per cent. of the benefit from the principal claimant without affecting his family does not live in the real world. When the family sits down together for a meal, the senior claimant will not get 40 per cent. less food on his plate compared with the rest of his family round the table. The misery and hunger — there will be hunger — will be shared equally by the family.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: I shall give way in a moment. To their credit, two Conservative Members tried to live on supplementary benefit, but both of them failed within a week. Neither of them even attempted to live on supplementary benefit of £13 less a week.

Mr. Scott: Such principles were not accepted by the Labour Government in 1948 when they reduced the national assistance entitlement for the same period as the unemployment disqualification period.

Mr. Cook: With great respect, there was not a Labour Government in 1911 when the principle was introduced. This goes back to 1911, and spans Governments of all three colours.

The Minister is introducing a different principle, which he has clearly espoused today. The previous Minister of State said the same in Committee. The six-week period was a de minimis provision. I do not object to that provision, which was in effect the excess clause in the insurance policy. If one is held to be unemployed for six weeks or one is between jobs and has voluntarily given up one's job, there is no particular reason why the state should be obliged to pay unemployment benefit. I accept that that is reasonable, to protect the state against minimal claims for that period by excluding a modest period, such as six weeks.

The period could be seven weeks or five weeks, but 13 weeks, and now 26 weeks, is not a de minimis provision. It is not an excess clause, nor did the Minister attempt to defend it as such. It is intended as a penalty.

Mr. Favell *rose*——

Mr. Cook: Conservative Back-Bench Members are being more honest about this. This is a penalty intended to penalise the unemployed for being unemployed.

Mr. Favell: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that somebody who is voluntarily unemployed should receive the same amount as somebody who is unemployed through no fault of their own?

Mr. Cook: I wonder whether the Minister——

Mr. Favell: Answer the question.

Mr. Cook: I shall answer the question, but, from the fatuous nature of the hon. Gentleman's question, I wonder whether he has been listening to my speech. The majority of those people to whom this rule is applied are not voluntarily unemployed, and no reasonable person in this House would hold them to be voluntarily unemployed. In the majority of cases, the rule is applied to people who lose their jobs through no fault of their own and find themselves unemployed, perhaps for a lengthy period.

My answer to the hon. Gentleman is, candidly, yes: those people's families are entitled to the same diet, clothes and heating allowances as the families of other unemployed people. I see no reason why we should hit their children as well.

There is a moral point behind the order. It is not a matter of statistics or individual cases of hardship. Decent incomes are enjoyed by the people who prepared the order. They are enjoyed by the Ministers who made the policy decision to introduce the measure. They are enjoyed by the civil servants who drafted the policy papers from which the Government selected this option. Decent incomes are enjoyed by the parliamentary draftsmen who reduced the measure to legal language. They are enjoyed even by Back-Bench Members of Parliament who, when the bell is rung, will no doubt troop loyally through the Lobby like Pavlov's dogs, and vote for the measure.

Those decent incomes provide a grotesque contrast with the poverty of the claimants whom those people are conspiring to penalise. That contrast makes the order a moral issue. I have not used the word "evil" before in the House, and I do not use it lightly on this occasion, but the order is evil. It has been introduced by Ministers who have given up any pretence that their job is to protect the unemployed against poverty and who are determined to ensure that the unemployed are kept in poverty. We shall vote against both orders tonight.

4.56 pm

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I wish that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) would speak much more often both inside and outside the House; the more he speaks, the more he makes the case of my hon. Friend the Minister of State.

I was amazed to hear what the hon. Gentleman said this afternoon, and I listened with great care. He attempted to wring the withers of the House by describing three

heartbreaking cases in his constituency. The first concerned a gentleman who drove a bus and the second concerned a person who was expected to work 12 hours a day, seven days a week — just like a Member of Parliament. He mentioned another case involving a pregnant woman who was unable to carry out her duties and was unfairly sacked.

The hon. Gentleman had gone into that at some length when my hon. Friend the Minister of State rose and said, "Hang on a minute. There is such a thing as independent adjudication rights in such cases." The hon. Gentleman then went on to give an extraordinary reading of the findings of those adjudication officials. He said that a quarter of the decisions were overruled. That meant that three quarters were all right. In another instance, he said that a third of the cases to come before adjudication officers were wrong. That meant that two thirds were right.

A little later, I found it extraordinary that he referred to a pass rate. He said that 29 per cent.—shock horror — of the cases that went before adjudication officers were overturned. However, that is not a pass rate and, as a matter of fact, 71 per cent. were OK, and 71 per cent. is a good pass rate.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I am following the hon. Lady's argument with care. Has it not struck her that the basic case that my hon. Friend was making is that, if one takes account of all those wrong decisions, the Government's case that the figures have risen significantly falls apart at the seams?

Dame Jill Knight: No, the hon. Gentleman said exactly what I am saying he said. He claimed that, because in one quarter of the cases that went before the adjudication process, the applicant won through, that shows that the whole thing was absolutely appalling. However, he did not mention the fact that three quarters of those original decisions were right, and surely that is what we should be talking about. I have no doubt that the cases that he put to the House would have been in the quarter, the third or the 29 per cent. that were overturned, because from the way in which he described them I certainly would not accept that in such cases the person had been fairly denied benefit. The hon. Member for Livingston must understand that he is using a double-edged weapon and that what he has said has supported, rather than destroyed, my hon. Friend's case.

When the Government came to power, Britain had reached a dangerous point. More and more the ethos of "Why bother to work? Why bother to save? Why bother to act responsibly?" had taken hold. It is absolutely true that more and more people were saying, "Why do I bother? If I do not bother, I am not going to starve or be in any trouble, so why bother?" The welfare system was increasingly seen not as a safety net for the luckless, but as a bed for the shiftless. That is what the Government have addressed themselves to. Thank God the majority continue to work, to save and to act responsibly.

Mr. Heffer: Conservative Members are experts.

Dame Jill Knight: If the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton wishes to intervene instead of mumbling from a sedentary position, I am quite ready to give way to him.

Mr. Heffer: I said that the hon. Lady and her friends are experts in shiftlessness.

Dame Jill Knight: If the hon. Gentleman seeks merely to throw insults across the House, let him. People outside who read this debate will give what he has said due note. However, in my own defence, I say that I have never been shiftless. I have often been hard up, but I have never been shiftless.

Mr. Heffer: That is a matter of opinion.

Dame Jill Knight: *Thank God the majority of people —[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order.

Dame Jill Knight: Well, the hon. Gentleman will mumble, Madam Deputy Speaker, and is rather a trial to us all.

I shall resume the main tenor of what I was saying. Thank God the majority of people in this country continue to work to save and to act responsibly. It is a very good thing they do, or else the country would be bankrupt. We simply cannot sustain ourselves as a nation — those nations that have tried to do so have failed — if more than half the people in this country are being supported in idleness by the other half working like mad. That will not do. The majority of people in this country—who do work, and act responsibly — have been increasingly angered and embittered at seeing their hard-earned money doled out to those who refuse to bear responsibility for themselves or their families.

I am very sorry indeed for all those who are looking for jobs but who cannot find them. That is a tragedy, whether one is young or old. To be unable to find work when one is genuinely seeking it is a terrible thing. However, I have no pity for those who quit their jobs without good reason. Let us be fair, it must be a good reason, but we have the back-up on that, as I have already described. I have no pity for those who refuse to seek a job or to train for a job, in the blithe certainty that society will pay all their bills. There is all the difference in the world between those two groups—between the genuinely unemployed, and those who have become unemployed in the certainty that they will not suffer in that way.

There is widespread sympathy for the genuinely jobless. Not only have the Government done everything possible to help them — I hope that Opposition Members will join us as we rejoice in the falling figures for unemployment in Britain today — but the taxpayer is ready and willing to see his money used to ensure that there is no question of the unemployed not having enough to live on. There is real sympathy among taxpayers for genuinely unemployed people. I am sure that, even on a voluntary basis, people would give if they saw a man genuinely out of work, through no fault of his own, and suffering because of it. However, the generosity of the taxpayer turns to fury when he finds that he is being forced to subsidise the idle. As I see it, that is what the Government are taking steps to stop in this order.

If Opposition Members have any doubts about the taxpayers' bitterness on this issue, I urge them to seek some of the comments from their own constituents; many people who work hard and who pay taxes are actually worse off than those whom they are subsidising, and that is wrong.

We have a difficult situation in this country, in that there is sometimes a positive disincentive to save. I have

[Dame Jill Knight]

known cases where people have saved carefully all their lives, but at the end of their lives, they have been in a home and have found that they are the only people paying for their care in that home. That is an impossible dilemma, because if people have money it is right that they should pay, but it is hard to have denied oneself all one's life to ensure that one has enough money at the end, and then to find that one is subsidising people who have never bothered to act in the way in which one acted oneself.

Today we are dealing with people who perhaps have lost a place on an approved training scheme, either through misconduct or perhaps by leaving voluntarily without any good cause, and with people who refuse to apply for a job or to accept a job on an approved training scheme. How can Opposition Members support that and suggest that it is right for quite poor people to subsidise those who are able to work, or who could train, but will not do so? I shall have the greatest pleasure in supporting the Government tonight.

5.7 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I do not want to speak for long, but I should like to give the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) my personal experience. My father joined the army when he was 13 years of age. He came out of the Army and for a short period became a policeman. He was then called up during the first world war. He was wounded four times and ended up as a regimental serjeant major. He was then trained to be a snob — that is, a shoe repairer or a cobbler. He never lost a day's work in his life. He worked very hard for his family, and ended up with 6d in the savings bank.

That is the story not just of one, but of millions of working people, and it is a fact. Indeed, that is why I became a Socialist — because I saw what my father and those around him had got from working hard all their lives. In the end, my father died of four cancers. I want that on the record, because that experience is not unique.

I want to talk about the penalties. Some of us, who also worked hard for our living in the shipyards and on the construction sites when we came out of the Army after the second world war, always resented even the six-week period. However, we tolerated it. We did not like that six-week period if, from time to time, we felt that we wanted to give up a job because of certain circumstances, perhaps because the foreman was a person that one could not stand. I remember one job where the foreman bricklayer was so bad that one lad lost his temper and broke the foreman's arms because he was so upset. That can happen.

Sometimes people cannot stand the individuals under whom they work. They may work, for example, in a machine shop where the fumes are very bad. They may have complained many times. It may not be a trade union-organised machine shop. So they leave and are immediately faced with six weeks' penalty, and they seek adjudication and so on. Sometimes they won and sometimes they lost. The system has always been resented but it could be lived with. We did not like it but we could live with it.

Then the Government come along and change something that has been accepted for a very long time. In a brilliant speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was absolutely right to say that from 1911 until the present time the period of six weeks has been an accepted fact. But there is a lot of difference between six weeks and six months. The Government are talking about taking people's livelihood totally away from them. These people cannot live on nothing.

It is working people who will suffer, who will starve collectively. The reason for the move is simple. It is a way of putting further pressure on working people to accept jobs which, in normal circumstances, they would not accept. That is the truth of it. When workers would like to say that they have had enough of a particular foreman and what he is doing, no longer will they protest; they will bow their heads even further. They will get a little further on to their knees and accept the treatment rather than place themselves and their families in such a situation.

The hon. Member for Edgbaston apparently does not even know what her own Government are doing by means of the present changes in benefits. Does she not know that, if people have built up a little nest egg of £6,000, after 1 April such people will find that nest egg taken into consideration, so that they lose some benefits that they might otherwise be given? Is that a choice?

Dame Jill Knight: The hon. Gentleman really must not ascribe to me ignorance that I do not possess. He has already insulted me once—and he is perfectly free to do so as often as he likes. What he must understand, however, is that insults are no substitute for fair, decent and sensible argument.

He has told the House tonight about his father, and I have no doubt that every single word he spoke was true. I wonder what his father, who obviously worked hard all his life on the different jobs that he did, would have felt if, while not earning very much but working consistently to provide for his family, he found that out of the meagre amount that he did have he was supporting and subsidising those who would not work.

Mr. Heffer: If I have insulted the hon. Lady, I did not intend to and I apologise for any insult. I do not like insulting people, so I apologise if I have unwittingly insulted her.

I will tell the House what my father did, even though the debate is not about him. When he was a cobbler and people used to come to him — working people, unemployed people or people in very bad circumstances —he would tell them, particularly if it happened to be a working woman, that he would mend the shoes for their kids and that they could pay him when they were able to. On many occasions they never paid him because they never had the money to do it with. But that is exactly what he did.

The result was that on one occasion he could not meet the repayments on some new equipment that he had bought, so it was taken away and he had to go back to doing all the work by hand. I am talking about someone who understood his own class, his own people, and who had a love of ordinary people. I think, too, about my mother, who believed that Christianity meant something.

I want to explain to the hon. Lady that, to Opposition Members, these things matter. It is important to have compassion for other people, to think about other people, to understand that some people are not in the same lucky situation as we are in. People do not voluntarily look for unemployment but may sometimes not be in a position,

intellectually and otherwise, to get employment. Are we to say that they must suffer six months of no income whatever, or of a very limited amount?

This is one of the worst things that I can remember any Government doing. I sometimes wonder whether the whole of my life has not been wasted when I see the destruction, one by one, of the good things that we have achieved over the years, the important things that we have done for society as a whole, the things that we have done for working people because we are part of them and they are part of us.

This is the last straw for me. It puts the character of the Government in a nutshell. The Government want to return to the position where workers will accept any job. It is a form of slave labour that they want to introduce. It is unforgivable and almost unbelievable.

I hope that some Members on the Government Benches will have enough decency about them not to listen to the silly arguments about people wanting to be unemployed. Of course there has always been a very tiny majority of people who manage to operate the system. It is so unbelievably small that no one need worry about it. The overwhelming mass of people to be affected by this despicable move by the Government are ordinary working people who want a job but who, from time to time, will feel that they cannot accept certain conditions and who, if they make a stand and if they are non-union and so on, will find themselves suffering because of the action of the Government.

It is dreadful. It is disgraceful. I feel very upset about it, more upset about this than about most things of late. I have been getting increasingly upset at the Government. What they are doing is despicable. Although I do not believe that it will, I wish that the House would turn its back on the Government today and say that it will not tolerate what is being done.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There is a lot of interest in this debate and we have only a short time for it. I appeal to hon. Members to keep their speeches short; than no one will be disappointed.

5.17 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I do not want to continue along the road followed by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). Many of us on the Government Benches also come from relatively humble origins and are proud of the fact. But we are living in 1988 and we are looking at what is to happen in future; we are not fighting the battles of 50 years ago. We are looking to represent the taxpayers, the honourable, honest working people who form the vast majority of the population. That is what we are addressing ourselves to this evening and we should not, as Opposition Members want us to, fight the battles of yesteryear, which have been won, but should go forward to the future.

All hon. Members on both sides of the House are extremely sympathetic to those who are unemployed. We all accept that to be unemployed must be soul-destroying for the individual, for his state of mind and, of course, for his family, whether children or parents. We read of many cases, and, as hon. Members, we have experience of many cases in our own constituencies of people who have lost their jobs for economic and financial reasons or because of advances in technology. People may have worked hard and long and often given years of service to their employer, when some unfortunate incident occurs and they lose their jobs. Such people deserve and receive our sympathy and our support, as hon. Members, and as taxpayers. My hon. Friend the Minister of State is well known for his support of and sympathy for such people, and for many years and in many speeches he has stuck up for the under-privileged in our society.

The order, relates to another kind of unemployment problem, notably concerning those people who make themselves unemployed or who voluntarily choose unemployment. An important principle is involved; a principle that the Opposition Front Bench will not acknowledge. There is a fundamental difference between those people who voluntarily make themselves unemployed and those who, through no fault of their own, because of circumstances completely beyond their control, end up unemployed.

We heard from the hon. Member for Walton that in the past people have been responsible and have worked hard to look after their families. The vast majority of people today work hard, pay their taxes and look after their families, but we must consider the difference between the genuine unemployed and those who choose unemployment. I wonder how those taxpayers in the real world would view the comment of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) that there should be no difference between the various types of people on the unemployment register. I do not believe that taxpayers would have much sympathy for people who voluntarily make themselves unemployed, when on the other side of the coin many people who are desperately striving for work cannot get it. They deserve our sympathy and support, not those who choose not to work.

I had the privilege and pleasure to serve on the Social Security Bill Committee in 1986 and the Employment Bill Committee in 1987. The Employment Bill Committee dealt with various aspects of the changes that have been alluded to this afternoon; the changes to benefits which will come into force in April and the other change which will come into law if the Employment Bill 1987 is passed in the other place—to disqualify people who have lost a place in an approved training scheme through misconduct, or who leave voluntarily without good cause. Today, more than ever before, people who leave school have more opportunities to be trained, to learn a skill and to get work experience.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Nonsense.

Mr. Evennett: The hon. Gentleman says, "Nonsense," but the facts tell a different story. Today, young people aged 16 to 18 have more opportunities than ever before for real training — for example, on the youth training scheme — but they do not want to take those opportunities and voluntarily reject the chance for a great future. Do they deserve much sympathy? The vast majority of people would think not. If we consider tougher penalties for people who leave jobs voluntarily——

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): I recall that the hon. Gentleman was on the Social Security Bill Standing Committee of 1986 and the Employment Bill Standing Committee of 1987, because I was also on those Committees. Could the hon. Gentleman explain, having

[Mr. Bob Clay]

had that experience, why in 1986 he and his colleagues thought that three months' disqualification was right, but a year later the period has doubled?

Mr. Evennett: We have discussed the matter in Committee and in the House. Things change and we reassess the position—that is what the Government are empowered to do. We must consider the position in the light of the facts and make a judgment, and the judgment is correct for today. I am sure that the majority of people would want to help the unemployed to get training and to get back into work, and to ensure that those people who, regrettably and tragically, are unable to get a job are looked after by the benefit system. That is what we are striving towards.

We must always consider seriously the point that there will be the odd case of hardship and distress, but we must remember that the money paid in benefits comes from taxation paid by people who have worked hard. The hon. Member for Walton told us about his father and how he had striven to look after his family and bring them up in the Christian tradition of hard work and looked after them with love and affection. That is the way most people behave.

We should encourage more people to train and get jobs, wherever possible, and not to throw away the opportunities that many other people would love to have. Therefore, I believe that the order is right and it will have my support in the Lobby tonight.

5.24 pm

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): From 1911 until October 1986, the maximum period for disqualification from unemployment benefit was six weeks. As the House knows, that period was increased to 13 weeks. I ask the Minister: what has changed so drastically as to regard the period of disqualification of six or 13 weeks as being no longer a sufficient means of controlling unemployment? I make no excuse for repeating the question, and I hope that the Minister will respond firmly.

There may be only two logical reasons for increasing the disqualification period to six months: either the Government believe that many people are voluntarily leaving their jobs, confident in the knowledge that they can get unemployment benefit after six weeks, or it is yet another example of the cheap, petty, cost-cutting exercises that the Government have become so expert at in recent years, especially in recent months. There is simply no evidence that many people are leaving work without good reason. I find it difficult to imagine that even the Government believe that people prefer unemployment and low income to work and security.

The Government have admitted recently that the purpose of the disqualification period is no longer for insurance protection but is a penalty. If a penalty is to be effective, people must be aware of its existence, but the social security policy inspectorate has demonstrated that there is no evidence of that awareness. Most people are not even aware that there is a disqualification period for voluntary unemployment, let alone that it was increased recently. Many people would not be aware of the debate today, and I do not believe that our deliberations will have the slightest effect on someone who is determined to become unemployed.

The reality is that the order will cut public expenditure further, which is the attraction of the 26-week disqualification period to the Government. When the disqualification period was extended to 13 weeks, the Government calculated that £25 million to £30 million per year would be saved. That saving was made through reduced benefit payments and because those people who were unfortunate enough to be in that position were not credited with national insurance contributions during the disqualification period. The Bill may save a few million pounds, but it will cause a great deal of hardship and frustration to those who try to appeal, and no doubt a lot of understandable anger.

I believe that a member of the Minister's staff will come to Southport in May to inspect the DHSS office. That office is very well run. I believe that the visit will be made because of the rumour that the security in all social security offices will be strengthened.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Michael Portillo): I will be visiting the office, not a member of my staff, and I look forward to it very much.

Mr. Fearn: I welcome that, and I hope that I can be there to speak to the same staff. I hope that the Minister will clarify whether he will be there to man the barricades against the terrific opposition to the measure and to the withdrawal of other benefits.

There is strong evidence that the disqualification process is not administered efficiently or fairly because many people who leave jobs because conditions are unacceptable or they are dismissed unfairly are being caught in the same net as people who voluntarily make themselves unemployed. I am grateful to the Low Pay Unit for its excellent investigation into the problem, as there can be little doubt that adjudication standards are not good enough at present. Corners are being cut and mistakes made.

Even worse, the Low Pay Unit has shown that many of these mistakes are not adequately corrected. The chief adjudication officer's report for 1985-86 found that one in every three decisions examined was considered deficient in one or more aspects. The social security policy inspectorate discovered in its survey in 1981 that DHSS operational instructions were not being carried out correctly. In many cases the initial decision to suspend benefit was not being followed by subsequent checks to discover whether the suspension was deserved. Ninety-three of the 205 cases in the inspectorate's sample—46 per cent. — were decided in the claimant's favour. Almost half of those who suffered benefit reduction did so unnecessarily, and many of them had undergone the full disqualification period already. Many of the wrongful decisions were never refunded. In 21 of the 93 cases, the decision was never rectified.

The large number of decisions that were subsequently overturned on appeal gives further cause for concern about the workings of the system. The chief adjudication officer's report for 1985-86 shows that, of a sample 1,000 appeals, 17 per cent. were revised on review, and the report commented that that figure

"casts doubts on the soundness of first-tier adjudication."

Of the cases that proceeded to appeal tribunals, the report found that 29 per cent. were decided in the claimant's favour.

The position in 1987 seems to have been no better. Of the 1,002 appeals on disqualification heard in the first three months of 1987, 43 per cent. were found in the claimant's favour. The fact that the average time between registering the appeal and the hearing was 15 weeks causes even greater alarm. The facts are clear for the Minister to see. The system is working at breaking point. Staff are overworked and under considerable pressure, and terrible mistakes are being made which cause great hardship to, and mean terrible financial loss for, many people. Given the clear evidence of serious problems with the disqualification system, which is causing fairly widespread injustice, does the Minister still consider it sensible to extend the period of disqualification for six months? Enough unnecessary hardship is being inflicted on people whose benefit is affected for 13 weeks without compoundng the injustice by increasing the disqualification to six months.

Another major objection to the unemployment benefit disqualification system is that it works against flexibility in the labour market. I should have thought that the Government would welcome such flexibility; at the heart of their policies lies the belief in the "get-on-your-bike" mentality, but, as with so many of their slogans, they say one thing and do something completely different. The legislation prevents people from moving around and looking for better jobs and trying to improve their positions. An increase to six months in the disqualification period will only make things worse. People will not take risks to better themselves and their families if there is a danger of facing poverty. Instead, they will remain trapped in unsuitable jobs with poor conditions and I cannot support that. I urge the Government to reconsider this utterly disastrous proposal; I shall be voting against the order today.

5.34 pm

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I want to remind the House that April, when the order comes into force, will be the time of the Government's Budget, which is a Budget for the rich, who will benefit from it. So there will be a Budget for one group — the rich — and social security regulations that will screw another section of society harder and harder. The Social Security Act will also be coming into force. That, viewed alongside the loans, grants and the poll tax, makes it clear that a division in society is arising such as has not been seen since the 1920s and 1930s.

It is not only the Opposition who argue this. We have heard much about the views of the Church recently. Three days ago, the Bishop of Manchester, looking at the legislation before the House, said:

"No society can survive without serious damage to its social fabric if self-interest is encouraged at the expense of other values."

But that is what the Government are doing. The Government are trying to fight unemployed people, whereas we are trying to fight unemployment, and they should realise the difference.

The hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) spoke of how training and education were available, and how young people should take advantage of them. Ministers are sick of me telling them that on Teesside and in Cleveland those options are not available. I do not know how often I have to tell them that 500 young people between the ages of 16 and 18 this year cannot get training places. After April, they will be hurt, just as people who are over 18 years old will be hurt, as a result of the legislation.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) acknowledged that the majority of people want to work but referred to the small minority who became voluntarily unemployed. She has no idea of the extent of the problem on Teesside. Since 1979, 43,000 people have lost their jobs. That is not due to idleness or being jobshy. They are desperate to work. The Minister said that people do not give up their work lightly — on Teesside, we know that better than many. The words that he used in his speech gave us some idea of the attitude of Conservative Members. They talked of "sympathy" for "such people". If they met and talked to them and saw the real world that people live in, they would not be introducing such legislation.

The introduction of the 26-week period for people dismissed from the armed forces has not yet been discussed. How can the Minister justify the double jeopardy that those young men and women will be in? They will have been thrown out of the forces — for whatever reasons — and will then come back and be penalised yet again for six months. If Conservative Members spoke to people leaving the British forces under these circumstances — they have to return to their families and try to resettle without the costs of such return being met — they would realise that their families are being made to suffer unfairly. That is a double jeopardy of the worst order, and I want the Minister to respond to it.

The order will have a particular impact on certain groups. My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) spoke of some of his constituency cases, and I shall mention two of mine. I know of a case of a middle-aged man on a community programme who was dismissed for sexual harassment. His case is now on appeal and has been so for 36 weeks. Whether the man is rightly or wrongly accused, he and his family have suffered for 13 weeks. I dread to think how they would have survived — they would not have survived — a six-month period such as that proposed by the legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston discussed some of the problems of the appeal system, and of the delays on the ground. I want the Under-Secretary to examine the delays in Cleveland, because the case I have mentioned of a 36-week delay in an appeal is not unique. If such cases are left to the whims of civil servants, they will use the maximum period allowed by the regulations, that is, 36 weeks.

I know of a 19-year old lad who was put on a scheme but was clearly unsuited to working on it. He was ostracised by his workmates and tried to sort out the problem with the boss. He was physically suffering and became ill as a result of being so unsuited to the scheme. In the end, he left. Contrary to what was said by the hon. Member for Edgbaston, if the case of a lad of that sort is left to the whim of civil servants and the adjudication officer, he may well not be treated positively by the system.

We are often told by Conservative Members that we moan and look for dark clouds. But we are looking at the cases of individuals in our constituency who will suffer as a result of this sort of legislation. The Minister did not explain why the Government chose a period of 26 weeks. Why double it from thirteen weeks? That was the sort of logic offered by the Minister. There was no evidence of

[Ms. Marjorie Mowlam]

consultation on such a period or of why it was considered suitable. Let us be straight about this matter—I am sure that the Minister wants to be straight. It will be 26 weeks, because it is the maximum that usually operates.

The Government would never get away with this proposal in the private sector. I shall consider what it is doing to national insurance. People pay into national insurance, but they are being denied an opportunity to claim benefit for a set period. A similar example of what the Government are doing would be if an insurance company said, "Because the trees have fallen this way during the storm, I am afraid that we are changing the rules and you can no longer claim." That is exactly what the Government are doing to benefit, and in the private sector they would never get away with it.

We must put the order in context. With this order, the rest of the social security legislation and the poll tax, the Government are shooting themselves in both feet at the same time. They are hitting one group in society with loans and poll tax repayments, and the Minister knows very well that repayments for those will be deducted from benefit. Yet now people are to be denied benefit. Conservative Members try to suggest that we are talking of one, two or half a dozen people. That is wrong; 20,000 people a month will suffer. As a result of the kind of dogma that we have heard during the debate, these cuts, along with the other legislation that the Government have introduced, will create an intolerable and unmanageable position.

5.40 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I shall pose one or two questions, which I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will deal with when he replies to the debate.

I was concerned about what the hon. Members for Southport (Mr. Fearn) and for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) said about the possible injusticies to people who have fallen foul of the regulations but who are not genuinely voluntarily unemployed. If there were many such cases, it would be a matter of concern to hon. Members who are interested in justice. It would be interesting if my hon. Friend the Minister could say how many appeals there are from people who are disqualified and the number that are successful. Clearly, if less than 1 per cent. of people appeal against disqualification, one would not expect there to be a relatively large number of appeals. However, I should like the Minister to say how many disqualifications ultimately result in a successful appeal.

Will the Minister state the average time that is taken before those appeals are heard? Will he consider putting a time limit on the period for the first listing of an appeal? An appellant or his advisers may ask for an adjournment; if they do, that is their fault. Will consideration be given to a time limit, during which the first listing of an appeal should be made?

What publicity is given to an appellant's right of appeal against disqualification? Is it brought home to every disqualified person that he has a right of appeal? Many people who fall foul of the regulations may not be particularly well educated, so that right should be clearly spelt out for them.

I am wholeheartedly in favour of the order. I was surprised to hear that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), thought that people who are voluntarily unemployed should be treated the same as those who are unemployed through no fault of their own. I am glad to see the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) present in the Chamber. His father worked extremely hard all his life. He never chose to be voluntarily unemployed and he showed a great deal of sympathy for those who fell on hard times when life was not as easy as it is for many of us now.

It is remarkable how many people are prepared to work for relatively low rates of pay. Hon. Members are relatively well paid. Not unnaturally, we choose to work because we are well rewarded for what we do. Many people work long hours throughout their lives for pay that is little higher than the level of supplementary benefit. It is an insult to them to suggest—as did the hon. Member for Livingston—that people who choose voluntarily to be unemployed should receive the same amount of benefit as those who are unemployed through no fault of their own.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I was relatively low paid until a few years ago, but I always gave people the benefit of the doubt. I never thought that the majority of my fellow citizens were workshy.

Mr. Favell: I am not suggesting that it is a majority, but it is a substantial minority. That substantial minority should be encouraged to work.

Mrs. Beckett: I have been following the hon. Gentleman's argument most carefully. If, as is rumoured, in the Budget the Chancellor of the Exchequer makes changes in national insurance contributions that give considerable benefit to those who have considerable amounts of unearned income, will the hon. Gentleman, along with us, vote against that?

Mr. Favell: I am not talking about what encouragement should be given to the higher paid. I am talking about the encouragement that should be given to those on low pay who do not refuse to go to work regardless of the fact that they are paid relatively little more than people on supplementary benefit.

The hon. Member for Livingston described the regulations as evil. That is one of the most extraordinary allegations that have been made against Conservative Members. It is remarkable to assert that it is evil to encourage people to go to work.

One of the most evil things that has occurred recently has been the encouragement of young people by Labour Members, who have said that they should expect work, come what may, when they leave school and that they should not go on training schemes.

Many Labour Members have encouraged youngsters who have no skill whatsoever to expect work. They have positively discouraged youngsters from going on training schemes. There is a lost generation of young people, aged 20, 21 or 22, who were encouraged by Labour Members not to go on training schemes because they should expect a job as of right.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): The hon. Gentleman is rewriting history.

Mr. Favell: I have heard Labour Members say that young people are entitled to a job, that training schemes are not real jobs and that training schemes should be discouraged. Labour Members have thrown cold water on Ministers' efforts to encourage young people to go into

training that will equip them for the rest of their lives. Those youngsters who were discouraged from going on training schemes have found themselves unskilled, at the age of 20, 21 and 22, and they have been condemned to the scrap heap because of the evil actions of Labour Members.

5.47 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fyfe, Central): I am pleased to stand with my colleagues and oppose the order. What has made the most impact on me so for is the crass ignorance of Conservative Members about what being voluntarily unemployed means. They throw in that concept without any regard to the different elements that go to make it up. One lasting commentary on the debate should be that they go away and think more deeply about the net that nearly 400,000 people are dragged into every year, as a consequence of which they suffer greatly.

No one doubts the wisdom of the insurance principle; we are all concerned that it must be protected at all costs. However, we must be concerned about the concept of voluntary unemployment. We are allowing a huge number of people to be subjected to a regime that the Government intensified to ensure that where possible their benefit can be stopped. It is as clear and simple as that, and the Government should acknowledge that fact.

The measure is significant in itself. As my hon. Friends have said, there are a number of sinister, shabby and seedy aspects to the order. The real significance of the order can only be seen when it is considered alongside the unprecedented assault on the unemployed that the Government have mounted over the past two or three years, and which they are accelerating as they work towards the hidden agenda and goals of the Cabinet to reduce the unemployment figures.

It is clear that there is no moral, social or economic justification for this measure. However, there are obvious and compelling political reasons for the Government bringing it before the House. The order represents a policy that is prejudiced, punitive and provocative, as many of my hon. Friends have said. We should be talking about this measure not as a social security measure but as a means of controlling the labour market.

For the first time since the war, two great Departments of State—the Department of Health and Social Security and the Department of Employment — are colluding. They are working together. That fact is not debated in the mass media, but we know that the agenda is there and for the first time we have direct evidence of the Government's social security policy strangling any credibility that their employment policy might have had.

Conservative Members say, "So we are dealing with 400,000 people; why worry? They are voluntarily unemployed and deserve no credit. They are scroungers." That mentality permeates the Government Benches. But, it should be put on record that not only will the disqualification be for the maximum period in most cases, but that it is automatic. Little regard is given to people leaving jobs. The decision to disqualify is automatic and in three quarters of cases the maximum disqualification period is imposed. It is no more and no less than that.

People will face disqualification from unemployment benefit and a 40 per cent. cut in the supplementary benefit allowance that goes with it. It is objectionable beyond belief. The Minister should address himself to the real concerns of Opposition Members rather than to the crocodile tears of his hon. Friends. The Government's case is extremely weak; they have accepted that. Ministers have found great difficulty in explaining the changes.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I wonder whether my hon. Friend would pause to consider the dilemma of the Conservatives, who have run out of speakers. The Whips have been scouring the highways and byways and have brought in the hon. Members from Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) and for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) with whom we should have some sympathy, as they are studying the order as we speak *[Interruption.]* I do not propose to contribute to the debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman does not wish to take part in the debate, Mr. McLeish has the Floor.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will be aware that I often come into the Chamber at this time of day to get the flavour of what is going on. I saw on the television screen that an important order was being discussed and I decided to come in. I am not aware of having sought to catch your eye. I have come in only to listen to the debate — as I wish other hon. Members would — and to hear the important speeches that are being made.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is good to have the hon. Gentleman's company.

Mr. McLeish: I enjoyed that impromptu speech, but now I must get on, as many of my hon. Friends wish to participate.

The real issue is how this measure fits into the Government's increasingly sophisticated and ruthless strategy to cut the number of people on the unemployment register. The order has nothing to do with protecting the national insurance fund. It has more to do with state coercion — a phrase not often used in the House. Tragically, the Government are now pursuing a policy that can be described only as state coercion—and ironically, it is a Conservative Government for whom choice is supposed to reign. How laughable that is, when one considers the order.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West) *rose*—

Mr. McLeish: No, I shall not give way.

Let me highlight the ways in which the Government have altered the unemployment count. We reckon that there have been 28 changes in the eligibility criteria, statistical adjustments, intensification of the benefits regime and the introduction of schemes and other measures such as restart. *[Laughter.]*

Conservative Members may laugh, but the tragedy for them is that the arrogance, ignorance and complacency of the Government have led them to let the cat out of the proverbial bag. Let them reflect on the press coverage of the Government's objective, which is to reduce unemployment to 2 million by the end of the year. They can achieve that without creating one single job. They need only pursue the present line — disqualifications and so on — and extend that to a broader canvas and, hey presto, they have a success story.

Mr. Hind *rose*—

Mr. McLeish: I am not giving way.

[Mr. McLeish]

The Government's policy will create mass hardship among families and will not do a great deal for individuals who want to find work.

I have rushed through my remarks to give my hon. Friends an opportunity to speak, but finally, I shall identify the key issues in this debate. When the Rayner report was published in 1981, it was clear that the Government would have liked to accept the suggestion to abolish unemployment benefit and replace it with a means-tested measure of income support. I believe that the order represents just another step towards the eventual abolition of unemployment benefit and its replacement with a means test.

It is clear from the various reports that we read and discuss that there is now a pressing need for an independent inquiry into how the philosophy, policy, powers and procedures of the present Government are being used in a great assault on the unemployed. My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) made the salient point that Opposition Members tackle unemployment, whereas Conservative Members tackle the unemployed. If the Government had any pride in their craft—*[Interruption.]*

It is OK for the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown), who is the Government Whip, to sit there and laugh about 400,000 people languishing. If the Government had any pride in their craft, they would reflect on the 28 changes, which are objectionable and obscene and an insidious reflection of the fact that the Government have gone badly wrong. However, the Government have no remorse; I find that fact even more objectionable than their policies.

The unemployed will be caught not only by an intensification of the benefit regime but by the withdrawal of employment rights in workplaces all over the country. The withdrawal of employment rights is forcing more people to become voluntarily unemployed, and the prize for that is to be made the victim of the six months' disqualification.

I am a new Member. I have been here only eight months. However, in my limited time here this is the most odious measure that I have come across and if the Government continue to go over the top we shall relish the prospect of the next general election.

5.57 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), who unfortunately did not stay to hear much of the debate, told us most movingly how unfair it is for those on low incomes to have to subsidise unemployed people. I suggest to her and to her hon. Friends that the way to tackle that problem is to raise the tax threshold so that those on low incomes do not pay income tax. I suggest earnestly that she bring that simple remedy to the attention of the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the appropriate time. However, in this debate, that argument is simply a red herring.

The order is part of a large package to make it harder to qualify for unemployment benefit. Various disqualifications have already been imposed—not only on those deemed voluntarily unemployed. For example, carers have become disqualified as a result of the ending of the crediting-in system. After a carer has spent a long period looking after an elderly relative and comes back to the labour market, the crediting-in that entitled him or her to unemployment benefit is being ended. It has become harder and harder to qualify. I shall not list the ways in which it has become harder, although, if I am challenged, I shall be glad to do so. This is probably the most despicable part of the package, although it is hard to rank them. Perhaps the treatment of the carers is in the first rank of evil, and this is the second rank. That is the kind of discussion that we find ourselves led into, because every part of the package is unjustified and unjust.

I can give examples of cases in which someone might leave a job and be told haughtily, "You have no right to make yourself unemployed." For instance, someone might want to change his or her job, be promised a new job and give notice, but then find the job offer withdrawn. Employers, after all, can be extremely capricious. That person would then find himself out on a limb.

Mr. Michael Brown: The hon. Lady has drawn attention to a case which I accept could happen. She should, however, be aware that if a valid offer of a job has been made and accepted, there is clear legal redress for fairly substantial compensation to be paid.

Mrs. Wise: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman does not live in the same world as most of us. I cannot advise my constituents to seek legal redress in such circumstances. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] Because they cannot afford it, that is why not. Moreover, in such cases employers can be very well advised legally, and can no doubt come forward with all sorts of plausible reasons. That person would still be out in the cold.

A young girl might feel that she was being sexually harassed. It might be said that she ought to complain; however, she might be afraid to do so. The person harassing her might be her boss, and she might fear that she would be accused of leading him on, as is commonplace: women are usually so accused if they try to make any accusations. It is not unnatural for a girl in that position—especially one who is young and inexperienced, and lacks confidence—to feel that the best thing to do is to leave the job, but that girl will be penalised with six months' loss of benefit.

Again, someone might be working for unduly long hours. In his opening speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) gave an instance of an employer acting illegally and breaking the Factories Acts. Yet it was the unfortunate employee who was penalised. I did not observe the Minister get to his feet and say that the matter should have been taken up, and the employer should have been acted against. We know perfectly well that employers constantly impugn legislation of this kind—that they constantly break the Factories Acts and the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, and are very rarely brought to book. When they are brought to book, the penalty is miserable.

A constituent of mine, a young girl, is working as a waitress. She has to come home very late at night, and I know that her mother is very anxious about her. There is a tension in the family about her job, because the girl wants to work but the mother does not want her on the street late at night. Sooner or later, the girl may give up the job. Perhaps that would be best for her safety and welfare, but nevertheless she will have made herself voluntarily unemployed, and will be treated as a criminal.

I remember the case of a young girl, a shop assistant, who worked in a shop where there was a big heavy mat

in the doorwell. Suddenly, her employer decided to include shaking the mat in her duties. When the girl said no, she was sacked and was disallowed for industrial misconduct.

The girl in that case was wise enough to have joined a trade union. She was represented, and she won her case. Many girls in the same position, however, would not win their cases, and many will risk doing themselves an injury to save their jobs. The other difference is that that case occurred when unemployment was not as bad as it is now.

Shop assistants usually work in places that are either too hot or too cold. It might not be thought that in this day and age, when people can go to the moon and so forth, it would be so difficult to obtain comfortable conditions for shop assistants. But, as a long-time member of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, I know that that is a fact. Little shops are cold and draughty; big shops are hot and badly ventilated. People working in such conditions may decide that enough is enough, and that they cannot tolerate it any longer.

Until very recently, when such people left their jobs, they would have to swallow a six-week disqualification; at present, they must swallow a three-month disqualification. Such criminals are they, however, that the Conservative party will now deprive them of their rights for half a year. The objective, of course, is to ensure that they do not leave their jobs—that they do not get stroppy, and that they put up with their conditions, whether cold and draughty or hot and ill-ventilated, because they will be too afraid to raise their voices, and certainly too afraid to leave their jobs.

Supermarket checkout staff frequently suffer, hour after hour, a most uncomfortable twisting of the spine. Some supermarkets provide decent seating, which swivels, and makes the job easier, but some do not. Consequently the checkout worker has to swivel her spine. Is the worker to wait until she indubitably has a bad back which will last the rest of her life, or will she have the right to say, "Enough is enough."? Do people make themselves unemployed voluntarily if they leave their jobs because they think that if they keep their jobs they will be ill? It seems they will have to wait until they are actually ill or injured, and then it will possibly be conceded that they were justified in leaving.

It has been mentioned that there is an appeal system. I suppose that we are lucky that, so far, such a system still exists. Give them time: that will go as well, as it has with the social fund. My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston pointed out that the average waiting time is already longer than the disqualification time, so that people are treated like criminals, fined heavily and have to serve their sentence while waiting for their appeal. I do not think much of that as a consolation for those who find that they win in the end, because they have had to endure it in the meantime.

I trust that the Minister will spare time to explain why, in families in which a woman is pregnant, there will nevertheless continue to be a deduction of 20 per cent. of supplementary benefit or income support. The Government are very kind; they realise that pregnant women may have special needs, so they do not dock 40 per cent. In doing that, they acknowledge by implication that docking the benefit of the main claimant affects the rest of the family, but they cannot bring themselves to concede that a pregnant woman should not be penalised at all in such circumstances. They know—or, if they do not, it is because they refuse to know—that it has already been established by medical authorities that pregnant women on supplementary benefit cannot obtain adequate nourishment. That is a fact.

A pregnant woman on supplementary benefit, less 20 per cent., will obtain even more inadequate nourishment. It is that woman and her child who are punished. I shall be interested to hear what the Minister says to justify that. If he does not choose to answer during his reply, I shall remind him.

I believe that the order is bad for everyone, especially for the young. However, in particular, it is bad for women, in common with so much of Conservative legislation.

6.10 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) that we must consider this legislation, this latest attack upon the unemployed, in the context of the Government's broader labour market policy. What they are seeking to do is to achieve increased profitability on the backs of the poor. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) that this is an evil, brutal and vindictive order. Indeed, I do not believe that those words are strong enough.

The Government are attempting to find a scapegoat —every piece of legislation currently going through the House is about finding scapegoats. At the moment, the unemployed are to be the scapegoats. They are to be despised by the rest of society; that is the aim of the order. I have listened carefully to some of the language that has been used this afternoon. Words such as "shiftless", "workshy" or "scroungers" have been used deliberately. I have no doubt that those comics that support the Government will use such words in their banner headlines.

If the Government succeed in marginalising the unemployed — they are yet another group that the Government are seeking to marginalise—they hope that a desperate army will be formed, a reserve army of malleable people, willing to go to work for anything. This is all part and parcel of the Government's plan of State coercion about which my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston spoke so well.

Let us consider the real world of the unemployed. Until recently, unlike Conservative Members, I was part of the labour market. For most of my life I have been employed in low-paid jobs. Some of my constituents are now suffering as a result of doing similar jobs to mine.

One young man came to my surgery a couple of weeks ago. He has a history of mental illness, but he desperately wants to work. He answered an advert for a job, came off sickness benefit and tried to do that job. However, he then found out that he was expected to do permanent night work—he had expected to do some night work, but not permanently. The rate of pay was £2 an hour. Incidentally, his job was in an old mill that was recently visited by the Prime Minister. We have been told about the new industrial revolution, but his rate of pay was £2, with no unsocial hours pay.

That young man eventually became ill again and the stress of that work and the low pay caused him to have another nervous breakdown. He lost his money and he had been without money for five weeks when he came to see me. He was desperate, and various charities had been helping him. We are now trying to get his employment

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

benefit back. However, he was deemed to have made himself unemployed and the inescapable fact is that he was forced to live without any recourse to income.

Another young man came to see me——

Mr. Hind: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Mahon: I shall happily give way when I have described this case.

A young man came to see me who was working for a security firm. He was also working for £2 an hour—that seems to be the going rate as a result of the wonderful entrepreneurial regeneration that we have witnessed in Halifax. The company for which that firm worked introduced a night shift and, by definition, his job went. The firm offered him a part-time job in another part of the country. He told me that he was deemed to have made himself voluntarily unemployed as a result of his changed circumstances.

Mr. Hind: I appreciate the hon. Lady's argument. There are some circumstances in which the argument can be made for benefits to be restored. However, the hon. Lady must bear in mind the fact that 3,427,000 people changed jobs between October 1986 and June 1987. That is a large number, and surely we should consider the problem carefully. There are many people who voluntarily leave jobs. The people to whom the hon. Lady has referred are a minority, and the appeal system deals with them.

Mrs. Mahon: I do not accept that the 420,000 people who have been disqualified made themselves voluntarily unemployed.

We must also consider the effects of other Government employment legislation. Anyone who tries to claim constructive dismissal cannot do so for two years. Constructive dismissal is something that employers often use, especially when they want to get rid of somebody or wish to reduce staff numbers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) has already mentioned harassment. It is a fact of life that women simply leave their jobs if sexually harassed. They find it difficult, for many reasons, to complain. Indeed, society does not accept the scale of the sexual harassment problem. Obviously, the younger and more inexperienced the woman, the less likely she is to complain. Women leave their jobs and lose benefit. Racial harassment also occurs in the workplace.

People may take a job and find that they are so low-paid that they have lost their passport to all kinds of benefit; that is another reason why they may leave their jobs. People may have extremely low-paid employment and may incur travelling costs, but they will still lose the right to free school meals. The Minister would regard such cases as examples of misconduct, but I believe that the people affected are victims. My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston has already said that many such people win their appeals against the loss of benefit, but there is an intervening time in which they have to live before they start to receive benefit again.

I wish to address some of my remarks to a group of people who have not been mentioned today — active trade unionists. I can speak about them from experience. In one of my last jobs, I was on a final warning and I know how easy it is for the management to set traps for the trade unionist. I also recognise that, in the few years since I left the labour market, the problems have got considerably worse. Victimisation in the workplace is on the rampage. The Government have mounted the most malicious and malevolent attack upon active trade unionists, who represent a large proportion of those we have discussed today.

I already said that 420,000 people per year face disqualification on the grounds of voluntary unemployment. I absolutely refuse to accept that the majority of my fellow citizens are workshy—that is nonsense. My hon. Friends and myself have outlined viable reasons why people leave work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Mullin) asked the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) why he had changed his mind. In Committee last year he had said that a three-month disqualification was all right, but he now says that six months is the proper disqualification period. The hon. Member for Erith and Crayford would not answer my hon. Friend, but I believe that the unemployment register has caused his change of mind. The Government want that register to reach the 2 million band and they are going to get rid of thousands of the unemployed as a result of the order. It is a fiddle—the 25th Government fiddle.

The hon. Member for Erith and Crayford spoke of the past, and the romantic notion of nobility of poverty. I would like to tell him some of my family's past and about some true poverty. My grandad was blacked as a miner and found it extremely difficult to get work in Yorkshire, even in the textile industry. When he did, the whole family had to work for very low wages indeed. There is nothing romantic about working for such low levels of pay. The Minister would take us back to slaving in the mills. Out of 11 children in that family, nine died below the age of 60 and four died under 50. That is what happens when people live in grinding poverty, working for slave wages, and have bread and dripping in the mornings. The Government would take us back to that.

What will the unemployed live on for six months if they receive nothing? What will happen to them? I ask the few Conservative Members who are present, how they think the unemployed will live. The Minister would take us back to those days. When I was in Standing Committee on the Social Security Bill, I appealed to the Minister, when we were told, as we have been told in the debate, that the Minister cares.

I made a special plea on behalf of the youngsters leaving care. I asked the Minister whether we could have an exemption for YTS youngsters who have been severely emotionally damaged or have had experiences that none of us would like to undergo. It is more difficult for them to settle in employment, and training schemes are particularly difficult for them. The Minister's answer, in the very quiet, bland and benign manner that he uses, was simply no. Those youngsters will still exist. They will disappear into homelessness and drug abuse, and it will be on the Government's conscience when they do.

The order will lead to more family breakdowns. My mother taught me that, during the 1920s and 1930s, when poverty came in, love went out. I grew up with that expression. There were breakdowns then and there will be massive breakdowns now. The Government will pay for this vindictive measure.

As a nation, we have never over-reacted—we are a very placid and calm nation—but I believe that this order is rubbing the noses of the poor into the mire, and the Government will pay for it.

6.21 pm

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I shall speak for only a few minutes, as other hon. Members wish to speak.

The measure can be described as nothing more than a bad employers' charter. It is about the fear of those who are privileged to have a job. No matter how low-paid or how bad the conditions or the harassment, they will feel that they have to keep that job, or they will be penalised by the state. It is a charter for bad employers; it is almost a charter for slavery. Any time that one tries to escape from a job that is nothing more than slavery, one will be hounded by the state and fined by being put into poverty for six months with one's family. There is no argument about that.

We all know what employers are doing now and what they will do in future when there is the threat of no income whatsoever or very little income if employees do not toe the line. It happens every day in the working lives of many of those whom we represent.

I understand the enthusiasm of Conservative Members who believe that this is a good measure. They represent the very employers who will exploit the situation for profit and greed at the expense of the workers that they employ, in very bad conditions. We can all give chapter and verse of the number of cases that we meet in our surgeries.

In my constituency, a woman became pregnant and took maternity leave. When the baby arrived and maternity leave finished, she could not go back to her job because she could not afford a child minder as it was a very low-paid job. She used her initiative and applied for other jobs but unfortunately the DHSS said, "You are deemed to have made yourself voluntarily unemployed; therefore you get no benefit." So her debts went up.

Hon. Members may say that there is an appeal mechanism, but that young lady went through the appeal mechanism and the adjudication officer ruled in her favour. However, she was then asked, "Have you been paying your stamp?" The employer apparently had lost her national insurance number. We are now approaching 26 weeks with no money and no pay for a lady with a baby. She is getting more and more into debt. When this measure goes through, that will happen all the time.

It is a matter of discipline. There was another example of a poor sod—if I may use that word—who had lost his job and after three months he could get no work. One of his neighbours was building a garage and said to him, "Come on son, we do not want you wasting time looking for jobs when there are no jobs. Help me build this garage." He got £20 for three weeks' effort. The neighbour was asked by the DHSS, "Is that your son?" and he replied, "It is one of the neighbours who has nothing to do and I thought that he might like something practical to do to keep him off the streets." Immediately, that man was deemed to have been employed, and he lost benefit from then on. For the sake of £20, he lost benefit for the next few weeks. Under the new system, he will lose benefit for six months. He will be fined for six months for earning £20 helping a neighbour to build a garage.

Is that democracy? Is that fair? We are not talking about skivers; we are talking about people who want dignity, who want real jobs, but are not prepared to crawl or to be hounded by the state or by bad employers. The Government are blackmailing those people into taking those jobs because they and their families will suffer. The Government hope that sooner or later people will accept slavery without dignity.

I hope and pray that the Government will push people so far that, although we are a conservative nation with a small "c", sooner or later people will rise up and take you on. Whether or not you have a police force and even if all the press are in your hands, the people will rise up and put you out of office by the ballot box——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Michie: I have great respect for you, Mr. Speaker. I was simply getting wound up. I shall wind up and wind down now.

I finish by saying that this is not an amusing issue for those who will be subjected to the order. It is not amusing to Opposition Members who are fighting every case. We are dealing only with the tip of the iceberg. Thousands of people will be subjected to a measure of which the KGB would have been proud. The Government are using exactly the same system, and the sooner they are overthrown the better.

6.27 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): There are few occasions when I have felt so emotional about a subject. The Minister has not thought it out. The Government think that they can simply throw someone on to the dole for 26 weeks.

At one time, a Conservative Member tried to live on the dole money, without an income. After five days, had he been living in Scotland, he would have died of malnutrition. He was cadging pints in the pub, and he could not survive on the dole money. He was a talented, able and clever young man, the heir to £100,000 a year, and he could not survive on the dole.

Now this suggestion has been plucked out of the air, to increase the period from 13 weeks to 26 weeks. That decision has no logic and no reason, except that someone voluntarily chucks in their job. That is life. I know many people on low pay who have dignity and who would like to work in a job for decent money and be able to bank something. Many people work six days a week and do not bank anything. They are desperate to look after their wains, but they have dignity. If a foreman or anyone pushed them around or tried to grind their noses into the ground, they would chuck in their jobs. They would chuck it then and there and the Government would ban them from benefit for 26 weeks. The Government would punish their families and drive such people to desperate acts.

I live in a constituency where 4,000 people are unemployed and many of them were put out of work or left their jobs because of their pride. If the Government think that such people will watch their children suffer, they have another think coming. The Government are living in cloud-cuckoo land if they think that they can force this measure on men and women who have worked to make this nation one of the richest in the world. They should be showing more compassion to the unemployed and low-paid.

I can give many reasons why people leave jobs and do so with dignity. Other hon. Members have spoken about how people are not prepared to grovel because of a bad

[Mr. Thomas Graham]

foreman, a personality difficulty or poor safety standards, with a lack of guards on machinery and people working in unsafe conditions. I have not seen many firms fined for failing to meet safety regulations.

I hope that this punitive measure will be defeated tonight. To live for 13 weeks without money is hard enough. As I have already said, a Conservative Member could not survive for five days on the dole, yet the Government are now asking people to survive for 26 weeks without it. People who have never committed a criminal act in their life will be driven to crime to seek aid and security for their families. The Government will make criminals of decent ordinary and good people.

6.31 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Everyone who has been present throughout will agree that this has been an excellent debate and one in which strong feelings have been expressed, understandably so, on the Opposition Benches.

The proposals have a strange history. Several hon. Members have mentioned that a period of disqualification was introduced as long ago as 1911 and managed to survive for a substantial number of years until the Government's arrival in office without it being thought necessary to revise that period. It survived the commission set up to study the abuse of benefits under a Tory Government in 1973—at a time, incidentally, when the levels of disqualification on such terms were running at 600,000 a year, compared with the 300,000 or so at which they are now running. Nevertheless, that committee, which was set up specifically to discuss the abuse of benefits, saw no necessity for a change in the provisions.

In 1979, the Supplementary Benefits Commission expressed its anxiety at any suggestion that these provisions might be tightened, believing that that would be unnecessary. Indeed, the present Social Security Advisory Committee expressed similar reservations and its great concern and anxiety when, in 1986, the Government last doubled the period of disqualification.

The hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) said that there would always be cases of hardship. Many hon. Members would accept that some of the cases quoted by Labour Members did represent cases of hardship. During the lifetime of the Conservative Government, the leniency that was once available for those in hardship has been steadily reduced and the conditions have been tightened. It was this Government who made the statutory deduction of 40 per cent. It was this Government who tightened the provisions whereby that amount could be reduced in cases of hardship and reduced those only to cases of serious illness or pregnancy, although even then, the deduction was 20 per cent.

Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) most ably pointed out, the range of criticisms that have been made, not from the Opposition Benches but by the chief adjudication officer and other independent studies, such as the social security inspectorate study of the means of judging these cases, show that not only is it a fact that so many cases are overturned on appeal and it is shown that wrong decisions have been made, but the history of the report of the social security inspectorate shows that often those incorrect decisions were never communicated to the people who suffered from them. Money was never repaid. We had to drag the Government kicking and screaming through the courts to make them repay even the 9,000 or 10,000 current claimants illegally denied benefit under these provisions.

Who in those circumstances can have confidence, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) said, that all those denied benefit whose cases were not overturned on appeal must have been correctly so denied? Let me quote a case given to us by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux of somebody whose disqualification was, indeed, ruled to be correct and who therefore, on the hon. Lady's judgment, should have been denied benefit.

A 17-year old labourer in a bus depot in the north-east was expected to work eight-hour shifts seven days a week for £50 a week. He was dismissed because he tried to arrange to have one day off each week on alternate Saturdays and Sundays. His dimissal was ruled to be correct under the law. The hon. Lady bows her head. Clearly that is a disqualification with which she agrees. She will not find many Labour Members who agree with her, and I doubt whether she will find many in the community. If I am misinterpreting the hon. Lady, I shall gladly give way.

Dame Jill Knight: I said that an appeal procedure was available and ready for people who felt that they had been wrongly dismissed. It is fair to say that one cannot give all the facts of a case in a few sentences. I would not say whether it was right or wrong on the facts that I have heard so far.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Lady has given her point of view. I merely rest on the observation that she said that she believed that those whose cases were not upheld on appeal must, by most criteria, have been rightly dismissed. All I am saying is that some of us on the Labour Benches would say that that is called into question by cases such as the one that I have just outlined.

I cannot recall the hon. Lady's exact words—if I misrepresent the tenor of her remarks, she will no doubt tell me, but I do not think that I do—but she referred to a direction in the operation of the welfare state of what she seemed to regard as increasing shiftlessness. She spoke of the way in which people were irresponsibly giving up job opportunities or jobs themselves and exploiting the provisions of the welfare state. In that context, the hon. Lady justified the changes that the Government made in 1986 and are seeking to make today. I do not agree with the hon. Lady, but I understand her case.

But what I find extraordinary, and what I entirely fail to understand, what neither the hon. Lady nor any other hon. Member, including any Minister, who has ever spoken on the matter has ever been able to make clear to me, is how the Government reached this conclusion. The initial doubling of the period to 13 weeks was not trailed in the Green Paper—the most fundamental review since Beveridge — that the Government published prior to their legislation. It did not even appear in the Government's White Paper. It did not appear in the Social Security Bill that was introduced in 1985 and debated in Committee for 160 hours. It did not even appear in a consultation paper in the way that the new clauses on industrial injuries and statutory maternity pay did — after the Bill had been guillotined, but still with enough thought and preparation for a consultation paper to be prepared.

Literally the week before the 13-week doubling was announced, we had been debating the very matter about which I have just reminded the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford—the Government's default and the number of people wrongly denied benefit, who had never been notified of their appeal and who had never had their lost benefit repaid to them.

We were debating that the very week before the 13-week doubling was announced and the Government, apparently, had not sufficiently made up their mind. This increasing trend which the hon. Lady had detected over decades struck them all of a heap suddenly between one week and the next and they thought it right to rush in this new clause.

The notes on clauses which were introduced to explain this proposal said nothing whatsoever, not a single word, about the Government's reasons for making it. They said what was being done, but nothing about why.

Nor, indeed, were we much wiser when we listened to the Minister of State's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton). He spoke for 10 minutes introducing the precursor to this order, the measure that laid the groundwork for this order being able to be carried out without further primary legislation. In that 10 minutes, he said not a single word about the reasons for the proposal. All he spoke about was the mechanics of what was being done; he said nothing at all about the reasons.

Certainly he said nothing about the evidence, for reasons which became a little more clear when he was questioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay). The Minister said—and this was about as far as he went in a quite tentative justification of the proposals that he was putting before us:

"there was now a distinct, but I accept not a very rapid, rising trend."

That was his way of describing the fact that the number of disqualifications had fallen substantially over the previous few years but had now begun to rise very slightly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North asked the Minister why he thought that was happening; had he a breakdown of age brackets, had he a breakdown regionally; had he a breakdown of the earnings brackets in which the numbers that he had quoted fell? The right hon. Member for Braintree replied:

"No, I do not have any breakdowns. I shall, of course, explore whether there is further information that I can make available to the hon. Gentleman, although I could not pretend that I should be able to do that tonight."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 30 April 1986; c. 1871.]

That was on 30 April 1986. It is now 1 March 1988 and the Government still do not seem to have come up with much in the way of statistics to justify the change that they made then, let alone this further doubling that they are putting before us tonight.

The right hon. Member for Braintree, did say, finally, that there was a question mark over the way in which the period of disqualification had been operating, that it was a matter of judgment to extend—and he emphasised this most noticeably — not the automatic period of disqualification, but the maximum period over which that disqualification could be applied.

Of course, what we saw then and what we are seeing now is that, unfortunately, it is the maximum period that tends to be applied in the vast majority of cases — according to the survey which my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston quoted and which the Government have not yet published, but which I hope that they will choose to publish—apparently running now at 75 per cent. of the cases judged.

The Government had no real evidence to put before us in 1986 and now, tonight, they have very little; they have no real further evidence to pad out the total lack of grounds that they offered us then.

If the Government were concerned that perhaps 13 weeks might not be enough or might not work properly, if they were concerned that some variation might be needed of the period of disqualification, why did they not monitor what was happening? Why did they not seek independent evidence? Why did they not make a study? Why is it that the Minister is still — truthfully or otherwise—able to say to us that no real monitoring of the periods of disqualification and the reasons for disqualification is being carried out?

What justification could there be on the Government's own terms, for the doubling of the disqualification period when they have little, if any, judgment to offer of why that should take place? Whenever the figures that they offer are questioned, they rapidly shift their ground, as my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston has pointed out.

To call the Government's case flimsy would be over-complimentary. The Government's case is tranparent. The Government have no case; they have a wish, a decision, a judgment that they have decided to exercise. Grounds for making it they have none—other, possibly, than their wish to make public expenditure savings, and one other, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) referred and to which I shall return in a moment.

Turning from the thinness of the Government's case, unfortunately the background, the reality and the experience of those who will lose from these changes is all too real. There seems to me to be—my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam), I think, used this phrase—a substantial amount of double jeopardy, some in the provisions themselves and some in the different provisions which the Government have put forward and of which this order will, unfortunately, be likely to be part after its passage tonight. Adjudication officers deny people one benefit in a variety of circumstances because, they say, people who have some degree of illness or sickness are fit for light work. The question whether there is light work is irrelevant; they are judged to be fit for light work and are denied benefit on those grounds.

One of the cases quoted by a west midlands citizens advice bureau is that of a pregnant woman who left her job in the fourth month because it involved heavy lifting and standing for long periods, which made her feel dizzy. She was refused both unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit because she was available only for part-time light work. That is double jeopardy.

In income support, housing benefit and board and lodging regulations, the Government tell us that the young are expected to live at home. The phrase which the Government used in the Green Paper and the words that they have used over and over again are:

"it is clear that at the age of 18 the majority of claimants are not fully independent and that the great majority of claimants above the age of 25 are. The government have concluded that an appropriate dividing line is age 25."

[Mrs. Beckett]

The Government have argued that, justified it and stated it over and over again since 1985, although it is a view that we have questioned. But that is the Government's view, so they tell us.

However, when we turn to the order, we discover that young persons who move from their jobs, because their parents have moved and their family home has been transferred to a different part of the country, are liable to find themselves in jeopardy under these proposals regarding their claim for benefit. The Government's argument in the adjudication officer's guide is this:

"Claimants aged over 18 who leave jobs because their parents are moving will, in general, only avoid disqualification if they, or their parents, can show that there is strong reason why they should continue to live with them."

When it is the board and lodging regulations, housing benefit or income support, young people are expected to live with their family, but when it comes to these regulations they are expected to stay behind, not to live with their family any more, because then it suits the Government to save money at their expense in a different context.

The most obvious double jeopardy of all is that with regard to persons who may be offered a training place or a job which they fear may be unsuitable. By the use of this order, the Government, if the Employment Bill is passed, are intending to extend it to the offer of a suitable—by the Government's standards, which means undefined—job or training place in any circumstances. So people, young or otherwise, who are offered a job or a training place which they fear may be unsuitable or unsafe will, if they refuse to take up that offer, have these regulations applied to them, and lose benefit. But if, under that compulsion, they take that place, job or offer and their fears turn out to be justified and they wish to leave, they will again be caught by the provisions of these regulations and will be denied benefit because—again I quote the adjudication officer's guide—

"if the conditions which prompt a claimant to leave his employment were known to him when he began the employment, and he accepted it in spite of them, he cannot turn the clock back and say that he has just cause for leaving simply because the employment was unsuitable in the first place."

Many of my hon. Friends who have spoken in the debate have made the point, and made it ably, that the Government are catching people both ways round; that it is, in effect, a new and refined form of slavery at work, because they will force people into unsuitable jobs. Indeed, the order can be used on the one hand to force people into such training places or jobs and on the other to catch them if they dare to leave, their worst fears having been realised.

The Minister said in opening the debate that these proposals had one clear purpose—to discourage people from remaining voluntarily without work. Unfortunately for the Minister, we had that discussion too in 1985. My hon. Friends raised over and over again with his predecessor the right hon. Member for Braintree the point that, if the Government were really worried about people against whom misconduct could be proved and against whom there could be a case that they had no just cause for leaving their place of work, they should wait until misconduct had been established and justified and then say that if there were to be disqualification from benefit it should apply from that date.

In resisting it, the then Minister of State told the Committee that he was not prepared to say that the disqualifications could apply only from the point at which misconduct had been proven, because by that time the person might be back in work. In other words, it did not have anything to do with discouraging someone from wilfully staying without work; it was specifically to penalise a person for daring to leave work or for daring not to take a job, a training place or an offer of any kind which the Government might have put before him primarily to reduce the numbers on the unemployment register.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central put his finger on the main point in drawing the attention of the House to the report by the Rayner scrutiny team "Payment of Benefits to Unemployed People", which said that although it had considered recommending the abolition of unemployment benefit, it had felt that

"the idea of means testing every claimant might not be politically acceptable".

The Government have not got the guts to do that, or to make the case head-on. They have not got the guts to say that they will not pay unemployment benefit when the people know well that there are not just hundreds of thousands but millions of their fellow citizens not in work, because there is no work. Even this Government have not got the guts to do that. Instead they steadily eat away at the benefits by abolishing earnings-related supplements, tightening the credit rules, making it more and more difficult for people to establish entitlement to unemployment benefit and making it easier to take benefit away.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) referred to the progress in his lifetime and how he had seen it destroyed. I am reminded of a conversation which I had with a colleague who is well known to many in the House, Mr. Jack Jones, once the general secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union. He said, "My wife and I have discussed this often. We feel that we have spent our whole lives dragging a cart uphill and now someone has cut the rope." Many people will get hurt when that cart rattles down the hill. I hope that Conservative Members are among them.

7.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Michael Portillo): I may be briefer than I had intended; if I do not cover every point, I apologise to the House in advance.

It may be worth beginning on first principles and saying that the purpose of unemployment benefit is to insure claimants who normally derive their income from employment against short periods of unemployment which they cannot foresee. It follows, as in any insurance scheme, that a person cannot be covered for circumstances or conditions which he brings upon himself. In the case of unemployment insurance, that means leaving a job with no other job to go to or being dismissed from a job for misconduct.

But we are not discussing in the debate people who leave one job to go to another. They are free to do that if they are able to find another job. We are not discussing people who are sacked because they are made redundant or people who are sacked because they are not up to a job. None of those apply. We are talking about people who are

sacked for misconduct or who leave their job voluntarily. That is a point on which my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) put his finger.

That is why, since 1911, penalties have existed to discourage voluntary unemployment. Those penalties were explicitly restated in the Social Security Act 1975, passed by the Government formed by the Labour party. The reason they were restated was that they had been formulated very clearly in the Beveridge report, which said in paragraph 326:

"Disqualifications, as at present, will apply to men refusing suitable employment, dismissed for misconduct or leaving their work voluntarily without just cause".

The reason Beveridge included that in his report was made clear in paragraph 130:

"The correlative of the State's undertaking to ensure adequate benefit for unavoidable interruption of earnings, however long, is enforcement of the citizen's obligation to seek and accept all reasonable opportunities of work, to co-operate in measures designed to save him from habituation to idleness, and to take all proper measures to be well. The higher the benefits provided out of a common fund for unmerited misfortune, the higher must be the citizen's sense of obligation not to draw upon that fund unnecessarily."

That, in similar language, was the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight).

May I point out to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) that there is nothing in the Beveridge explanation about de minimis or any of the other terms which he used to try to explain why a Labour Government had consistently applied the principle. The case advanced by Beveridge is the concept of enforcement of the citizen's obligation. No amount of wriggling by the hon. Gentleman will get him away from that point.

The objective in 1911, the objective in 1948, the objective in 1975 and the objective today are the same—to discourage voluntary unemployment. As I understand it, and as the hon. Member for Livingston stated clearly, the Opposition have no disagreement on the purpose or on the means, because they used the same means — disqualification from unemployment benefit and the downrating of supplementary benefit. They downrated supplementary benefit even at times when it was much lower in real terms than it is today. Apparently the only disagreement between the two sides is that we are interested in making the penalty effective and the Opposition are not interested in so doing.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) talked about the evidence from the numbers of disqualifications. In the year to October 1986, there were under 414,000 disqualifications, at a time when there were 5·35 million claims for benefit. In the year to October 1987, there were over 420,000 disqualifications; that is to say, the number went up at a time when the total number of claims went down to 4·9 million. So the proportion showed a considerable increase. The increase was from 7·7 per cent. to 8·6 per cent.

Since the hon. Member for Livingston raised different quarters, I will discuss those quarters with him. He wanted to discuss two quarters taken at random, one ending at 30 September 1986 when the number of disqualifications was 7·03 per cent. of claims. He wanted to compare that with the quarter ending 30 June 1987, when disqualifications were 8·83 per cent. of claims. Therefore, the increase was particularly marked in the period which he chose. The increase from 7·03 per cent. to 8·83 per cent. was an increase of 26 per cent., as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Minister in his opening remarks.

Mr. Robin Cook: May I stress to the Under-Secretary that I did not choose those nine months at random? The Minister of State chose those nine months in his press statement when he said that in those nine months the number of claims from people leaving work had increased. The Under-Secretary will admit that that statement was wholly untrue and that the figures provided to the House clearly show that the numbers fell. The only reason the proportion went up was that the numbers of those made redundant fell even faster over the same period. Is he suggesting that if the numbers of those made redundant halve in the next year, and the proportion increases, he will come back and double the penalty once more?

Mr. Portillo: I continue to maintain that the proportion is a significant figure. I notice that the hon. Gentleman has not disputed the fact that the quarters which he has chosen to quote, both in this morning's *Guardian* and in the debate, actually strengthen our case. That is the point that I make to him.

Many questions have been raised about the quality of adjudications and the number of appeals. Let me put it in context for my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell). In 1986, there were 5·3 million claims arising from unemployment. Of those, 720,000 were referred to adjudication officers and about 40 per cent. of them were allowed at that stage. Then 6,428 were appealed on the grounds that the voluntary unemployment deduction should not have been made. Of those, 2,548 were decided in the claimants' favour.

Out of 5 million claims, 2,500 were decided in the claimants' favour and voluntary unemployment deduction should not have been made. That is about one twentieth of one percentage point. If errors are made in adjudication, they are probably few, but, however few they are, I regret them. However, it is ludicrous to say that a policy is void because, out of five million claims, there may be some errors. On that basis, we should have no benefit system at all. I ask the Member for Livingston to accept that.

Several hon. Members have asked whether the maximum period is always imposed. The guidance given by the chief adjudication officer on 23 September 1986 is clear about that. He said:

"It is wrong to say that the only two possible approaches to deciding the period of disqualification are by starting at the maximum and working down, or by starting at the minimum and working up.

It is not correct to say that the maximum period should be imposed unless the claimant proves that there are mitigating circumstances. . . . The correct approach is to regard each case as one in which a sensible discretion has to be exercised in such manner as the justice of the case requires. All the circumstances must be taken into account."

The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) wanted to know what the effect on claimants would be. The effect will be the same as it was under the Labour Government, as the 40 per cent. rate of deduction on supplementary benefit remains unchanged. The difference is that, in real terms, supplementary benefit is now double what it was in 1948 and has been rising under this Government.

Mrs. Wise: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Portillo: No, I am coming to the end of my remarks.

[Mr. Portillo]

The reduction in supplementary benefit amounts to 40 per cent. of the personal rate. Amounts for the family continue to be calculated on the benefit rates, so a single person aged over 25 would have his income support reduced by £13·35 but, for a couple with children, the deduction would be exactly the same, so that their full income support rate would be £79·10. Assuming a rent of £30, on average rates, the total receipts for that family, including housing benefit, would be £114·30. That is a deduction of some 10 per cent. in total support and ignores free school meals and agency benefits which continue unaffected. If the 20 per cent. deduction applies, the total amount of downrating is about 5 per cent.

Mrs. Wise *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: The Minister will recall that my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston asked him how he came to give an answer on 18 February, suggesting that information was not being collected on the length of disqualifications, when, apparently, it was being collected. His answer appears to have been misleading. Will he tell us how that situation arose?

Mr. Portillo: I have no hard and fast information on the length of disqualifications. I have only a sample of about 500 which may give a reasonable indication. I should not have dreamt of giving that information to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), as though it were scientific evidence of what was occurring.

The debate has been characterised by muddle and embarrassment on the Opposition Front Bench. The hon. Member for Livingston has had to engage in considerable sophistry. He has argued that the 40 per cent. reduction could cause hunger — those were his words — but not, apparently, when the same deduction of 40 per cent. applied under the Labour Government. He said that six weeks was a de minimis and not a penalty. In that, he flatly contradicted Beveridge. He agreed that suspension of benefit was right, but he does not wish it to be effective in discouraging voluntary unemployment. We wish to be effective. That is the difference between the Government and the Opposition and that is why I commend the order to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 274, Noes 219.

Division No. 200] **[7.3 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick

Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walters, Dennis
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.

NOES

Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Allen Adams.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Unemployment Benefit (Disqualification Period) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 19th February, be approved.

Social Security (Armed Forces)

Motion made, and Question put,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Social Security (Benefit) (Members of the Forces) Amendment Regulations 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 269), dated 18th February 1988, a copy of which was laid before this House on 19th February, be annulled. — *[Mr. Robin Cook.]*

The House divided: Ayes 216, Noes 268.

Division No. 201] **[7.18 pm**

AYES

Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Cook and
Mr. Allen Adams.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey

Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, M. *(Newbury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon Sir Charles
Morrison, Hon P *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walters, Dennis
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd and
Mr. Alan Howarth.

Question accordingly negatived.

Orders of the Day

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [25 February],

That the draft Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts 1978 and 1987 (Continuance) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 16th February, be approved:—*[Mr. Tom King.]*

Question again proposed.

7.30 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will remember that in the adjourned debate, the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) used a phrase in relation to me, when he said:

"He has set up many UDR men."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 1988; Vol. 128, c. 490.]

Subsequently, some hon. Members sought a ruling from the Chair on that statement, and I wonder whether Mr. Speaker has had time to consider the matter further. I do not expect Mr. Speaker to master the Northern Ireland vernacular totally, but he may be able to get the flavour of what the statement meant. I ask whether you would make a ruling that the statement is, to say the least, unparliamentary language, and to set down such a ruling as a precedent?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I cannot add to what Mr. Speaker said last Thursday towards the end of the debate. It is not possible to go back on points of order —they must be raised at the time—but I think I can help the hon. Gentleman. We are now resuming the debate, and I am sure that, with a little ingenuity, he will be able to raise whatever points he wishes to in the debate.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. During the resumed debate, when you were not in the chair, points of order were made and Mr. Speaker promised that he would consider the questions raised by Opposition Members on the description used of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is nothing I can add. I have refreshed my mind—I have the point in front of me. Of course, I have discussed the matter with Mr. Speaker, and nothing can be added. I suggest to the House that it would be better if we get on with the debate, when no doubt hon. Members will be able to pick up the threads of the debate last Thursday.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The point of order will be brief, but it is of some importance. Could you advise the House on how we should proceed? As I understand it, Mr. Speaker can notify the Procedure Committee when a statement is made, as it was this afternoon on the potential takeover of British Leyland by British Aerospace, whether Ministers should notify the House of any financial interests of hon. Members, because the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) is listed in the Register of Members' Interests as the honorary adviser to the chairman of British Aerospace plc.

Hon. Members do not and cannot look through the Register of Members' Interests at the time, but if hon. Members have an interest in the subject of the statement, it would be to the advantage of the House if that were made clear in the statement. There is no Standing Order on that at the moment, but it would facilitate matters if you could draw it to the attention of the Procedure Committee that additional information is required, so that hon. Members can make a better judgment of the relationship of the Government with hon. Members such as the right hon. Member for Chingford.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When you are referring the matter to Mr. Speaker, would you ask him during his investigations to check on what Cabinet positions were held by the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), at the time both of the appointment of Mr. Graham Day as the chairman of the Rover Group and of the privatisation of British Aerospace, because something smells fishy?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have noted the points raised by both hon. Gentlemen, and they have almost answered their own points. If they feel that changes are required, it is for them, not the Chair, to draw the matter to the attention of the appropriate Committee, be it the Procedure Committee when it is set up or the Select Committee on Members' Interests.

7.33 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): With reference to your statement, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we should pick up the threads of the debate from last week, I sincerely hope that we do not, because the *Official Report* shows that it turned into a semi-pantomime. When we are dealing with a very serious issue, the last thing we want to do is pick up those threads.

I do not wish to labour the point on the accusation made by the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. I. Paisley), but I have made and will continue to make public any revelations of which I am aware as to the involvement of the security forces in illegal actions. I believe it would be a dereliction of my duty if I did not do so.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North referred to two incidents which took place in my constituency. The first was the involvement of members of the UDR in the Miami Showband murders; the other was when two men were shot dead and it was subsequently verified by the police that an unmarked, unlogged UDR patrol with its numbers blacked out was in the area at the time. That was verified by the police very soon after the incident. In my constituency, four members of the UDR have been convicted of murder. It would be highly irresponsible of any public representative not to draw attention to such events when they happen.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North referred to an incident in the first Assembly, when a Unionist refused to sit with me. I am in very good company. Of late, Unionists have refused to sit with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and with other hon. Members. They have refused to sit on district councils and with Ministers, so the accusation should be put into context. I assure the hon. Member that I can do without the type of company of which he suggests I was seriously deprived.

This is a serious debate which takes place against a background of the events—or non-events, some may say —of the past two weeks. There is an air of unreality

about the debate, because the circumstances of the past four weeks have been incredible. It takes a tremendous leap of imagination to take seriously an order which has been a contributing factor to the events of the past week. The House should be aware of that unreality. I suggest that Kafka could not have written the script for the one debacle after another and the effect that that has had on morale, as well as creating resentment, frustration, anger and disillusionment in the communities of Northern Ireland.

It is not exaggerating to say that people are punch-drunk, and staggering from one body blow to another. In the past three weeks, people have seen their hopes for good law, proper justice and freedom from injustice being dashed in a way that has not been experienced before.

I have some sympathy for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who has to cope not just with his own mistakes but with the mistakes of others. I have great sympathy for him, because he is dealing with something he inherited and over which he had no control.

We are considering the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act and the Report of Viscount Colville. He stated in the foreword that it was not his brief

"to query the philosophy behind the legislation."

That is a terrible mistake, because the philosophy behind the legislation should be examined carefully. From that philosophy have come two Bills, neither of which has contributed to peace or created stability or justice in Northern Ireland.

Many hon. Members regard the legislation as something new, something introduced in 1974 as a result of the horrific bombings in Birmingham—but it is not. The legislation is a refinement of the Special Powers Act which has existed in Northern Ireland since the day the stayte was formed until 1970, which was a refinement of the Coercion Act 1887. I could go back into history, but I will not do that. Over that period, this type of legislation has been based on false premises, on the spurious notion that if one bends the law one can enforce it—if one introduces repressive legislation, one will somehow bring about peace. That is not so. Such action will nurture, spawn and feed violence, as has so often happened in the north of Ireland.

It is also spurious to suggest that punitive action by the police, the Army or the courts, will create stability. It merely destroys and undermines it. Empiric evidence from the past 20 years, and from many years before that, going back into Irish history, shows that there is no solution down that road. There is no solution of a military type. Anyone who saw General Glover on "Panorama" last night will have been interested to hear someone who was the GOC in the North of Ireland saying what I am saying. That is why the philosophy behind the legislation is so important.

Once one begins to derogate and lower standards, corrosion starts at all levels, so we must examine all levels and say harsh things if they must be said, looking reality in the face if it is there. The highest standards in Government have been corroded. The Attorney-General's decision not to prosecute the policemen against whom there was evidence of perverting the course of justice was a profoundly damaging mistake, whose repercussions are there to be seen, in political terms, both on the ground in the North of Ireland and nationally and internationally. What was a regional issue became a national issue when the Attorney-General rang the bell with the buzz words "public interest" and "national security".

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Would my hon. Friend accept that, if the RUC had been completely open about what happened and admitted that mistakes had been made, and had identified the persons that were involved at every level—including, perhaps, even Sir John Hermon—it might have been satisfactory then to have held merely a disciplinary inquiry as opposed to a prosecution? We are trying to find out the truth, to ensure that this never happens again. The calls for prosecutions only arise because of the cover-up.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. Gentleman. There are two factors in this. First, six people who could have been apprehended with the use of minimum force, but who were not, and who were innocent before the law—I am old-fashioned enough to believe that everyone is innocent until proven guilty—could have been brought before the law and charged, but were killed in an unlawful manner.

Secondly, the disastrous decision of the Attorney-General not to prosecute has created a cover-up in the North of Ireland and has kept the lid on a can of worms. Those worms are squirming out around the edges and will continue to squirm until someone, somewhere down the line, has the courage to tell the truth about what happened.

I have suggested that the highest standards in Government have been corroded. What has happened to Ministers of the Government in the North of Ireland who have inherited the problem? Perhaps it is time that the Minister who was in charge of security at the time and who is now a Member of another place had the courage to go to the House of Lords to tell us what we have not been able to hear so far—the definitive position from the person who was responsible at that time for security in the North of Ireland.

The highest standards of policing and the direction and leadership of the RUC have also been corroded. People in the police service have broken the law. There is evidence that they tried to pervert the course of justice. They have been protected on the Floor of the House by the Government, and by the entire political establishment, in a way that I believe is counter-productive for the Government and the police service. Does it not seem incredible that Mr. Stalker, who was asked to investigate events in the North of Ireland, was suspended from duty for the most spurious of reasons, while the Chief Constable of the RUC, who is under investigation by the Northern Ireland police authority, not only remains on duty but takes every opportunity of becoming a star of screen and stage. Is that not embarrassing for the people who have tried to protect him? Is it not bad for morale in his force and disastrous for people in the police service who wish to do their jobs as good coppers without this cloud hanging over their heads?

It is difficult to imagine the outcome of the inquiry by the police authority, when the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Prime Minister have stated that they have the utmost confidence in the Chief Constable of the RUC. I know that they have to say such things at such times, but surely a little dollop of honesty would be more effective. They should realise that, by saying such things, they will pre-empt the decision made by the Northern Ireland police authority.

[Mr. Mallon]

The highest standards of those in charge of the Army have been corroded too. I refer to the circumstances of the release of Private Thain after serving less than three years for a murder. I have beaten a path to the door of the Minister of State in the past, asking for compassion for young people caught up in the tragic events with which we have lived for so long. I take no satisfaction from what I am about to say, but we must realise how that release was perceived in the North of Ireland.

Twenty-five Republican young offenders and nine Loyalist young offenders, all of whose offences were committed before they were of age, are still in prison, and some of them are entering their 14th and 15th years of imprisonment. That is to be measured against the decision on Private Thain, and it causes us to ask certain questions. For example, is any Irishman's life worth only two and a half years in gaol? I regret to put it that way, but that is what has been said and how the release was interpreted.

On what criteria was the decision based? The first criterion should be: has the person served a length of time commensurate with the crime he committed? Those two and a half years, as opposed to the 14 or 15 I have mentioned, should make the Minister of State reach not only for his brief but for his list of young offenders and resolve to do what we have asked him to do time and again —to show the sort of compassion which alone can start to introduce some humanity to the situation in the North of Ireland.

The second important criterion is that the words of the convicting judge be taken into consideration. His words in the Thain case were not encouraging. He said clearly that Private Thain was not telling the truth and that he was unco-operative and evasive. The judge said that he did not believe the man. Yet the Home Secretary's Department, and whoever is responsible in the Ministry of Defence, have allowed the highest standards to be corroded by this type of insensitive release, and by taking that young man back into the armed forces. I regret to say—I have a lot of compassion for those who are caught up in these matters — that it was contemptuous for the court, for someone in a position of authority in the Home Office and in the Ministry of Defence to make this decision in the way that it was made.

Once the high standards are corroded, and once there are low standards in the highest of places, one is prepared to do certain things. One creates the circumstances within which the type of incident that we saw at Aughnacloy happens and it is inevitable that such incidents will happen.

We should look these matters in the face; we should not try to avoid them. In the North of Ireland, 166 people — they were not members of paramilitary groups and they had not been involved in acts of violence — have been killed by members of the security forces. That is a startling statistic, but it is ignored. Given that those 166 cases produced two convictions, one of which was of Private Thain, people such as myself can be forgiven for believing that there is a blinkered approach not only to this legislation and its implementation but to the administration of justice in the North of Ireland.

What happened at Aughnacloy will happen again. It is inevitable that young men on the streets who are put in uniform and given guns, will see the Government's disregard for the highest standards of justice; they will see the Attorney-General's disregard for the process of justice; they will see senior police officers being able to avoid the rigours of the law; they will see that the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office, irrespective of what will happen, will protect their position. They will say to themselves, "If those people can do it, why should I try to abide by the highest standards?"

The lowest standards are permeating on the ground. They are reinforced by the legislation that we propose to renew tonight. We are making it inevitable that soldiers and policemen will take their lead from their superior officers and from the decisions made on the Floor of the House, and do so in the belief that another Irishman is dispensable. They will say, "If Thain can get off, so can I; if senior police officers can do what they did and not be made to answer before the law, I surely will too."

That is the type of attitude, climate and ethos that makes those incidents possible. They make the death of someone such as Aidan McAnespie inevitable. They stem from the example that has been given from the top. We are also guilty, because tonight we shall renew the circumstances within which that climate and ethos thrive.

I referred earlier to Lord Colville's position. I regret that he did not think it worth while to look at the philosophy of this legislation. If he had, and if he had carried it through to its logical conclusion, he would have been able to say that the empirical evidence of almost 20 years is that this legislation does not create peace, prevent terrorism or create stability. All it does is create the circumstances in which we go from battle to battle on the Floor of the House and in which the confidence in and integrity of the process of justice is eroded to the extent that Northern Ireland was discussed when the Foreign Secretary visited Mr. Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. That is the extent of the corrosion that has taken place.

We shall extend that corrosion tonight. We shall renew the power of seven-day detention, despite the fact that in the Brogan case, which was heard by the European Commission of Human Rights, it was found that seven-day detention breached the convention. The Commission's recommendation was for five days' detention at the maximum. We will disregard that advice. We shall again impose the corroding standards that are permeating down.

We shall ignore the fact that, since 1975, 41,367 people have been arrested under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 and the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 without any charges being brought. We shall ignore that fact when we go through the Lobbies tonight.

Those of us who work in the North of Ireland know that the powers given by the Prevention of Terrorism Act are being used as a trawl for information. It is an easy way to take someone out of their house for questioning. In my constituency recently, a lady who was six months pregnant was put into a helicopter, taken to Gough barracks in Armagh and kept there for a day and a half. That is the easy way to discover information about somebody else. If that is not sufficient, I can give the example of another lady from my constituency who in the past two weeks was subjected to the same treatment. That is what we shall be voting for when we renew this piece of legislation.

We shall be voting for this measure despite the complete absence of any uniform legal or statutory regulations on the use of lethal force. I should have thought that, with 166 people having being killed as a result of lethal force by the

security forces—people who had not been involved in any acts of violence—it was time that regulations were written into legislation and into law.

Yes, we have the judges' rules; yes, we have the code of conduct for the RUC; and, yes, we have the Army code book, but they are all secret: they are not statutory and they are not known to the public. That matter should be looked into very quickly, because I cannot see how any Government could turn their face against making that a statutory requirement. Nothing is laid down by the House in relation to it. There is a code of practice in England, Scotland and Wales, but it does not exist for a country in which 166 people have been killed.

We shall be voting for powers to stop, search, question and humiliate young people on the streets. I shall repeat the effect that that has on the community—I see it daily. Unfortunately, there seems to be no redress if one goes to the RUC or to the military. The reality of the matter is that we are giving young soldiers and young policemen the power to do just those things without reasonable suspicion. It is happening on a continuing basis. I have seen young people on the streets having to take off their coats, shoes and socks, knowing that they had been questioned half an hour previously.

I have a calling card that was left on selected cars in my constituency last night. It says:

"Boys are back in town. 40 Commando Royal Marines."

That is not a squaddie prank. Squaddies do not waste their money getting cards printed. It was officially sanctioned, and that is the type of veiled threat that has been used by people to whom we are giving these excessive powers. That is happening daily. Therefore, can one be surprised when an incident happens such as that at Aughnacloy?

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the printing and distribution of those cards was approved by the military authorities in Northern Ireland? Will he clarify?

Mr. Mallon: I am not aware of what may come under the military authorities in the North of Ireland. However, it is logical to deduce that the cards were not printed by a young squaddie going out on duty. I am sure that a young squaddie would not waste his money on that, and in any case would not have the facilities to get such cards printed. That type of thing happens consistently. This is not the first time. I hope that the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) is correct and that he will take this opportunity to demand of those in authority that the matter is fully investigated and that if guilt is established —as I know it will be—proper action is taken.

Tonight, we will renew the powers of the Diplock courts about which there has been much controversy. I shall confine myself to two points about those courts. First, I shall repeat the words of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights set up by the Government to advise them:

"The wider interests of the administration of justice would be better served if there was a system of trial which inspired greater public confidence than the present method . . . The introduction of three-judge courts is one of the amendments to the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act which could be made without reducing the effectiveness of the legislation but which nonetheless might lead to a wider acceptability".

The views of that public body, set up by the Government, have been ignored during the controversy.

The retention of the Diplock courts system tells us something about ourselves. It tells us that we are prepared to settle for something that represents a serious derogation from the norm and from the highest standards. The law is much too serious a matter to leave to the lawyers. The responsibility for this law rests with hon. Members. We may or may not answer the challenge and face up to our responsibilities in deciding whether to renew the legislation.

I again ask the House to have the courage and vision to start to look for a solution that is not a military or quasi-legal solution, because there is no such solution. Let us have the vision to create a proper system of law and justice with which everybody can identify and that everybody can support. Let us have the compassion to seek a solution rather than seeking retribution. It is only through justice that we can create peace, and peace is the only foundation on which a lasting solution can be based. We shall never go down that road—the only road by which we can succeed—until we start to re-examine the philosophy behind this legislation.

8.2 pm

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): Early in his speech, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) said that he believed that someone is innocent until proved guilty. He then proceeded to pronounce 40 Royal Marine commandos guilty. Having had some rather undistinguished service in the Corps of Royal Marines, I resent that, and I look forward to hearing from the Minister that there will be a proper inquiry. It seems equally possible that someone could have printed those cards with the purpose of discrediting this fine unit of the armed forces of the Crown.

The hon. Gentleman does not wish the emergency powers to be renewed. It is a defect of our Northern Ireland legislation that we cannot amend the Acts. The hon. Gentleman criticised some of the provisions and the way in which they are operated. It is a pity that he cannot table amendments for us to discuss. However, when the Republic of Ireland cannot dispense with the Offences Against the State Act, which is emergency legislation, it seems self-evident that there has to be emergency legislation in Northern Ireland. After all, the Irish Republic has not yet—I say "not yet"—felt the full fury of terrorist attack, while Northern Ireland has.

As the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh said, the debate has been overshadowed by the Stalker affair and by recent difficulties with Dublin. *The Sun* newspaper is better known for its insight into the female form than for its insight into international politics, but I agree with the leader writer in *The Sun* who said that the Anglo-Irish Agreement is part of the problem. I also commend the letter of Senator Mary Robinson in today's edition of *The Independent*.

I had the pleasure to correspond with Senator Mary Robinson shortly after she had resigned from her party, with considable courage, because she considered that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was unfair to the Unionist majority. It is, indeed, a grievous and unequal treaty.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) and I are at one in desiring to improve relations between the Governments and the peoples through a reciprocal treaty that admits not the interference of another Government in a province of the United Kingdom, but the discussion of the totality of

[Sir John Biggs-Davison]

relationships between the two sovereign states. It is sometimes argued for the Anglo-Irish Agreement that it enables Ministers and other politicians to dispense with megaphone diplomacy. I believe that the Anglo-Irish Agreement has simply provided an amplifier for the megaphone.

We have a common travel area with the Irish Republic and indeed with all the British Isles and we ought to have a common security area, too. It is time that there was an end to petty objections from either side when a squiggly border is crossed or air space traversed in pursuit of the common enemy.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh mentioned Private Thain. Concern has been expressed about his release and return to his regiment. I agree with Father Denis Faul that the decision in this case is to be praised. Father Faul has been a stern and courageous opponent of all terrorism. On 27 March 1987, he said that it was a mortal sin to be an active member of the Provisional IRA. He also makes no secret of widespread Roman Catholic support for the Union, although not for Unionist parties. However, he has regularly attacked the security forces for alleged excesses and, like the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, has no love for the powers that the House is being asked to renew.

Father Faul, in applauding the decision on Private Thain, returned to the case that he has frequently made —and that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh and others have made— for the release on licence of young people imprisoned for terrorist offences who, having learnt a bitter lesson, wish only to start a new life free of the terrorist oppressor. I commend that view to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State at whose pleasure many such young people are now detained.

Mr. Mallon: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman's sentiments. However, the Thain case is not the only case. It is a matter of record that someone known as Colonel Callan, among other things, who was subsequently executed in Angola, was sentenced in 1972, while a member of the British Army in Northern Ireland, to 10 years for armed robbery and released after 18 months. Would the hon. Gentleman address his mind to that?

Sir John Biggs-Davison: I should be glad to address my mind to it, but I am afraid that I cannot provide any useful information now. I shall certainly have a look at the case.

As for "Stalker-Sampson", as they call it, my opinion, for what it is worth, is that there was never any question of criminal prosecution. The hon. Gentleman describes Sir John Hermon as a star of stage and screen. I did not wish to make any criticism of Mr. Stalker until I heard the hon. Gentleman say that, but I should have thought that the description might be better applied to Mr. Stalker. I did not think that it was very edifying to see him signing copies of his book in Dublin.

No less valuable than Mr. Stalker's book is Peter Taylor's book "Stalker: The Search for the Truth", published last year, well before the Attorney-General's decision. Basing himself on what the Labour Attorney-General Sir Hartley Shawcross—now Lord Shawcross—said in 1951, Mr. Taylor envisaged that the Attorney-General might decide that the effects of trial in court on "public morale and order" would render prosecutions unwise in the public interest.

Bad policemen must be rooted out, but the morale of the police is of supreme importance. It is also vital to protect the lives of informants, and with them the lives of many others.

Mr. Taylor is the man who, when he produced a film for BBC's "Panorama", seemed confident that there was a conspiracy to shut Stalker up. Then he did more research, and concluded that there was no such plot. He confirmed that view in a letter to *The Guardian* on 2 February 1987, in which he wrote:

> "Had the authorities wished to kill off the Stalker enquiry, they would not have breathed fresh life into it by handing it over to Colin Sampson who carried on where Stalker had left off and reached almost identical conclusions. Nor would the Attorney-General have admitted in his statement to the House of Commons that there was evidence to warrant the prosecution of police officers."

To those in the House and outside who have been impressed by Mr. Stalker's literary activities, I commend the contribution of Peter Taylor, written not with hindsight but with prescience. What matters now, however, is to close as quickly as possible, with proper and searching investigation, a distressing chapter in the history of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Some of its present critics, Nationalist as well as Unionist, were glad to praise that gallant and indispensable force when its members showed themselves—despite attacks on themselves and their families— bravely impartial between orange and green. Much has changed, and changed for the better, since 1982.

8.13 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I strongly concur with what the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) has just said about the need for the Minister of State to take a careful look at some of the people who are languishing in the Maze, McGilligan and the other prisons in Northern Ireland, and who may have been placed in those prisons when they were very young. I have been making representations directly to the Minister about the case of one Protestant paramilitary, Noel Hillen, and I am grateful to the Minister for the replies that he has sent. So far, however, those replies, while they have been carefully worded, have not given any hope to the prisoner. Although he has renounced violence, and is prepared to work and to put his efforts into reconciliation in the community, sadly he cannot be released to achieve that.

There is plenty of evidence that people who have been released from goal in Northern Ireland are prepared to work for peace. I saw one just two weeks ago in Derry, Liam McCloskey, who is working for reconciliation in that community. He was a member of the INLA and spent 55 days on hunger strike after Bobby Sands. He renounced violence, became a Christian, and is now committed to bringing about reconciliation and trying to work for peace through non-violence in that divided community. I think that there is a strong case for early prison sentence reviews and the Minister should listen to the views on it recorded by both sides of the House.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that, if those men had been of age

when they were tried, they would have done their time and would now be out of prison? It seems hardly fair that someone who happened to be under age, no matter what his religion or conviction, is not even given a date for his release. That causes grave hardship both to him and to his parents.

Does the hon. Gentlman not think that the Northern Ireland Office, having been asked by those on both sides of the religious divide to look at the matter from a purely humanitarian point of view, should take cognisance of that fact?

Mr. Alton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his helpful comments. He has made a good point about those who are under age. Some of the prisoners, of course, will have been over age when the were committed to goal, but even so, some will be relatively young. People can change. Surely, for the future, we must wean people away from violence, and people on both sides of the community must put every effort into that.

We come to this debate the day after an illuminating "Panorama" programme on television in which General Sir James Glover, the former head of intelligence and commander of the British Army in Ulster, said:

"In no way can or will the Provisional IRA ever be defeated militarily. The Army's role has been now for some time . . . to help create the conditions whereby a full democratic, peaceful, political solution can be achieved."

I am sure that he is right. The future must be bound up with justice, with politics and with reconciliation being created by decisions made in this place, and also by those in the Dail in Dublin.

I am also certain that the future must lie in closer co-operation. Although I agreed with what the hon. Member for Epping Forest said about the need for closer security co-operation, our objectives must go deeper than that: a recognition that both North and South of the border, and across the Irish sea, there will be much more that binds us together than common, collective security.

It is inevitable that the security issue will, however, be much in our minds at present. I hope that the Minister will say something about Sir John Hermon's announcement yesterday that SAM 7s—surface to air missiles—have reached the island of Ireland from sources in Libya. Clearly, it is a matter of major concern that missiles are available that could destroy British helicopters and change the whole security position in Northern Ireland. I think that the House is entitled to know what action is being taken collectively by the British and Irish Governments and the security services to ensure that everything possible is being done to prevent their use.

It is a staggering thought, but since its creation in 1921 there has not been a time when Northern Ireland has been without some form of internal legislation which would not be acceptable in the rest of the United Kingdom. The emergency laws under discussion tonight were first introduced in 1973. I do not believe that there will come a time when Northern Ireland will be without emergency powers until there is a clear appreciation of the link between justice and security, and an acceptance that the only gainers from petty arguments and ridiculous territorial disputes are the paramilitaries.

The columnist Hugo Young put it very well when he wrote recently:

"Are these large, ongoing incursions into British liberties justified as indispensable to British security? I think I'm entitled to the opinion that they are not, without being blackened as a procurer of murder or a friend of the vilest enemy."

I agree with that. Anyone who dares to state the mildest criticism about the use of emergency powers, or about the prevention of terrorism legislation, seems invariably to be labelled as being on the side of the paramilitaries. It is not a question of that. It is simply that many see that the only way in which people will be weaned away from violence is for the link between justice and security to be strongly asserted.

This debate is taking place against the backdrop of five serious events that have devastated British-Irish relations and jeopardised the future development of joint initiatives and closer relations: the Stalker-Sampson inquiry, the Birmingham Six decision, the making permanent of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974, the killing of Aidan McAnespie, which led to the Irish Government establishing a separate inquiry, and the release of Private Ian Thain, already referred to in this debate, after serving just three years following his conviction for murder.

Those five events add up to a devastating litany of failure, insensitivity and ham-fistedness. Many of those criticisms are not directed at the existing Government Front Bench. However, there has been a great deal of insensitivity in the way in which events have been handled, although many of them are undoubtedly, as the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) has said, time-expired. No one should underestimate just how seriously those events have set back the cause of reconciliation and co-existence.

There are one or two matters that I wish to raise with the Minister arising out of those incidents. First let us consider the Stalker-Sampson inquiry. Last week, during the first part of this adjourned debate, the Secretary of State took exception to the expression, "shoot-to-kill policy". Outside this House, that phrase is used again and again.

Two weeks ago, I met Sir John Hermon and asked about the allegations concerning the shoot-to-kill policy. I specifically asked him about the hay shed outside Lurgan on Ballyneery Road where, in November 1982, some of the shootings took place. I asked Sir John—I would like to ask the Minister again tonight—who placed the listening devices in that shed? What was recorded during the incident? Who removed them, and who gave the orders for the tape to be subsequently destroyed? Therein lies the key to the truth and about whether or not there was a shoot-to-kill policy.

I am prepared to believe Sir John Hermon, but how can anyone know where the truth lies until we know who gave the orders to destroy the tape? If the fault lies with the security services, that should be out in the open. That is the only way in which Sir John Hermon's name can be cleared and the reputation of the RUC restored.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: I understand—perhaps the Minister can confirm this—that such tapes are always destroyed, under standing orders to that effect.

Mr. Alton: I hope that the Minister will confirm that tonight. However, in such circumstances, given the sensitivities involved and the knowledge that there could be prosecutions, I am amazed that those tapes were destroyed. If that is the case, surely such Government policy should be reviewed.

[Mr. Alton]

Sir John Hermon has taken a lot of criticism throughout, but I believe that he brings skill and determination to the most difficult policing situation in Europe. He has endeavoured to strip the RUC of every last vestige of sectarianism. Sir John simply will not do — any more than John Stalker — as a convenient scapegoat. The blame, I believe, clearly lies with the security forces and the relationships that existed between those forces and the RUC five years ago. Indeed, one of the validations of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is that I do not believe that what happened then could happen now, and I fully accept that what the Secretary of State told us last week was true.

Yet it will not do for Government Ministers to hide behind weasel words such as "the national interest." National interest amounts to many things — the relationship between ourselves and the Irish Government, our security interests on the border and the confidence that the minority community in Northern Ireland has in the RUC. If the minority do not feel any sense of confidence, how can they be expected to join the RUC?

I have pressed the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh about this on many occasions. I want to see more people from the minority community joining and supporting the RUC. However, until the RUC is seen to be totally impartial in its policing policies and its name cleared in the aftermath of the Stalker-Sampson inquiry, it is unrealistic to expect the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh to say to the minority part of the community that they should join the RUC now.

Arising out of the Stalker-Sampson affair, I believe that we need a Select Committee with investigative powers or a judicial inquiry, consisting perhaps of Privy Councillors. We smugly gloat when we hear about incidents such as Irangate in the United States, as though it could not happen here. Mistakes happen in any democracy, but our mechanisms for dealing with such mistakes are woefully inadequate. We need to improve our accountability and the mechanisms that deal with complaints to ensure that the truth comes out.

I met Sir John Hermon for the first time about five years ago. I asked him why it was not possible to attract more Roman Catholics into the RUC. He said that it was his objective to do so, but that he should make it clear that in Northern Ireland there are Catholics, Protestants and the RUC. He said that he would continue to do all that he could to strip away any sense of sectarianism from the RUC. The way in which the RUC dealt with the events in Portadown last year is evidence that the RUC is impartial. However, a shadow hangs over its reputation.

Following my discussions with Sir John, he admitted to me that the behaviour of his men was "unconscionable" in the aftermath of the events at Lurgan. There must be recognition that faults lie across a broad spectrum, and it would be wrong if all the blame were laid at Sir John's door. A Select Committee inquiry could establish where the blame should lie.

For the future, when RUC officers are killed in Northern Ireland, I believe that it would be appropriate —I have said this to the Irish Government and I hope that other hon. Members will press for this — that Gardai, in uniform, should attend such funerals. When Catholic members of the RUC have been killed I should like to see senior members of the Catholic clergy present. That would make it clear that the RUC has the full support of those who have high clerical positions in Northern Ireland.

I believe it was wrong, for instance, in the case of the Liverpool bar murder, that there was no senior Catholic churchman present, and I have raised that matter with Cardinal Fiaich. I shall also keep on pressing that solidarity should be shown between the RUC and the Garda.

I believe that there should be a stronger Nationalist presence on the police authority. The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) mentioned Father Faul, and I can think of no better person. He would be someone who would safeguard the nationalist interest and yet would be likely to be beyond the guns of the IRA.

During Prime Minister's Question Time today, I was disappointed that the Prime Minister was not prepared to accept the need to consider the idea of a joint security commission. I believe that we could consolidate the Anglo-Irish Agreement by considering how we could work closer together on a whole range of issues. A joint security commission would be a start.

The Diplock courts should be replaced, perhaps with courts initially sitting just outside the Northern Ireland jurisdiction. Eventually we could have mixed courts North and South of the border trying terrorist cases together and that would demonstrate our joint resolve and determination to deal with terrorism. Another way of underpinning the Anglo-Irish Agreement would be the establishment of the parliamentary tier, which has been spoken of for so long, but has still not happened. That would be a good way of bringing politicians together from all parts of these islands, so that some of the old animosity, fear and hatred could be broken down.

It is difficult to realise that it is less than four months since Enniskillen when there was a genuine spirit—the spirit of Gordon Wilson—of forgiveness and reconciliation. That spirit has been squandered by this series of mind-boggling blunders. The prize must surely be to push the paramilitaries on to the margins and to ensure that Ireland's future does not consist merely of worn-out slogans, abusive rhetoric and more talk of victors and vanquished.

Confidence and security are the sisters of democracy and justice—they are never the relations of revenge or political one-upmanship. Confidence and security must be our clear objectives and in turn they depend on how we are seen to administer justice.

My colleague, Dr. John Alderdice, the leader of the Alliance party in Northern Ireland, said to me earlier today:

> "The series of mishaps, misadventures and misfortunes in the administration of Northern Ireland and, the conduct of Anglo-Irish relations over the past few weeks has been causing concern about the Government's handling of the situation. It is now giving way to a sense of alarm."

British policy must consist of not the endless renewal of emergency provisions, but of a long-term political strategy clearly agreed and supported by Irish and British, Nationalists and Unionists alike.

8.29 pm

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): May I first thank the Leader of the House publicly for arranging, in response to the vigorous demands made last Thursday, for the debate to continue today.

The order highlights the fact that the Province is in a less than equal position with the rest of the United Kingdom. The order cannot be amended or changed in any way by Parliament. It has to be accepted or rejected in its entirety. It reminds hon. Members, if they need reminding—sad to say, some of them do—that the cruel campaign of terrorism continues to crucify the people of Ulster regardless of their religion, because terrorism strikes at Protestants and at Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland, deliberately or by accident.

The most recent terrorist atrocity that received national and international attention was the massacre at Enniskillen on Remembrance Sunday. Of course, other terrorist killings, mutilations and destruction have occurred since then; they are all part of the pattern of the past 20 years.

Some months ago the Secretary of State issued a grave warning that the IRA intended to mount a fresh horrendous campaign of terrorism against the people of Northern Ireland. Despite the obscene killings, and the grave warning issued by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the Ulster people, this is, as far as I am aware, the first debate on security in the Province since then.

However, the debate is limited to the terms of the order and is taking place only because the order has to be renewed and the Government have to table it. I am sure that people in Northern Ireland wonder about the extent of the Government's commitment to defeating terrorism in Northern Ireland. I am sure that they have come to the conclusion that the Northern Ireland Office does not wish to put its record of the battle against terrorism in Northern Ireland under parliamentary scrutiny.

Certainly the security situation is no better than it was last year, the year before or indeed, since the Stormont Parliament was destroyed by the then Government at Westminster in an attempt to placate the opponents of a British Ulster. Of course I am surprised that this debate, which is important for every man, woman and child in Northern Ireland, has been attended by so few hon. Members. The largest number of hon. Members present at any one time has amounted to about a dozen and a half. If proceedings in the Chamber were televised, the people of Northern Ireland would be shocked at the lack of interest in Northern Ireland and in the lives of the people of Ulster and the security forces in Northern Ireland.

Undoubtedly, the situation is grave because the campaign of terrorism has gone on for 20 years, and the Government should answer for that. In addition, the situation has changed because the Provisional IRA has acquired sophisticated weapons. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) referred to the possibility of SAM missiles being in possession of the IRA. The IRA has the new impact grenade referred to on Thursday during the first part of the debate. That grenade is able to penetrate 6 in. of steel. Therefore, the security forces are now vulnerable when travelling around in their vehicles, which, until the introduction of the impact grenade, gave them a reasonable degree of safety. The SAM missiles are a frightening change in the situation.

I wonder whether the Government can provide some information about the amount of arms that the IRA has brought from Libya. The GOC in Northern Ireland apparently announced on television last night that the British Army cannot defeat the Provisional IRA. What does that do to the morale of the people of Ulster and the security forces in Northern Ireland?

Insufficient credit is given to ordinary people in Northern Ireland, who have shown remarkable restraint despite the vicious campaign that has taken the lives of so many people. They have faced the betrayal of the Anglo-Irish Agreement that was entered into behind their backs and without prior consultation.

The normality that exists in the Province is surprising. I only wish that more people would come to Northern Ireland and see for themselves the indomitable spirit of the people, share their humour and enjoy their hospitality. I wish that more hon. Members from all parts of the House would visit Northern Ireland—I know that some hon. Members have been there—and speak to the police, the soldiers, the people and the representatives of the different constitutional parties. They would then be in a better position to assess the situation.

Sadly, Northern Ireland is facing not only a battle with terrorists, whoever they may be, although the principal terrorist organisation is the Provisional IRA. Northern Ireland also has to face the hostility of the media. With a few honourable exceptions, the media are not fair in their presentation of the situation in Northern Ireland or of the Ulster majority which believes in honesty, justice and fair play, no matter what has been said by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon).

The media adopt that hostile attitude to Northern Ireland partly because of the skill of the Provisional IRA, which has a superb, sophisticated propaganda machine, working all the time in Great Britain and abroad, particularly in the United States. That propaganda campaign is threefold. It aims to raise money to buy more arms for the IRA, to make other people and Governments bring influence to bear on the British Government, and to demoralise the British people and weaken the resolve of Parliament and Government.

Of course, as part of that campaign, whenever a terrorist is arrested it is alleged that he was beaten up; whenever a confession is made, it is alleged that it was made under pressure; and whenever a conviction is obtained, there are allegations that witnesses have lied or that the court was biased because it was British.

It is further argued that if all the measures introduced to restrain and defeat the Provisional IRA and other terrorists were abandoned, the IRA would not be provoked into committing murders and bombing. I do not believe that the IRA or any other terrorists are lily white. If the police, the Army and the UDR were to disappear overnight, the IRA and other terrorists would not become as the driven snow. Such arguments are naive in the extreme and demonstrate the success of the IRA progaganda battle.

The IRA wants to limit the activities of the security forces, to put shackles on them and make them easier to defeat, to kill and to mutilate. I cannot accept that possibility, because, as a democratic society, we must do everything possible to ensure that every power is given to the security forces so that they defeat the forces of evil.

In the debate on Thursday, the Prime Minister was attacked by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) for showing "truculence" in her statement of support for the security forces. I see nothing wrong in the strength of her observations about the security forces. In the last war, it would have been

[Mr. James Kilfedder]

regarded as a heroic statement. If she had made the same remarks at the Dispatch Box in the last war she would have been greeted in the same way that Winston Churchill was greeted for giving a lead, for inspiring the people and for helping the people along in a difficult situation. Yes, she has every right to back the security forces to the hilt.

I deeply regret that not every hon. Member gives the same unqualified support to the RUC, the men and women of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the young soldiers serving in the Regular Army. I may have been disappointed that the Prime Minister allowed herself to be talked into the Anglo-Eire Agreement, but I resent the attack on her patriotism and support for the security forces.

This is a sombre time for everyone in Northern Ireland. I hope that when hon. Members speak they will think carefully, because their words will be taken up and repeated in Northern Ireland and may provide the IRA with an excuse, if it needs one, for taking further action against members of the security forces.

The speech of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh depressed me. I was not surprised, but, none the less, I was depressed. At no time does he or his party call on the Nationalist people of Northern Ireland to give full and unequivocal support to the RUC, the UDR and the Regular Army. That attitude, let me emphasise, is not prompted by anything that has happened in the past for days, weeks or months. It is an attitude which has been maintained for decades. It is no use referring to what may have happened in Aughnacloy or anywhere else, because, unfortunately, the divide is there. Again, I shall welcome the day when constitutional politicians will be able to work together to provide and to help security in Northern Ireland and to protect everybody in the Province.

I understand that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh wishes, as indeed every member of the SDLP does, to take Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom against the wishes of the majority of the people in Northern Ireland, and to put it fully and squarely in the Irish Republic. That is his position, but let him make it clear that that is his position.

Mr. Mallon: It would be churlish indeed if I did not respond to the hon. Gentleman's points. We give our support to the police in impartially enforcing the law. That is a reasonable position for anyone to take. I should inform the hon. Gentleman that I do not give unequivocal support to anything or anybody. My support for anything, and my allegiance to anything, must be constrained by the fact that that to which I give support acts in the proper way.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, I can assure him without any doubt that my political ambition — my political aspiration — is to see the reunification in Northern Ireland by peaceful means and by agreement, not, as he wrongly suggests, contrary to the wishes of any section of the people in Ireland. That is an honourable political position to take. That is my position and I would expect the hon. Gentleman to respect its legitimacy and to do so now.

Mr. Kilfedder: Before the hon. Gentleman interrupted, I had already shown that I accepted his attitude on the existence of Northern Ireland. He wants to take it out of the United Kingdom. That is it, fairly and squarely.

As to the hon. Gentleman's point about the security forces, one cannot pick and choose. One either supports the security forces or does not support them. One does not back the police when they are striking the heads of Loyalists who are engaging in some demonstration but oppose them when they are doing that to the Nationalist community.

Everyone in the community should respect the security forces and the police who have a difficult job to do. We should all tell the people in the community that they should back the police, join them and the UDR and defeat the terrorists who are a threat to everybody in Northern Ireland. They are certainly a threat to the existence of the next generation.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh said that the events in Northern Ireland — I hope that I quote him correctly — made the death of Mr. McAnespie inevitable. I do not believe that Mr. McAnespie's death was inevitable. What happened in Aughnacloy is to be deeply regretted. I hate to see the death of any man, woman or child anywhere in the world, and certainly in Northern Ireland. But the young soldier has said——

Mr. Mallon *rose——*

Mr. Kilfedder: I shall give way in a moment.

The young soldier has said that it was an accident, and public comment by anyone, certainly by politicians, should await the verdict of a properly constituted court of law, sitting in the United Kingdom where we take pride in the standards of the judiciary.

The consequences of a cruel campaign of obscene terrorism are inevitable in Northern Ireland. Without the vicious killings of the IRA, there would have been no death at Aughnacloy. It is ridiculous in the extreme for the hon. Gentleman to produce a card in the House this evening which, allegedly, was from 40 Commando Royal Marines, although I do not have a note of the words that he alleges are in the card. The hon. Gentleman believes that it comes from 40 Commando Royal Marines. He alleges not only that it comes from them, but that it had been sent with official approval. That is an appalling allegation to make against anyone. I know many hon. Members who have served in the Royal Marines. It is an honourable regiment. Anyone could have printed that card. The IRA could have printed it and sent it to the hon. Gentleman.

I receive many nasty and obscene letters. Some are signed by people declaring themselves to be strong Loyalist clergymen. The wording would not make one believe that such letters came from a clergyman. Therefore, I do not automatically believe that they have come from any clergyman — Protestant, Loyalist or anybody else. What the hon. Gentleman said is naive and dangerous because the IRA can now pick out a member of 40 Commando Royal Marines and kill him for his "sectarian" attitude, or political attitude to a representative of the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland. That is the sad situation that we see in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mallon *rose——*

Mr. Kilfedder: I have been asked to bring my remarks to a close, so I shall not give way.

More than 250 members of the RUC have been murdered by terrorists. They would not have died but for the terrorist campaign. UDR members have been

murdered. Members of the Regular Army have been murdered. I remember two young brothers, about 17 years old, who were taken out of Belfast 15 or 18 years ago, made to kneel down and shot in the head by the IRA. I do not think that those two brothers, who came from England, should be forgotten. I do not think that we should forget anybody who has died in Northern Ireland. Their sacrifices must not be in vain. We must defeat terrorism in Northern Ireland, but I accept also that we must make political progress. We must never give up hope that we can make progress.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The winding-up speeches are expected to begin at about 9.20 pm. Many hon. Members still wish to speak, so I appeal for very brief contributions.

8.50 pm

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I shall certainly conform to your wishes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. High-handedness on the part of the British has always been a standing threat to Anglo-Irish relations, and it is that high-handedness that I wish to address now, in what has become a wide-ranging debate.

At the time when the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed, one of the most important changes from the Government's point of view was that it seemed to promise a more equal relationship. As a result, British Ministers would become aware, through a process of consultation, of the repercussions that their words and actions might have on Irish public opinion. Much of this was due to the quality of the officials involved on both sides. That is why the recent serious breakdown in diplomacy is so disturbing and so puzzling.

There is no doubt who is responsible. There is a quite striking sympathy for Ireland's case, and in particular for Mr. Haughey, across a wide spectrum of British political and media opinion. I am excepting, of course, the gutter press.

London and Dublin have just passed through probably the worst passage in their relationship since the early 1970s. Yet, according to *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday week,

"Mr. Haughey . . . did nothing to make matters worse".

The Times, on a day in the previous week, took the same view, saying:

"To his great credit, Mr. Haughey has gone to some lengths to avoid making the tensions worse."

The Taoiseach set out a position in the debate in Dail Eireann a fortnight ago which clearly reflected the belief that he and his Government hold the high moral ground. The London Government's performance has been a sorry accumulation of ineptitude, insensitivity and incomprehension in assessment of Irish reaction—matched, I regret to say, by that of a small number, happily fast diminishing, of Conservative Members.

There are two main questions. Why have the British behaved so badly? And how do we restore a relationship with Dublin that had become informed with common purpose and mutual trust? Let us look at the main issues —extradition arrangements and Mr. Stalker.

On the question of implementing the extradition arrangements, the London Government are wrong and have behaved badly. As *The Daily Telegraph* pointed out on 22 February:

"It could make a start by meeting Dublin halfway on the provision of evidence to back up extradition warrants for terrorist suspects. Britain requires such evidence from other countries, so it is hardly surprising if the Republic expects it from us."

If there are practical difficulties, they should have been addressed within the Anglo-Irish Conference or on a bilateral basis between the two Attorneys-General.

On the question of the Stalker affair, in 1982, as *The Times* of yesterday week put it:

"something went wrong—and it took 5½ years for any minister of the British Government to admit it publicly."

To suggest that RUC personnel engaged in an official or unofficial shoot-to-kill policy should merely be disciplined was to make a nonsense of the rule of law. If RUC men were not prosecuted, it would be difficult for a long time to believe that the law was being justly applied in Northern Ireland. The decision of Mr. McAnespie's family to request the exhumation of his body for further investigation can only reflect a growing disenchantment with the rule of law in Northern Ireland.

How deafening the silence of Sir John Hermon on the substance of Mr. Stalker's allegations has now become. Soon after the book was published, the RUC issued a terse statement denying that a shoot-to-kill policy had ever existed or that it had ever obstructed Mr. Stalker's inquiry into its affairs. At the time, journalists in Belfast were given to understand that there would be a detailed rebuttal of what the RUC believed were "gross" distortions and inaccuracies in Mr. Stalker's account of what had happened. To date, this has not been forthcoming. Instead, there have been vague leaks to the effect that nobody in the RUC trusted Mr. Stalker and that was why they did not talk to him.

Former Taoiseach Dr. Garret FitzGerald, one of the architects of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, speaking in that Dail Eireann debate, said that it was difficult to avoid the conclusion that they were faced with the consequences of muddle and confusion within the British Government. He reminded us in the House of Commons of the assurances that his Government in Dublin received as late as the end of 1986 that there were would be prosecutions as a result of the Stalker report. Dr. FitzGerald said that the London Government now had a duty to do all in its power to minimise the damage done and to restore confidence.

It will not be easy to restore that confidence while tragedies like the shooting of the young Aughnacloy Catholic continue to occur, not to mention the reports of his harassment over a long period.

At least 160 civilians, as the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) has reminded the House, have been killed with either lead or plastic bullets by the British Army, the RUC and the UDR in Northern Ireland in the past 19 years. In that time, only one serving soldier, Private Ian Thain, who has now been released after serving three and a half years of a life sentence—this needs to be impressed upon the House—and unbelievably is now back in the Army, was convicted of murder in the course of duty. I have to say to the Minister on the Front Bench, and it gives me no personal satisfaction to do so, that I cannot conceive of this even being considered by the Ministry of Defence in Her Majesty's Government a decade ago.

It also needs to be borne in mind that it has tended to be the poorest sections of the Catholic population whose members, young and old, including children, have borne the brunt of the British Army's attacks on civilians—

[Mr. A. E. P. Duffy]

[Interruption.] Well, they are all there on record. There can be no doubt in the mind of any hon. Member who is familiar with the Northern Ireland scene——

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): What about IRA attacks as well?

Mr. Duffy: Of course, and they are to be equally deplored, if not more so.

But, in the face of such extreme provocation, let the House also not forget the gains. The Government have taken two years or more of the most intense Loyalist reaction. The RUC has stood firm on the streets. The Secretary of State has stood firm against the leaders of Unionism, who tried to break the agreement, which instead, finally and successfully, broke their veto. The Maryfield secretariat is in place and is working, with its system of monitoring and checking the work of the security forces on the ground.

The agreement holds. Security co-operation is not in question. What is at risk, unhappily, is the sense of trust and common purpose between the two Governments—the spirit in which the agreement was born and from which everything, especially our hopes, have flowed. Much influential opinion in Britain is on Ireland's side. What is important now is that Irish and British Ministers jointly effect a rescue of what remains by way of good faith and co-operation, and in that the onus is clearly on the House.

Although there was, as the Irish Deputy Prime Minister put it, every evidence of healing at the meeting that was held in Dublin last Wednesday with the Secretary of State, both will need to employ all their experience and skill before the trust and confidence essential to a sound relationship are restored. If the case for repairing the damage to Anglo-Irish relations had still to be made, it was done by the discovery of two substantial arms dumps in Ireland during the last week. The discoveries underline Britain's folly in risking a breakdown in co-operation.

Most of all, the Government must break out of their practice of seeing the agreement almost exclusively in security terms and ignoring both the spirit of the pact and the generosity underlying it on both sides, as well as the many imaginative possibilities it offers to both Governments to help create better understanding between these islands and on the island of Ireland.

9 pm

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): The first part of the debate on the order last Thursday was marked by an unmerited attack on my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister by the shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. It is correct to say that my right hon. Friend takes a keen interest and a keen pride in the Royal Ulster Constabulary, in the Ulster Defence Regiment and in the British Army in Northern Ireland, and rightly so. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State is a former Minister for the Armed Forces. He knows, as I know, that that interest and that pride of the Prime Minister are a source of encouragement to those whose task it is to protect the innocent and pursue the guilty in Ulster.

In moving the approval of the order, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that he wanted to deal with

"the wider issues and the present scene in Northern Ireland."
—[*Official Report*, 25 February 1988; Vol. 128, c. 473.]

Like my right hon. Friend, I regret the need to ask the House to approve the order. Like him, I agree that in the present circumstances the renewal of the order is necessary. Like him, I wish that the circumstances were different.

There is in Northern Ireland today an atmosphere of great uncertainty and instability. Certainty and stability are the enemies of the terrorist. Uncertainty and instability are his friends. These evils have two manifestations at present—first, in our relations with the Government of the Irish Republic and, secondly, in the Province itself. It is to those two manifestations that I want to address my speech.

As to our relations with the Irish Republic, the preamble to the Anglo-Irish Agreement refers to the unique relationship between our two peoples and the close co-operation between our two countries, acting as friendly neighbours and as partners in the European Community. I endorse those statements. They are an echo of the words of the communiqué issued after the Anglo-Irish summit four years previously. That communiqué, issued on 6 November 1981, referred to

"the unique character of the relationship between the two countries."

The Anglo-Irish Agreement marked a dramatic change of policy. Ever since it was signed two and a quarter years ago, it has been interpreted differently in London and in Dublin. That is a grievous flaw in any agreement, and it is fatal when dealing with Ireland. On the day the agreement was signed, the Irish Minister for Justice claimed that the agreement meant that the Republic had been given a continuing and substantial role in the day-to-day running of Northern Ireland. It was a claim that was instantly rejected by the Secretary of State. From that basic difference of interpretation, with the Irish Government mindful of their parliamentary and domestic audience and the Secretary of State mindful of his, highly publicised differences between London and Dublin have flowed.

Mr. Soames: Does my hon. Friend share my astonishment that the Republic of Ireland should feel that the British Government are able to dictate to the judiciary or to the Director of Public Prosecutions what progress or action they would like to see in any particular case? Does he agree that that is a horrifying feature of the events of the past few weeks?

Mr. Gow: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, and I shall deal with that point a little later.

Inevitably, disagreements have flowed from the day when the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed, and nothing, save the ending of the agreement in its present form, can put an end to continuing highly publicised differences.

Let me illustrate what I mean. London believes—in my opinion, rightly—that the extradition arrangements with the Republic, in respect of those suspected of terrorist offences, are less satisfactory than with any of the other 10 states of the Community, despite the Anglo-Irish Agreement and an especially close common interest in cleansing the islands of Ireland and of Great Britain of the evil of terrorism.

The Republic made representations to Her Majesty's Government, asking that there should be three judges and not one in the Diplock courts, despite the fact that we had already examined that proposal exhaustively and the fact that any person convicted by a Diplock court has the

automatic right to go to three judges in the Court of Appeal. Moreover, the Republic appeared to link the number of judges with the arrangements for extradition.

More recently, the Republic has given the impression that it should have been consulted before the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland decided that there should be no prosecutions following his study of the Stalker-Sampson report. As the director did not consult the British Government, it is strange to suggest that he should consult the Government of a foreign power, yet that was precisely what was suggested.

Then we were told that there was considerable disquiet among senior Ministers in Dublin, including the Minister of Justice, at the decision of our Court of Appeal, presided over by the Lord Chief Justice, which upheld unanimously the unanimous decision of the jury some years earlier.

Following the tragic shooting at Aughnacloy on 22 February, the Irish Government ordered their own inquiry, even though he who fired the shot and he who was so tragically killed were both in the United Kingdom and even though the Army and the police in the United Kingdom were both carrying out urgent and thorough inquiries. Even last Wednesday's communiqué, following the most recent meeting of the Inter-governmental Conference, resulted in embarrassing disagreement about interpretation.

Each of those episodes was predictable and predicted. They are a foretaste of what is to come. That is in no way surprising, because the agreement gave the Irish Government the right to put forward views and proposals about political, security and legal matters, including the administration of justice. Article 8 provides:

"The Conference shall deal with issues of concern to both countries relating to the enforcement of the criminal law."

Those who fashioned the agreement did so in good faith. They genuinely believed that the agreement would lead to improved relations between Dublin and London. The reverse has been the case. Troubled relations between Dublin and London are bad for Ulster. However, another belief was also held in good faith by the authors of the agreement—that it would lead to peace, stability and reconciliation in the Province and hasten the day when there would be no need for such orders to come before the House.

I now turn to Northern Ireland itself. One advantage claimed for the agreement is that it has resulted and will result in closer cross-border co-operation between the security forces in both countries. That close co-operation is greatly to be desired. However, there is an unpleasant corollary to that argument. If the Republic had not been given the right to put forward views and proposals about the way in which Northern Ireland should be governed, its Government, army and Garda would not have given the same co-operation in what many people, including myself, believe to be an overriding duty of all civilised Governments, namely to do their utmost to protect all our people against terrorism.

Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State seemed to agree with that when he said in the House last Thursday, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham), who had asked about the agreement:

"Perhaps he"—

that is, my hon. Friend—

"could explain to me how we are likely to do better in border security if we do not co-operate closely with the Government of the Irish Republic. . . . the closest co-operation with the Government of the Irish Republic is absolutely essential."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 1988; Vol. 128, c. 427.]

I agree with my right hon. Friend, but was he really telling the House that the agreement was necessary to gain the co-operation?

I remind my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, who is to reply, that there is the closest cross-border co-operation in the fight to defeat Basque terrorism between France and Spain. No Franco-Spanish agreement exists whereby France has the right to put forward views and proposals about how the Basque territory should be governed.

The agreement gave the Republic responsibility for representing Nationalists in their dealings with the British Government, over the heads of the three SDLP Members of this House. The agreement has alienated the majority, without reconciling the minority.

Article 4(b) states:

"It is the declared policy of the United Kingdom Government that responsibility in respect of certain matters within the powers of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should be devolved within Northern Ireland on a basis that would secure widespread acceptance throughout the community. The Irish Government support that policy."

Twenty-seven months, and more, have elapsed since the agreement was signed. My right hon. Friend knows that he is not one step—not even half a step—closer to achieving what he then said was his purpose. If a policy objective is unattainable, and since we are on earth and not in heaven, it is the duty of those engaged in politics to strive for that which is attainable.

I have heard no protest from the Irish Government about the way in which Irish citizens living in London, Liverpool or Glasgow are treated by Her Majesty's Government. The complaint relates to the way in which Irish citizens living in the Province or British citizens described in the agreement as members of "the minority community" are treated.

Very well, the remedy is at hand. I agree with the Irish Government that Nationalists in Northern Ireland are treated unfairly and differently from Nationalists in Wales, Scotland, London, Liverpool or Glasgow. It is possible to treat Nationalists in Northern Ireland and Unionists in Northern Ireland in the same way as we treat citizens of this kingdom living in Scotland, Wales or England.

There is no reason why we should deny to Northern Ireland alone a county council or a regional council. Why should only the 1·5 million of the Queen's subjects living in Northern Ireland be denied that right to elect a county or regional council—a right which is taken for granted in Great Britain? Why is it that those duties which fall upon district councils in England, in Scotland and in Wales are not conferred upon the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland? Why is it that the representatives of those who live in Northern Ireland are denied the right to amend proposed legislation which affects the Province?

We should legislate for Northern Ireland in the same way as we legislate for the rest of the kingdom. Constitutional Nationalists in Northern Ireland deserve, and have the right, to be protected under a just law. Their right should be respected and acknowledged, just as the right of the Unionists is respected and acknowledged.

I said that certainty and stability were the enemies of terrorism. We would the better be able to restore certainty and stability in the Province if we were to say

[Mr. Gow]

unequivocally that, while honouring, acknowledging and respecting constitutional nationalism, we shall henceforth govern Northern Ireland in a way that more closely conforms to the way in which we govern the rest of the kingdom. If such a policy were to be followed, it would offer the best opportunity, the best hope, of discontinuing debates of this kind on emergency legislation.

9.16 pm

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Will the debate go on only to 9.20 pm, Mr. Speaker? How long have I got?

Mr. Speaker: A number of other hon. Gentlemen wish to speak. If the hon. Gentleman could bear that in mind, it would be very helpful. I understand that the Front Bench spokesman will seek to rise at half past 9.

Mr. Flannery: I will not take quite as long as the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow). I shall reorganise slightly what I was going to say, because I want to refer to the hon. Gentleman's curious belief that the troubles in Ireland began with the Anglo-Irish Agreement. He spent his entire speech labouring that one point.

It is, of course, absolute nonsense. The fact is that the enemy of terrorism is democracy — and there was no democracy for the minority community in Northern Ireland. The terrorists battened on the lack of democracy, especially on the part of the Democratic Unionist Members who did not understand, and still do not understand, and who want to go back to the old Stormont. *[Interruption.]* Despite the interruptions of Democratic Unionist Members, I want to make a contribution. I never intruded on anyone else's speech.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) said something at the beginning which commended itself to me. He is a Catholic, and he was trying to help a paramilitary of the Protestants. There is a lesson here for all of us; the hon. Gentleman believes in justice and not in sectariansism. So do I. I have a very Catholic Irish name, but I am not a Catholic. I did not go to Ireland until I was nearly 50 and I have taken no lively part in the struggle. But some of us at some time must do what we can to make it clear that we are struggling on behalf of a particular grouping, not just for the interests of that grouping, but to obtain peace in Northern Ireland. I believe in a united Ireland — I always have — and I believe that the lack of democracy which drew a line round an in-built Protestant majority community caused all this trouble.

I should like to put a hypothesis. If a powerful imperialist Ireland had attacked England, occupied it and, when the time came to withdraw after hundreds of years of struggle, suddenly decided that there was a powerful Irish community in Lancashire and had drawn a line round it and, not content with that, wanted to make it even harder and had drawn another line to make sure that that community remained there, and had then added Lancashire onto that imperialist Ireland and said that it was part of Ireland, what do we think the English would be doing?

The emergency provisions, not the Anglo-Irish Agreement, have caused all the trouble. I abstained from supporting that agreement until I was sure that I felt good about what was happening, which I now do. I am sorry that the Government have done so many things in the past few weeks which have provoked the struggle over that agreement.

The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts of 1978 and 1987 were unnecessary. I feel sad that a Labour Government brought them in, because there was enough law to handle the existing position. It did not need those draconian measures, which have helped the terrorists. There is confusion about what is in the emergency provisions Act and what is in the Prevention of Terrorism Act, after what has happened to the six people from Birmingham.

Viscount Colville said in the first paragraph of his review:

> "New ideas, new information and a scrutiny of each provision would facilitate a more effective discussion."

Viscount Colville recommended no changes whatsoever. He said, in effect, "I believe that the solution to the problem is political." His terms of reference were

> "to report on the way the legislation has been applied over the previous year and to draw attention to any of the temporary provisions which safely might be allowed to lapse."

But he did not point to anything that should be allowed to lapse. In his report, which he said was hurried, he said:

> "the invitation for written submissions coincides with Christmas and the New Year. The predictable result on this occasion has been a meagre response to the invitation."

The events in Northern Ireland of recent days show that the position is as serious as it has ever been. It was getting better, but the Stalker-Sampson affair has soured relations with the Irish Republic and the refusal to prosecute certain leading members of the RUC has strengthened the terrorists, who ask whether that is British justice.

The aftermath of Enniskillen lingers on, and the recent killing of Mr. McAnespie has deepened the position. Private Thain's release was insensitive, piled on what had happened to the Birmingham six and the killing of Mr. McAnespie. It is natural that people in Ireland wonder whether there is any justice, when the British Government have been so insensitive. They should be ashamed of themselves for deepening the position, which was already bad. It is difficult to separate the two Acts.

The Baker report of 1986 set out all the details in a much larger report than that of Viscount Colville. The report said that it was restating section 8 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 to exclude confessions. There is a difference of opinion about whether the Birmingham six were guilty. The judges—it was not a Diplock court, but three judges without a jury, on appeal —made it clear that they took not the slightest notice of the men having been beaten up in prison. There were pictures on record of the faces of the men who had been beaten up in gaol. How can we say that confessions of people who have been beaten can be allowed as evidence? The Baker report made that recommendation, but it has still not been accepted; nor are many other recommendations.

Many of us believe that the emergency provisions Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act are stopping justice and are causing terrorism. It is sad that not one of the hon. Members who was elected last year is present in the Chamber.

Every time this melancholy renewal comes up—it is to be indefinite, even though it is only for a year now—some of the Unionists never admit that they ever did anything wrong. They never say that what they did caused all this. Until they say something like that and admit to the

lack of democracy in Northern Ireland for the minority community—there is an in-built majority where there should not have been one—there is no hope for the united Ireland that I want or for the peace of Ireland and the British people, who are also suffering.

It is in everyone's interests that the whole of Britain and Northern and Southern Ireland should come together and cross the sectarian divide. I began by saying that the hon. Member for Mossley Hill had tried to do that. I want to do that and I want to hear the Unionists saying that they want to as well, and do not want to go back to the old, undemocratic Stormont. Is there any hope of that?

9.26 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): Tonight we have heard a verbal onslaught from the hon. Members for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) and for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). It proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that no matter what concession the Government give Republicans and their representatives, the latter will take it, kick the Government in the mouth—and then start to demand more. We listened to the hon. Member for Hillsborough blaming my colleagues and me for the lack of democracy in Northern Ireland. If he were intelligent enough, he would know that his facts are wrong. None of my colleagues were ever in government in Northern Ireland and to blame us for something for which we had no responsibility shows the hon. Gentleman's ignorance. We were the official Opposition——

Mr. Flannery: I did not say the hon. Gentleman was in government.

Rev. William McCrea: The hon. Gentleman lacks knowledge of the situation, but usually blows his mouth off about it nevertheless.

I have listened with interest to everything said tonight. I have yet to hear the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, or the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) or some other hon. Members condemn the brutal murder of two UDR men the other day. They mentioned McAnespie, but said not one word about the two members of the Ulster Defence Regiment who were blown to pieces. Of course, some hon. Members might find that funny and exciting, but we in Northern Ireland take their statements about wanting to cross the sectarian divide with a pinch of salt. We shall carefully study their remarks in the House tonight; nothing in them will give anyone who believes in democracy any hope.

What is expected: that the Unionists will surrender every right, as the majority, to remain part of the United Kingdom? That may please certain hon. Members, but the majority in Northern Ireland, no matter what the carrot held out before them—gold or otherwise—are members of the United Kingdom and desire to remain full members of it. I heard the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh talking about a lady being taken away to one of the barracks and obtaining information on terrorists.

I remind the House that I could take hon. Members to a home in the Crumlin road in Belfast from which a young UDR man was taken out by the Provisional IRA. Barbed wire was put on his arms, which were behind his back; his tongue was cut out of his mouth and a gun put into it, and the back of his throat was shot out by the IRA. Is that justice? Instead of condemning the Provisional IRA, we hear a few wee words whenever a challenge is made by Unionist Members to SDLP Members. It may be thought that Sinn Fein is absent from the Chamber, but, having listened to the debate tonight, in scriptural terms, the voice may be the voice of the SDLP, but the hands that moved tonight were clearly those of Sinn Fein.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh said—I took down his words—that he was

"old-fashioned enough to believe that everyone is innocent before proven guilty."

Those were his words. He went on to enlighten the House and he produced a little card. He said that it had been produced by the 40 Commando Royal Marines. There is no evidence whatsoever of that. He believes that everyone is innocent until proven guilty. He told the House—it will be in *Hansard*—that the boys of the marines had come back to his constituency and he told us of the threat to his constituency. It could be that the 40 Commando of the Royal Marines printed those cards, but the SDLP, Sinn Fein or the IRA could have printed them. The marines are innocent until proven guilty. However, that is not what the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh wants. He wants them to be found guilty whether they are guilty or not.

The House should condemn the disgraceful and despicable act of the cardinal in Northern Ireland who tried, condemned and sentenced a young British soldier in front of his congregation, to whip up the fervour of Republican nationalism. He stood before that congregation and said that that young soldier had committed murder. That was the statement of a Sinn Fein cardinal. We may be able to take that cardinal out of Crossmaglen, but we cannot take Crossmaglen out of that cardinal.

The House is being asked to accept that a young soldier who is doing his duty does not have a right to a fair trial. Opposition Members are not interested in a fair trial. They would put him on a rope if they could. That is the type of justice that they want for young British soldiers, young UDR men and young RUC members.

Hon. Members should learn that nothing will satisfy the IRA except the removal of everyone who is British from Northern Ireland. I should like to read on to the record a short letter from a pensioner in Northern Ireland. It says:

"I was disgusted listening to Mr. Hume and Mr. Mallon, also their comrades in the South of Ireland about this 'shoot to kill'.

Shooting a young Christian girl, coming out of church. Was this not 'shoot to kill'? Going into a church and shooting the preacher, and members of the congregation gathered to 'praise the Lord'."

Was that not shoot to kill? It continues:

"Shooting three young policemen sitting in their car."

Was that not shoot to kill?

Perhaps the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh has forgotten that one evening nine members of the RUC were blown to bits by an IRA bomb in Newry. In that case, there were no calls for an inquiry. It was not said that the incident was worthy of an inquiry. Innocent men, because of the plan of an IRA man, were ushered into eternity. The letter continues:

"Shooting a judge and his daughter coming out of Mass."

Was that not shoot to kill? It continues:

"Luring three young soldiers to a fake party on the Antrim Road and shooting them in cold blood"

through the back of the mouth. Was that not shoot to kill? It continues:

"What about the innocent people of La Mon; the Abercorn; Oxford Street; Donegall Street and many others?"

Was that not shoot to kill?

[Rev. William McCrea]

Hon. Members must face the suffering of innocent people in Northern Ireland. I condemn the killing of any innocent victim in the Province, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh had better tell the whole United Kingdom, the House and everyone listening that the IRA does not care whether a person is Protestant or Roman Catholic, religious or irreligious. If he stands in the way of the IRA, if he believes in being British or if he wants Ulster to remain part of the United Kingdom and in a democracy, that is enough for the IRA to sign his death warrant. No judge or jury sits in those trials; a bunch of murderous scum sit in a back room and decide that a man's life must end.

We should speak of reality. When I listen to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh trying to portray policemen on the rampage shooting everyone in sight—160-odd innocent civilians killed—I am driven to ask him: "What about my own loved ones?" Were they responsible? A 16-year-old lad went out in the car with his 21-year-old sister who was engaged to be married. She wanted to show him the engagement ring on her finger. Was that enough for them to be blown up and put in a coffin—the two of them in one night?

Am I supposed to stand back and listen to all the tripe pumped out against the security forces? I have walked behind the coffins of those in the security forces. I challenge the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh to tell the House how many policemen's coffins he has walked behind, to how many policemen's widows he has given succour, to how many UDR men's young lads or lasses he has offered his genuine sympathy or walked with to the grave.

The SDLP has not done that. Instead, in the past few days, the leader of the SDLP has sat down with the leader of the murderers, Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams. He sat down in collusion with him. That was their second meeting and they are now deciding on a third. Has that stopped the killing? Not at all.

That is not the purpose of the meetings. Their purpose is to extract every possible concession from the Government. I say to Ministers that it is about time that they felt for the young lads and for the young UDR men and policemen. I trust that they will show their sympathy and go along to talk to the families to find out how they feel about being robbed of their loved ones.

In my constituency, not one Minister from the Northern Ireland Office has ever walked through the door of the family of a member of the security forces brutally done to death or offered his sympathy in person to those who have suffered so tragically all these years. The Minister shakes his head. I invite him to tell the House how many homes he has visited to speak to widows and orphans of members of the security forces and when. When did he last go along to follow a coffin to the grave? Those are the realities in Northern Ireland.

Whether a person is Protestant or Roman Catholic, life is precious, and we should defend the people's right to live. However, there is a murderous group in Northern Ireland that does not care who one is and is intent on destroying democracy. It is intent on destroying this House. If the IRA could get here, it would do that. Indeed, the IRA tried to destroy part of this building. When the IRA tries to destroy Her Majesty's Ministers, my life does not count for much.

I beg the House to renew the powers but also to do something else—to allow the security forces to destroy the terrorists. The Prime Minister told me that her policy was to eradicate terrorism. That is her statement and I agree with her. I feel passionately about it. I am asking the House when we shall get the murders stopped in Northern Ireland and when the people of Ulster will get around a table to talk about a future that will bring peace and stability to all our citizens.

9.40 pm

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): The House recognises that the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) feels very passionately about these issues. However, the House should also know that he entered into an agreement, after my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) had shortened his remarks, that he would do the same. If my arithmetic is correct, he spoke for 12 minutes. I accept that it was passion that carried him away, just as it was passion and the power of tongues that carried away his hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) on Thursday of last week.

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I made it clear to the House last Thursday why I spoke. I spoke to obtain justice for those who represent the Northern Ireland people in the House, and to obtain time for them to speak. Let me put it on the record——

Hon. Members: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is speaking on a point of order, and I do not think that he can put anything on the record during a point of order unless it is something that I can answer.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it right for a representative of the Leader of the House to come to an hon. Member, as he did to me, promise that the debate would finish at 11.30 pm and then move that it finish at 10 pm? That promise was made to all Unionist Members, and that is why some of them do not rise in their places. They were promised that the debate would go on until 11.30 pm.

Mr. Speaker: I know nothing of that. All I know is that the House passed a motion that the debate should end at 10 pm.

Mr. Jim Marshall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The House is grateful to the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) for obtaining an extension of the debate. A concession was made allowing the debate to be extended this week.

There has been a degree of unanimity among Opposition Members, particularly on two issues. The first is the usefulness of, and the need to continue, the Anglo-Irish Agreement. We urge the Minister, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister to ignore the words of despair of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) and to seek to ensure that when renewal of the agreement comes about, agreement is reached betwen Her Majesty's Government and the Government in Dublin.

The second main area of concern, and I think unanimity, results from the early release of Private Thain,

the soldier found guilty of murder some years ago. It is felt that the compassion shown in that case should be extended to many of the other young people in Northern Ireland who have been caught up in the troubles over the past 20 years, have been convicted, and are now serving long sentences. If there is to be an even-handed approach, it is only fair and equitable — and, in my view, morally correct — that the Government should show them the same compassion.

All of us wish to see peace in the North of Ireland. We are all democrats in the House, despite the comments thrown backwards and forwards across the Chamber tonight. It is in none of our interests to see terrorists succeed in bringing about political change through the use of violence, which we all condemn as a political weapon. It is also right to recognise, however, that terrorism cannot be defeated by reciprocal violence alone; the conditions that breed and secure terrorism must also be removed.

We are driven to the conclusion that security policy alone will not defeat terrorism. If we are to defeat it, both communities in the North must feel secure in the knowledge that the practice of rule of law will be objective and even-handed.

In addition, political institutions must be developed which both communities perceive as fair, and not as recreating the old prejudices.

Economic activity must be encouraged, as the present high levels of unemployment do much to institutionalise economic discrimination against the minority community. We believe that political and economic policies, are as important as, if not more important than, security policy in the search for lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

I should like to quote the words of the Secretary of State, because the Official Opposition's views on security coincide with what he said in 1986:

"Our strategy is to fight terrorism within the law. We want the most effective and vigorous action, but we believe that it must always be within the law. That is morally right. Any alternative will be bound ultimately to be counter-productive. It is the responsibility of the police, who lead in the fight against terrorism, to bring people to justice before the courts. Our aim and ambition is that the laws under which the courts will operate are fair and must comply with international standards of human and civil rights. Against the background of terrorism and the difficulties that that causes, the courts must diverge as little as possible from the ordinary law. It is vital to maintain the confidence of both communities in the institution of justice and we must do all that we can to ensure equal rights and remove grievances if they are fairly demonstrated, thus further to isolate the men of violence". —[*Official Report*, 16 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 1082.]

That succinctly states the Opposition's views on the strategy towards violence.

We believe that the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts 1978 and 1987 have failed to meet those laudable objectives in certain important particulars. Those failings were enunciated by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), the shadow Secretary of State, last Thursday, and for that reason we shall vote against the renewal order.

9.47 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. John Stanley): I am extremely sorry to learn from the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) that the Opposition will vote against this extremely important order tonight at a time of a serious security threat in the province.

What should be uppermost in the mind of every right hon. and hon. Member of this House is that, right now in Northern Ireland, we face a threat to security and to life which is as serious as any that has arisen in the past 20 years. Anyone who had any doubt about that from the information that is available in the public domain will have had those doubts dispelled by the BBC "Panorama" programme last night.

There is no question about the seriousness of the threat. It has been made absolutely clear by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, by myself, by the Irish Minister for Justice and by the Chief Constable of the RUC. We face an extremely serious threat in the Province at the present time. That threat and its seriousness have been vividly and visibly demonstrated in recent weeks by the massive finds of weapons, ammunitions and explosives on both sides of the border. Against that background, I believe that it is deeply regrettable and reprehensible that the Official Opposition should be voting against the order tonight.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) referred to the tragic events that took place last week with the murder of two UDR soldiers. He asked for an investigation into the circumstances in which the bomb was placed behind a hoarding. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will be writing to him about that matter.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) questioned the philosophy behind the emergency powers legislation. He referred to what was said in the "Panorama" programme last night by General Sir James Glover — that there was no military solution to the problems that we face in the Province. This Government and preceding Governments have said that many times. Indeed, it has been reflected in the policies followed by successive Governments, to try to improve the political climate in the Province. The whole process of breaking down discrimination in housing and in employment, trying to increase confidence in community relations, the security forces and the administration of justice, has been part and parcel of what we have been seeking to do.

Just as it is wrong to say that the problems of the Province can be resolved by purely military solutions, I must say absolutely clearly that anybody who thinks that political actions alone will solve the problems of the Province does not recognise the nature and the threat represented by the Provisional IRA. As my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) acutely pointed out, even in the South, in the Republic, there is unique legislation that is not generally paralleled in other Western democracies, in recognition of the particular threat represented by the provisional IRA.

Mr. Mallon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stanley: In view of the time, I would be grateful if the hon. Member would let me continue. He referred to the cards which apparently have been found on cars in his constituency.

Mr. Mallon: They were found on selected cars.

Mr. Stanley: As the hon. Gentleman says, cards have been found on selected cars and they state:

"Boys are back in town: 40 Commando Royal Marines"

I share the concern expressed by other hon. Members that the hon. Gentleman, in response to an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), should have said that, in his view, those cards had been

[Mr. Stanley]

officially produced by military authority. I believe that there is absolutely no basis for saying that at present. However, I can tell him that the matter is under full investigation by the commanding officer of the unit concerned, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman might at least reserve judgment until that investigation is concluded.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) expressed sympathy with those who had committed very serious offences very young. I must say to the House that the age at which an offence is committed is very much taken into account by the life sentence review board and by Ministers in considering release dates. Certainly I can assure the House of that.

I would also like to draw the attention of the House, and those hon. Members who were not present, to what my right hon. Friend said in answer to questions last week. I can assure hon. Members that that is a matter which we take very seriously.

The hon. Member for Mossley Hill made a comment that I would very much like to support. He made a plea that senior members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy — both Protestants and Catholics — should be willing to appear and be seen to be supportive at funerals involving members of the security forces of denominations other than their own. I very much share that sentiment. I also endorse what the hon. Member for Mossley Hill said about the importance of making certain that the Northern Ireland police authority included representatives from the minority community. I can assure him that there are some representatives already on that authority, and I fully endorse what he said about the importance of that.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) referred to the extradition issue, which has certainly not been problem-free. But I can tell him that meetings will take place shortly and I hope that the initial difficulties that have been encountered in giving practical effect to the legislation passed by the Irish Government will be sorted out.

I said that we face a serious position on the security front, and I want to underline that. The find of weapons and explosives by the Garda in January in Donegal was the largest ever find in the Republic. The RUC's arms find in February in a lorry just outside Belfast was one of the largest that it has ever made. The RUC's finds of explosives last year were two and a half times larger than the year before, and the Malahide find last week was one of the largest finds of commercial explosives ever made either in Northern Ireland or the Republic.

Those finds, which the House will recognise are greatly to the credit of the security forces on both sides of the border, included huge quantities of ammunition, potent explosives, automatic rifles, rocket launchers and machine guns. The hon. Member for Mossley Hill and my hon. Friend the Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) asked about SAM 7 missiles. I can tell the House that we assume that SAM 7 missiles are in the island of Ireland, although, as the House knows, they have not yet been located.

There is no doubt that, if such weapons and explosives are brought into use by the terrorists, there will be a serious position and a potentially serious loss of life. It is imperative that searches continue with great intensity on both sides of the border. I want to stress to the House that the legislation before us tonight includes vitally needed stop-and-search powers for the security forces. At a time when there is such an imperative need to locate the remainder of the supplies that have been brought in to the island of Ireland, it would be madness, and totally irresponsible, to contemplate a reduction of the powers of search at the present time.

I very much regret that doubts have been cast on the integrity of individual members of the RUC; indeed, in one or two cases, on the integrity of the force as a whole. The position is clear. As has been well acknowledged, and the DPP has concluded, there is evidence of the commission of offences relating to perverting the course of justice. My right hon. Friend has announced how the disciplinary aspects of that matter will be handled. Those disciplinary aspects should now be allowed to take their course. The integrity of the RUC as a whole should not be slurred, nor should the position of individual officers be called into question before any disciplinary proceedings have been concluded, and, indeed, before there has been any official announcement about the individuals concerned. In those circumstances, it is wrong to cast doubt on the integrity of the force as a whole.

In the last remaining moments, let me refer to the importance of the continuation order. I hope that, before we vote, the House fully understands that what is at stake in this continuation order is whether the security forces in Northern Ireland will retain or be deprived of powers that are critical to their ability to combat terrorism. The Opposition have said that they are committed to the fight against terrorism, and one takes what they say at face value. I can only say that to reduce the powers of the security forces at the same time would be an extraordinary way to fight terrorism.

If this continuation order is not passed, the security forces are going to lose their special powers of arrest, their powers of search and their power to stop and question. The Opposition are also going to make a very serious dent in our ability to deal with racketeering and other offences. I believe that it is essential, therefore, that the continuation order is passed, and I ask the House to endorse it.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 233, Noes 134.

Division No. 202] **[10 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard	Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Bowis, John
Allason, Rupert	Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Amess, David	Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Amos, Alan	Brazier, Julian
Arbuthnot, James	Bright, Graham
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*	Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Ashby, David	Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Aspinwall, Jack	Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Atkins, Robert	Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*	Buck, Sir Antony
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Budgen, Nicholas
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*	Burns, Simon
Batiste, Spencer	Butcher, John
Bellingham, Henry	Butler, Chris
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Butterfill, John
Benyon, W.	Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Biggs-Davison, Sir John	Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.	Carttiss, Michael
Boscawen, Hon Robert	Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Boswell, Tim	Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Bottomley, Peter	Chapman, Sydney

Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miller, Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stokes, John
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Stephen Dorrell.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Richardson, Jo
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Vaz, Keith

Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert N. Wareing and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts 1978 and 1987 (Continuance) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 16th February, be approved.

Northern Ireland (Appropriation)

10.12 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I want to intervene on behalf of my hon. Friends. As we were denied in the previous debate the time promised to us to discuss life-and-death issues, we are not prepared to present a charade to the House that everything is normal in Northern Ireland. The Minister can address other hon. Members, but we shall not take any part in that charade.

10.13 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. John Stanley): I beg to move,

That the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 10th February, be approved.

The order is being made under paragraph 1 of schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 1974. The order has two purposes. The first is to authorise the expenditure of some £76 million, included in the 1987-88 Spring Supplementary Estimates. That amount, when added to the £3,447 million previously approved by the House, brings the total Estimates provision for Northern Ireland Departments to some £3,523 million for this financial year. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask hon. Members who are not participating in the debate to leave quietly.

Mr. Stanley: The second purpose of the order is to authorise Vote-on-Account expenditure of some £1,598 million for 1988-89. That amount is necessary to enable Government services to continue until the 1988-89 Main Estimates are debated later this year. Full details of all the expenditure sought in the order are set out in the "Northern Ireland Spring Supplementary Estimates 1987-88" and the 1988-89 "Statement of Sums Required on Account", copies of which have been placed in the Vote Office.

I also draw the House's attention to our first published commentary on Northern Ireland public expenditure plans covering the years 1988-89 to 1990-91, which was published on 24 February. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members who are interested in Northern Ireland affairs —I am sorry that some have now left the Chamber— will find that a useful source of detailed information on public expenditure in the Province.

The House will be aware that the Northern Ireland Office Estimates for law and order are not included in the order. Those Estimates are covered by separate United Kingdom Supply Estimates presented to Parliament by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

As we are concerned with the entire range of voted public expenditure in Northern Ireland, other than law and order, I should like to highlight certain key features of the Northern Ireland economy which heavily influence the pattern of public expenditure provision. I am glad to say that unemployment in Northern Ireland continues to show a downward trend. The seasonally adjusted total for January was the eighth consecutive monthly fall.

The United Kingdom is now in its seventh successive year of steady growth and the Northern Ireland economy can be expected to benefit from growth at the national level in the years ahead. That expectation is confirmed by recent independent surveys, for example by the Confederation of British Industry, which suggest that the

economic outlook for the Province is fairly encouraging, with an increase in investment intentions and business confidence in the manufacturing sector last year, despite some instability in the financial markets.

Meanwhile, the rising incomes of those in employment can be expected to provide a further stimulus to the commercial revival of Belfast and other urban centres, and to businesses in the service sector of the economy. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear when announcing public expenditure allocations on 24 November, one of the Government's main priorities is to strengthen the Northern Ireland economy through the industrial development programme and by supporting other programmes and schemes which contribute to the development of the Province's economic potential and to long-term economic regeneration.

I turn now to the specific Estimates before the House. I do not propose to refer to every Vote for which supplementary provision is being sought, which will be a relief to the House, but instead will concentrate on the main items. I start with the Department of Agriculture's Vote 1, which provides for the Northern Ireland expenditure on United Kingdomwide support schemes. An additional net provision of £4·5 million is required, mainly to meet outstanding commitments on two capital grant schemes, the agricultural and horticultural development scheme and the agricultural and horticultural grants scheme, both of which have now been discontinued.

The Vote also provides for expenditure of up to £7·7 million under the national element of the agricultural improvement scheme, primarily for the provision of effluent storage and disposal facilities. The Department of Agriculture's Vote 2 requires an additional £4·6 million, the major components of which are expenditure on the grassland scheme and residual commitments under the original Northern Ireland agricultural development programme, which ceased taking new investment in 1986.

General support to industry is covered by the Department of Economic Development's Vote 2. An extra £7 million is required to meet the current level of expenditure on industrial development grants under selective financial assistance agreements. That reflects continuing success by the Industrial Development Board in its main task of promoting and safeguarding employment. That increased expenditure is offset by reduced requirements, such as a reduction of £2 million for industrial development loans. The need for public sector loan assistance has been less than anticipated, reflecting a welcome increase of private sector involvement in the funding of projects. When the pluses and minuses are taken into account, the net additional provision for this vote is some £4·8 million.

The Department of Economic Development is also seeking increases in the provision for its Votes 3, 4 and 5. The House will note that those are "token" Supplementary Estimates, each for £1,000. Their purpose is to draw attention to various increases in expenditure which are being offset by savings elsewhere.

The final economic development Vote requiring an increase is Vote 6 — administration and miscellaneous services. The additional £1·5 million sought is required for increased staff costs arising from the implementation of further employment measures, including the expansion of the restart programme. In addition, the Department's computer facilities will be upgraded to cope with an increased workload. This, together with other efficiency measures, will improve management information and thus the service provided to the public.

Next we come to the Department of the Environment Vote 1 which covers roads, transport and ports. Some £3 million has been channelled into an extended programme of structural maintenance works on roads. That includes the repair works made necessary by the severe flooding of last October, for which additional resources were made available to Northern Ireland from the contingency reserve. Much of that has been financed by additional receipts and savings, leaving a net supplementary estimate of some £600,000.

On the Department of the Environment Vote 4, additional provision is sought to meet increased expenditure on environmental and miscellaneous services, including £4 million for the Belfast programme, £1·5 million for land acquired for the Ballymacoss development scheme and £600,000 for the general grant to district councils. However, the additional expenditure has been partly offset by savings and additional receipts within the Vote, leaving a net requirement of a little over £4 million.

In the Department of Education, Supplementary Estimates are being sought in Votes 2, 3, 4 and 5. In Vote 2, higher and further education, an extra £3·2 million is sought. That is largely required to cover grants to the two Northern Ireland universities, reflecting mainly the recommendations of the University Grants Committee, and to cover the additional costs of the pay award for further education lecturers agreed earlier this year. Additional requirements are partly offset by savings arising from lower than estimated numbers of awards for postgraduate study and by savings on the in-service training of teachers.

An additional £476,000 is sought under Vote 3 for Department of Education miscellaneous services and administration. Total increases in that Vote are £918,000, but those are partly offset by reduced requirements, mainly in respect of loan liabilities. I particularly draw the House's attention to the £200,000 required for our new community relations initiative to promote cross-community contact between schools and among the young people in Northern Ireland. Also to be noted is the £85,000 required to fund the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, whose main objective will be to promote high standards of education in these schools.

Other additions include extra resources for the Belfast urban programme, provision for the Northern Ireland contribution to the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, payments to the Northern Ireland Training Authority in respect of the open learning centre, and increased expenditure on departmental administration, mainly on consultants' fees and equipment.

In Vote 4, which covers grants to education and library boards, an additional £11·4 million is sought. Some £8·4 million is for recurrent grants to boards, including increased expenditure of £3·5 million on rates, £2·2 million on salary costs and £2·1 million for mandatory awards and special schools. The increases sought will also enable education and library boards to carry out certain essential maintenance work on school buildings. In particular, there will be extra money to cover the costs of repairs to schools in the Western board area, following the storms last autumn.

The additional provision in capital grants to education and library boards is £4·5 million. That is partly offset by

[Mr. Stanley]

increased receipts from the sale of land and buildings of some £1·5 million. The increased provision for capital grants is required mainly for conversion work due to the closure of gas undertakings in Northern Ireland, for expenditure on the capital elements of the youth training programme and on the vocational education and 11-to-16 programmes.

Turning to the Department of Health and Social Services, gross spending on health and personal social services this year will increase by £28·6 million. Some £2·1 million of this provision is the Northern Ireland share of the £100 million additional resources made available from the reserve in 1987-88 for the health services throughout the United Kingdom, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health on 16 December. Of the total increase, some £16·7 million will go to health and social services boards. That will enable them to meet most of the cost of higher than anticipated pay settlements in 1987-88.

The £28·6 million increase in spending will contribute towards maintaining the high standard of health and personal social services which we have in Northern Ireland, and assist in the process of transition from institutional to community care for those in long-stay accommodation. That is in line with one of the main themes of the regional strategy — the development of community care as a real alternative to care in institutions. The increase in the capital programme of just over £1 million will be applied principally to minor works and the essential replacement of medical equipment. The sum of £9 million is required for family practitioner services to meet increased demand and higher costs, particularly in the pharmaceutical services.

In the social security programme, an additional provision of £15·4 million is sought, £6·3 million of which is for DHSS Vote 3, for administration and miscellaneous services, of which £3·4 million is needed to ensure the successful completion of the reforms in the administration of social security benefits and to maintain momentum in the computerisation programme. The balance of £2·9 million is required to meet a shortfall in receipts from the national insurance fund.

Finally, in Vote 4, an additional £9·1 million is required to meet increased expenditure on the supplement to the national insurance fund, supplementary pensions, attendance allowance, payments into the social fund, maternity grants and expenditure on retail prices index adjustment payments.

I have outlined with remarkable completeness the main expenditure provisions in the draft order, which I commend to the House.

10.26 pm

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): I am sure that the Minister will be pleased to learn that it is not our intention to divide on the order, and we hope that we will not detain the House at great length. I assume that those hon. Members who are present are interested in the order to follow.

We generally welcome the order and the Minister's statement, particularly on the Government's recognition of the importance of public expenditure in supporting economic development and developing essential services in Northern Ireland. We welcome the publication for the first time of the commentary by the Northern Ireland Office. In some cases it is an apology for public policy, but it is a welcome development. The commentary says on page 9:

"The Government's public expenditure plans for Northern Ireland must take account of the political, economic and social conditions in the Province."

Against that background, I would like to examine the Government's proposals and judge them in the light of the economic and social needs in the Province.

The Northern Ireland economy has deteriorated over the past 20 years. Since the early 1970s, there has been a massive decline in employment, particularly in manufacturing industry. Industries such as the synthetic fibre industry have virtually disappeared. Industrial output is now well below the level of 1973. Unemployment figures are consistently twice the national average, with more and more people falling into the category of long-term unemployed.

The future economic prospects are not good, particularly in traditional industrial areas such as shipbuilding, textiles and clothing, all of which have an uncertain future. Many people are living on the poverty line. Low pay, especially among women, is endemic. Since 1979, the inequality gap has widened substantially. That is not a phenomenon peculiar to Northern Ireland; it has occurred throughout the United Kingdom since the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was first elected in 1979. So it is against that economic background that we need to examine the needs of Northern Ireland.

The overriding need of the Province is for peace. I regret the absence of the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and his hon. Friends who, in a show of pique some 20 minutes ago, absconded from the House, presumably to take an early bath and have an early night. They did not think the matter sufficiently important to stay here at this relatively early hour to discuss the essential economic and social requirements—in addition to security — of Northern Ireland. I deplore the hon. Gentleman's absence and the manner of his leaving.

As I said, the Province's overriding need is for peace. Since the start of the troubles in 1969, there has been tragic loss of life and a crippling effect on the economy and economic development of the Province. Figures published in 1984 by the New Ireland Forum estimate the direct costs of the troubles at about £4·5 billion, and further indirect costs in lost economic and employment opportunities at about £3·3 billion — a total cost to the economy of about £8 billion. An economy as fragile as that of Northern Ireland cannot bear that sort of crippling expenditure. It is only through the pursuit and attainment of peace in Northern Ireland that these costs can be removed and more and more finance channelled into economic and social development.

I do not intend, as did the Minister, to pick out detailed points from the order. Rather, I want to highlight areas which are of concern to my party, and which require further explanation and additional expenditure. I shall mention them in conjunction with the relevant spending Departments.

First, I mention the Department of Economic Development. Will the Minister who is to reply comment on the future of Harland and Wolff? Last Thursday I put down some questions on that subject to the Under-Secretary of State. It is vital that the Minister takes this opportunity to dispel rumours about the future of the company. The Government and the House accept that

Harland and Wolff is of strategic importance to the economy of Northern Ireland, and vital to hundreds of small suppliers which depend on the yard for orders. It is essential that the Minister give a positive answer on the future of the company.

Will the Minister also turn his mind to the issue of the Northern Ireland electricity board and the Kilroot phase 2 conversion? What do the Government have in mind for the future ownership of the board? We are keen that they should take the decision to proceed with the Kilroot phase 2 development. With regard to the Department of the Environment, the Government's commentary states:

"Poor housing has been a major social problem in the past".

That is a sentiment and conclusion with which we agree wholeheartedly.

If that has been true in the past—we believe that the problem continues today—why have the Government taken decisions to reduce expenditure on housing when we know that, first, house waiting lists are increasing; secondly, that new building by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is being reduced; thirdly, that the numbers of dwellings in need of repair is increasing; fourthly, that the backlog on improvement and repairs is increasing; and, fifthly, that 51,000 homes are now classified as being unfit and that 131,000 dwellings are in serious disrepair. This is a time not for reductions in housing expenditure but for further expenditure.

I presume that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has no political axe to grind. If we accept its views, the Government's allocation of finance represents a cut in real terms of £118 million over three years. Not only will that cut lead to fewer houses being built but, we are informed by the Housing Executive, it could lead to a loss of 3,000 jobs.

In the light of reductions in housing expenditure, what is likely to happen to the development of schemes such as that at Divis? The Minister knows that I have a particular interest and concern in that scheme; I believe that that interest and concern is shared by the Minister.

With regard to education, despite what the Minister has said about additional expenditure in certain areas, we believe that further expenditure is required. The Minister will know that evidence has been provided by the education and library boards and the teaching trade unions about, first, the increasing numbers of teachers leaving the education system and, secondly, despite an increase of £500,000 that was announced a few months ago, the fact that there is still a growing backlog of school repairs. That shows that further expenditure is required.

I draw the Minister's attention to the provision for youth, sport, recreation and community services, which is outlined on page 75 of the commentary. The provision is being reduced this year and for the next two years. Will the Minister say why a reduction is being made, given that this is a time of mass unemployment in the Province, which particularly affects young people?

Hon. Members who take an interest in the problems of Northern Ireland are aware of the fact that the DHSS and the Health Service in particular are facing serious problems. That is being said not only by the Opposition but by the health boards and the National Health Service trade unions in the Province. What we are witnessing in the Province is a growing and potentially catastrophic crisis in the National Health Service.

The Minister has no excuse for being ignorant of the scale of the problem. It has been brought to his attention many times. He must know that in key areas the numbers of beds are being reduced. Evidence to support that argument appears on page 87 of the Government commentary. Waiting lists are growing; staff morale is at its lowest ever ebb.

The problems are highlighted by the desperate proposals of the Eastern health board. To save £7·6 million, it has had to make the dramatic proposal of a cut in surgical beds of approximately 100 and the rationalisation of vital casualty services in Belfast. In this sense, rationalisation means a reduction in the level of service rather than maintaining the existing level of service or providing better service at reduced expenditure.

The Minister must also be aware of the major reduction in services at Lagan Valley hospital in Lisburn, proposed by the Eastern health board. These proposals and others have rightly provoked an outcry of rage in Northern Ireland. The solution to the problem lies in the Government's hands and it is for them to produce it.

The Minister of State mentioned social security. I realise that he has limited discretion in that area of policy-making, but I direct his attention to the implications of the introduction of the social fund to Northern Ireland. The Minister will be aware that, in 1986, more than £38 million was disbursed in single payments. In the first year of the social fund—1988-89—the social fund budget provides for only £21·1 million, of which only £7·2 is available as grant. That represents a horrendous cut for the poorest in Northern Ireland. Opposition Members believe that Ministers at the Northern Ireland Office should be pushing their right hon. and hon. Friends at the Treasury and at the DHSS in London to ensure that further additional funds are provided for the Province in the light of its economic plight and the desperate need of many people in poverty.

The Opposition recognise the imperative of security—despite what the Minister said in his reply to the previous debate—but it must not be at the expense of other services, which appears to be the case in some key aspects. Despite some of the opinions expressed in the previous debate, we need to encourage further economic co-operation with the Republic. I accept that at the moment political difficulties make further progress in that direction difficult for the Government. However, we should continue to press the view that further economic co-operation is vital for the development of the economies of both the North and the South of Ireland. We must impress on those on both sides of the border that the island of Ireland is one market and not two markets arbitrarily divided by a land frontier.

We need to encourage more inward investment. In that context, I suspect that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland may have words to say about fair employment legislation at some time in the near future. If we are to encourage more inward investment to the Province, especially from the United States, the Government must show beyond any shadow of a doubt their commitment to fair employment opportunities for both communities in Northern Ireland. Unless they do that, the problem will continue to cast a shadow on incoming American investment in the Province. For the sake of those living in Northern Ireland, we must encourage as much investment as we possibly can.

The House will be pleased to know that we shall not be calling a Division on the order. We welcome many aspects of the order, but I hope that the Minister will answer some of my substantive points on it.

10.44 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Like the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall), I very much regret the absence of colleagues from the North of Ireland who have left the Chamber. I am struck by the fact that, last week, a filibuster took place, for the ostensible reason that the debate should not be allowed to continue while colleagues of the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) were in gaol. I have checked with the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker), and have discovered that all the hon. Members are now out of gaol. The excuse this week seems to be different, although, judging by the suntan of the hon. Member for Belfast, North, there may be something attractive about gaol at present. I fear, however, that we shall have to do without the intellectual input and the unique insights that we would have encountered had those hon. Members remained in the Chamber.

I shall be very brief, and I shall say nothing that I have not said many times before to the Ministers concerned. The Minister, who has responsibility for the environment, knows that I believe—and I believe that he knows that I am right—that proper funding has never been given to the part of my constituency known as South Armagh. The Minister has already created a precedent in relation to Health Service spending in one of the area boards, on the ground that it had previously been underfunded. I ask him to take especial interest in the roads in the area, so that they can be brought up to a standard equal to that in the rest of the constituency, and of the North of Ireland.

Let me impress on the Minister the concern about the completion of phases 2 and 3 of the Newry bypass—not, of course, to the detriment of expenditure in the rest of the area. It is crucial that the rural areas that have suffered from neglect for so long are brought up to date, and up to the required standard. It is essential that phases 2 and 3 be continued very quickly, because, as the Minister knows—being well aware of the geographical circumstances of Newry—because of the river and the canal, there is at present only one way in and one way out. A huge bottleneck will result from the completion of phase 1.

If the Minister has a chance to visit the area in the near future, I hope that he will be able to bring good news about both the bypass and the continuing nuisance of the presence of the customs station on what is known as the Dublin road. It is the most appalling situation imaginable. No doubt the Minister will readily tell me that it does not come within his brief, and I accept that. But the roads on which the lorries are parked do, and when he sees the bottleneck created in a residential part of the town which carries an enormous volume of traffic towards Dublin, I think he will agree that there has been undue delay.

I have heard from people involved in the proposed building of the new customs station that there has been a nod from on high, suggesting that there should be no rush. That is causing enormous problems, and will continue to do so.

Again, the Minister will know that my requests are very humble. I am satisfied with very little—and I receive very little, so I am not very satisfied.

In the past three years, the expenditure on street lighting in my constituency could be counted on two hands. I hope that the Minister will accept that that is an accurate assessment. I have sought confirmation from the Department that expenditure will be made on various places such as Peter's place in Newry, the Dublin road in Newry and the Monog road in Crossmaglen. However, I am then told that the only expenditure will be on new housing. What is wrong with the people in the existing housing? They should receive such expenditure after waiting years and years to get it. I know that I have raised simple constituency matters, but I believe that all hon. Members would agree that those people who believe that such matters are simple are taking a simplistic approach to the subject.

Will the Minister also consider the problem of water supply to farmers in the Granemore area? I think that it is incredible that, in this day and age, farmers cannot avail themselves of the mains water supply. They can be taken to court and prosecuted if effluent from their farmyards and silos seeps into public streams and rivers, yet those farmers do not have a water supply to wash and properly tend their farmyards and farm buildings, so it is unfair that they should risk prosecution. I hope that the Minister will reconsider this matter, because it is archaic that people are expected to farm without a proper mains water supply.

I am rather confused about the agricultural development programme. I had hoped that, towards the end of the month, that programme would be announced. However, having listened to the Minister, I am not sure whether that will happen. It is absolutely essential that that programme is quickly reinstated for the farming community in the North of Ireland. I may have misunderstood the Minister; I hope that I did, because I am keen that that programme is re-established. I hope that the Minister will confirm that when he replies.

Another broad area of crucial importance is the position of the Northern Ireland farmer in relation to the non-devaluation of the green pound. As a result of our unique situation, the Northern Ireland farmer must compete with the farmer from the Republic of Ireland on an inequitable basis. The devaluation of the green pound in the Republic means that those farmers are able to outbid and outbuy the Northern Ireland farmer consistently. I know that that problem does not exist in England. However, as the hon. Member for Leicester, South has said, Ireland is one island, irrespective of the political divisions. Indeed, agriculture is an example of how things should be geared. As it stands now it makes no sense: it should be dealt with on an all-Ireland basis.

I know that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would not wish me to go into details about how pigs or cows often stray across the border, and the headage payments that must be met when those animals stray. One way to deal with that unique form of farm diversification would be to equalise the green pound rate so that the Northern Irish farmer is not at a disadvantage.

The rural development programme has already been studied by the European Parliament and reported on by the Maher report, and it must be given serious consideration. Until we get to grips with all the factors that affect the rural farming community in terms of infrastructure, job creation and agriculture, we will never do anything more than a piecemeal job.

My final point relates to the provisions of the new Social Security Bill. It has been rightly stated that less money will be available under the social fund than was available under special permits. I could speak for a long

time about the potential effects of the Social Security Bill, but I shall home in on one issue and ask the Minister to examine it carefully.

It seems that the Bill will affect mostly those people who are not well below the required income for subsistence, but those who are borderline cases. Those who have jobs but are very poorly paid and have dependants in their homes will move from family income supplement to family credit and will lose, especially in regard to school meals.

I visited a number of schools in my constituency and talked to teachers, pupils, parents and those who work in the school kitchens. There is no question or doubt that, as a result of this legislation, many children will not get one square meal a day. There is no question whatsoever that much of the £2·55 per week allocated to school meals in the family credit system will not go towards feeding those children in the way that school meals now feed them. That will be a serious social problem that can be avoided. Because of the unique problems of the North of Ireland, we should ensure that every child at school has at least one square meal in the day. We should get to grips with that problem before it becomes as immense as I believe it will.

10.56 pm

Mr. Jim Marshall: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To save time tomorrow, at the outset of my speech I referred to the leader of the Democratic Unionist party as the hon. Member for South Down. May I correct that, out of deference to him and to my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), and give his correct constituency, namely the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley)?

10.57 pm

Mr. A. Cecil Walker (Belfast, North): Once again in speaking to this appropriation order I must object most vehemently to the way in which such orders are imposed upon the Province. From time to time, I have paid tribute to the Government for their commitment to the needs of the people. Sadly, I cannot pay any compliments on this occasion, when the Government are abrogating their responsibility to our beleaguered Health Service.

In the absence of democratic institutions within the various health boards, the Minister simply cannot fudge the issues for which he must carry the can. He cannot run out of the kitchen to escape the heat. If he considers that the people whom he has appointed are not fulfilling their obligations, he should say so categorically and without reservation. He cannot simply say that there is no more money.

There is a strong suspicion in the Health Service that resources are not being effectively deployed and that they are being absorbed to maintain a top-heavy bureaucratic administration.

The hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) mentioned that the Eastern health and social services board has assessed a shortfall in funds for 1988-89 of £7·6 million and the area executive team has identified options which it says need to be considered within the service.

There are widespread objections to some of these options, and where they specifically affect the elderly population and those in need of medical care I wholeheartedly endorse them. The Minister must be aware that the public have not been convinced that Health Service spending is adequate, particularly when there is a steady increase in the number of 75-year-olds, with corresponding problems that will create the greatest demand on medical and social services.

It is in that context that any proposal to reduce geriatric provision must be considered. In my constituency the Throne hospital, although an old building, has provided the most cost-effective and economic geriatric care in the Eastern board's region. Any proposal to close that hospital would be a tragic betrayal of the rights of the elderly to gain hospital care, where needed. Too often in the past the needs of our elderly population have been neglected and overridden. The Throne hospital has an occupancy in excess of 90 per cent., with over 75 per cent. of the patients requiring long-stay care.

Such patients are a heavy responsibility on the nursing service. They require considerable attention. I pay my respects to the staff of this hospital who have striven to provide such a high standard of care for their patients, as is evidenced by the active, voluntary and continuing fund-raising programme that provides furnishings, comforts and outings for these inmates.

North Belfast has a greater proportion of residents who are over 65 than anywhere else in the Province. That population will continue to increase, particularly over the next two decades, so, instead of decreasing facilities, the Department should be looking at ways of increasing them. The suggestion that private nursing homes will accommodate patients at present requiring long-term care is incorrect. It is deceitful to suggest that they could in any way cater for those people, who in my opinion should be accommodated in the Throne hospital

I trust that, in the light of what I have said, the Minister will examine very carefully any proposal regarding the Throne hospital. Then I sincerely believe that he will concur with my views in relation to one of the best and the most caring establishments for the elderly in the Province.

Another matter that I must bring to the Minister's attention concerns the Mater hospital. There is a proposal to close the casualty department from 3.30 pm every day, with the possibility of complete closure at weekends, together with the closure of gynaecology wards and a reduction in the number of surgical beds. I respectfully ask the Minister to visit this hospital, which for the last 100 years has served the people of north Belfast impartially and has delivered the highest standards of care that are available anywhere.

If these proposals are implemented, the people of north Belfast will lose an acute hospital to which they have every right. The casualty department serves north Belfast and also other areas, such as Newtownabbey, Carrickfergus, Greenisland, Antrim, Whiteabbey, Ballyclare and Glengormley. If these proposals go ahead, the people of north Belfast and those who live in a large part of the county of Antrim will lose a valuable and essential accident and emergency service. In such a case there would be no casualty service between Ballymena and the Royal or City hospitals. That would inevitably lead to the death of seriously ill patients in transit from any of these areas.

In addition, my constituency has the highest number of sectarian incidents in the Province. The Mater hospital has played more than its part in saving the lives of patients, who would almost certainly have died if they had been transferred to any other hospital. The Mater hospital also treats a large number of children. If the unit closed at 3.30 pm, these children would have to be treated at the

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children's hospital in the Royal complex, which is stretched to breaking point and could not possibly cope with the increased work load.

Eleven million pounds is currently being invested in a much-needed new block for the Mater hospital. This new block was intended to house a new casualty unit, a new X-ray suite and an observation ward, and to provide updated and more modern facilities to meet the health care needs of the people. I am very concerned that any dilution of services at the Mater will result in the new block becoming a vastly expensive white elephant with no acute services left to be transferred to it. Surely it would be a more financially sound proposition to ensure that acute services were retained as at present, so that completely efficient use could be made of this new facility.

The Eastern board, in a strategic plan document, recognises the need to make increased use of the resources of the Mater hospital because of this investment. It now appears to me that financial logic and the needs of the patients are being totally disregarded in a frantic effort to cut money from budgets.

I would also contend that the board would not realise the financial savings estimated to accrue from these proposals inasmuch as much greater demand would be placed on the ambulance service to transport patients to and from hospitals, thereby increasing the amount of money that would be needed to meet that demand.

Going on to the section on housing services, I take issue with the Minister on the cut-off date for repairs grant aid, which has been standing at 31 December 1956 for far too long. The Department, as the funder of the scheme, has set these rules and guidelines, and the Housing Executive cannot entertain applications for properties built after 1956. The Minister must be aware that in the period 1958-1960 we experienced some of the very poorest housebuilding. The owners of these properties are now having to live with the results of the jerry-building of those houses. It seems completely unfair that the Housing Executive can actively pursue a repair and renovation programme based on a 25-year cycle which now caters for properties built up to 1963, whereas the private tenants, most of whom purchased their houses with the encouragement of the Prime Minister, have been left out on a limb without any means of redress. I suggest to the Minister that he raise the cut-off point to an appropriate level, in the interest of justice and fair play for those who accept the responsibility and consequences of home ownership.

In conclusion, further to any proposals to cut provision for the elderly, serious consideration should also be given to the criteria for housing need in sheltered schemes provided by housing associations. The Housing Executive now operates on a basis of 35 places per 1,000, fixed by the Department and based on Scottish special criteria. But this is completely inappropriate to the Belfast situation, where we have had a drift of the younger and more mobile familes to the suburbs, which has left the population completely distorted, with a much higher proportion of elderly in need of care. Apparently it is the Government's intention to release more elderly back into the community, but if this is the case they must provide the type of accommodation needed to cater for them. There are little pockets of land all over Belfast in areas very compatible with the needs of the elderly where sheltered schemes could be built quickly and economically.

I ask the Minister to examine this acute situation sympathetically and as a matter of extreme urgency.

11.9 pm

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): I charge the Government with financial discrimination against Northern Ireland in the Health Service. In the recent review of public expenditure for the United Kingdom, Great Britain was given a 6·3 per cent. increase to allow for inflation for the financial year 1988-89, but Northern Ireland was granted only 5·3 per cent. That means only one thing: the Government are discriminating against the sick in Northern Ireland. I urge the Government to think again.

The Northern Ireland health boards will have less real money than last year when they made cuts. Public expenditure cuts last year and in preceding years have deeply and adversely affected the hospital and other services. That has been particularly true in my constituency.

Last summer the Minister published a regional strategic plan for health in the Province. The disparity in the provision to meet inflation in Great Britain and in Northern Ireland means that the Minister's strategic plan has been undermined. There will be less real money available this year than last year, taking inflation into account. There will be further reductions in the number of beds available in hospitals for ordinary and geriatric patients and less money available for the services provided by district nurses and home helps. Day centres, too, will be affected, although they are very useful to the people. There will be less money available for the disabled and mentally handicapped.

I represent an area of great population growth. There is also a high percentage of elderly and retired people in the area, yet North Down and the adjoining Ards area are facing massive and unacceptable cuts in hospital and social services. To save money, the Eastern health board is considering the closure of the accident and emergency facilities at Ards hospital and the transfer of patients to the Ulster hospital at Dundonald.

I do not see how the Dundonald hospital can cope with the extra patients. Last year 26,000 people were treated by the casualty unit in the Ards hospital in Newtownards. So many extra patients at the Ulster hospital, where people already have to wait long periods, would create an intolerable and unacceptable situation. It would add considerably to the misery not only of patients but of their families. At the very least nothing should be done by the Government until extra money has been made available for the Ulster hospital at Dundonald to increase facilities and medical and other staff.

The Government are thinking of saving money with cuts here, there and everywhere. But, as my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) said, they should cut out the fat in the bureaucracy. I urge the Minister, instead of cutting and saving money, to think of the cost in human terms. Regional hospitals have provided a good standard of medical and nursing care and support at Dundonald, Bangor, Newtownards and in the geriatric unit at Crawfordsburn hospital. But year by year the Government have chipped away at the hospitals in North Down and elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

There is an additional problem. The Eastern area board, which covers North Down and Ards, also takes in the city of Belfast, to the detriment of the hospital facilities in my area. For years I have advocated dividing the Eastern board and establishing a separate board for Belfast so that a proper and balanced Health Service could be provided in North Down.

It is essential in a modern society—I hope that the Minister will heed my words—to provide a decent level of health care, and sufficient resources should be made available to ensure such a service. I have been impressed by the dedication of the staff at the Bangor, Ulster and Ards hospitals, but every reduction in service means a reduction in medical staff, student nurses, ancillary staff and, of course, in all the other facilities that should be available.

In addition to social factors, which are relevant when considering the question of hospital facilities, the age of the population is highly relevant. In the Eastern health board area, those over the age of 65 account for 50 per cent. of the use of all hospital facilities. The work load has increased in the Eastern health board area with a 6 per cent. increase in admissions to general hospitals, despite a decrease of 9 per cent. in the number of beds available. The reduction in the number of beds is due to the board's cut, dictated by the Government.

The number of surgical beds has been reduced by 15 per cent., despite the 11 per cent. increase in the number of major operations. That is surely bad for those in need of medical care. Waiting lists continue to increase and that means further anxiety and suffering for many patients and their relatives. I refer particularly to the waiting lists for ophthalmic surgery which are at an all-time high, despite the efficiency of the staff.

The ophthalmic medical staff at the Royal Victoria hospital, a distinguished team led by Professor Archer, stated in a submission to the Eastern health board:

"The past two decades have seen a progressive decline in the funding of the ophthalmic specialty in the Eastern Area Board both relative to similar ophthalmic specialties elsewhere in the United Kingdom and other surgical specialties in Northern Ireland . . . centralisation of the speciality at the Royal Victoria Hospital site has resulted in a net loss of 4 operating sessions and the reduction of ophthalmic beds far below any norm for ophthalmic inpatient accommodation in the United Kingdom."

The staff stated that the minimum required to provide a basic ophthalmological service for the area is the provision of a third operating theatre and the necessary running costs, an immediate increase in the ophthalmic bed complement, the appointment of two consultant ophthalmic surgeons, the improvement of out-patient facilities and nursing services to take care of the current patient load and allow some development of day surgery, and the funding of the outstanding ophthalmic equipment list, amounting to about £250,000.

I hope that the submission made by the ophthalmic unit at the Royal Victoria hospital will be studied carefully by the Minister. I do not expect him to answer tonight, but I should like, in due course, to hear from him that he is prepared to respond positively to the proposals of Professor Archer and his team.

The threatened closure of Crawfordsburn hospital, which deals with geriatrics, continues to cause anxiety to the staff, the residents and their relatives. I have been told that approaches have been made to a private nursing home in Donaghadee to take 40 residents from Crawfordsburn. I should like to know whether there is any truth in that rumour. What will happen to the residents who wish to remain in the Crawfordsburn area so that they can be close to their relatives?

I do not understand how vitally needed money is denied to hospitals, which could provide essential services, yet money is made available by the Local Enterprise Development Unit to establish some private residential homes, while it is not given to others. I should like to know from the Minister how much taxpayers' money has been spent in setting up such residential homes, which are companies for private profit. Presumably, money is provided only to establish industries where no similar industry exists, but Northern Ireland has a plethora of private nursing homes. Therefore, I should like to know how much taxpayers' money has been spent setting up those homes, and how much money will go back to the taxpayer or at least be made available to the hospitals.

I conclude by making a personal appeal to the Minister. I urge him to provide more money for hospital services in the North Down area. I urge him to come with me to meet the surgeons in those hospitals and the consultants, doctors, housemen, nurses and ancillary staff who work together to provide what I believe is the most efficient hospital service in the whole of the United Kingdom. I ask him to come and meet them because if he listens to them and sees their patients and the patient care and studies the record of their work, I am sure that he will come to only one conclusion and will provide more money for a service that is vitally needed in my constituency.

11.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): I shall, of course, respond to the points that have been made by hon. Members as fully as I am capable, but if, by any chance, I miss one jot or tittle of a comment that has been made, I shall study *Hansard* most carefully and write in full.

I begin by welcoming the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) to our debates on appropriation orders, which are usually rather more colourful affairs than we have been able to have tonight, as the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) removed himself and his colleagues from the Chamber. Further, the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) is not here. Therefore, what is usually a fairly thick Irish stew has turned into rather thin gruel. I mean that with no disrespect to the hon. Members who have contributed. However, it means that perhaps we shall get through the feast rather quicker than we usually do.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Leicester, South will considerably broaden his experience and understanding of Northern Ireland affairs when he has been through a series of these debates. I am grateful to him for the fact that he has no intention of seeking to divide the House this evening, and supports—or rather does not oppose—the Government's expenditure plans. However, the fact of the matter is, as he well knows—as do most hon. Members—that about 70 per cent. of the GDP of Northern Ireland is generated through public expenditure. Even for the wettest of the wets, that figure must cause some alarm in terms of the requirement to improve private sector income generation, wealth creation and so on. If the hon. Gentleman is not aware of it, it may interest him, and the House, to know that public expenditure per head in Northern Ireland is 40 per cent. higher than the figure for

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the rest of the United Kingdom. We must consider public expenditure as a whole in the light of those large sums of money. I shall deal in a moment with the points made by the hon. Members for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) and for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) as to whether it is realistic to suppose that at the present time this Government, or any other, could increase the amount of public expenditure in the Province.

I cannot agree altogether with some of the comments by the hon. Member for Leicester, South because, having accepted, it seemed to me, the basis of the Government's position, he then went on to make calls for substantial additional funding. Nor can I altogether agree with some of the comments that he made about the future of some of the industries. He is quite right to say that some of the basic industries of Northern Ireland face difficult times, but I am not prepared to accept, for example, that textiles, clothing or linen are industries which are not doing extremely well in Northern Ireland at the moment, that they have not got a fine record and that they are not likely to improve on that record in future.

I hope that the hon. Member will, on reflection, reconsider that point, because I am sure that he would not want his words to give the impression that those industries are not doing well and will not continue to do well. They have a very fine record and make some very fine products.

Mr. Jim Marshall: I am sure that the Minister does not wish to take my remarks out of the context in which I made them and that, on reflection, he will accept that the industries to which I referred employed in the past substantially more people than they do now. The point that I sought to make was that the industries which employed substantial numbers of people in the past are no longer capable of sustaining those levels of employment.

Mr. Needham: I accept that point, but there are many industries which employ substantially fewer people than in the past and which now have very much higher levels of output, productivity and wealth creation. If the hon. Member looks at industries making linen, clothing and textiles such as Desmonds, for example, he will see enormously successful companies. I hope that this success will continue.

Agriculture faces difficult times, not only in Northern Ireland but in the rest of Europe too. The Government understand and accept the problems of agriculture in Northern Ireland, and spend approximately four times more money in agricultural support there than they do elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member asked me about Harland and Wolff. I have nothing further to add to the answers given to questions by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State last week. The future of the yard must depend on the ability of the management to win orders within the European Community sixth directive on shipbuilding. That cannot be the Government's responsibility; it must be the responsibility of the management.

The hon. Member for Leicester, South went on to ask me about Northern Ireland Electricity, and the decision on whether or not to proceed with phase two of the Kilroot conversion. As he is well aware, no new generating capacity is expected to be required in Northern Ireland until the mid-1990s. The Government will, of course, consider and evaluate the options, including phase two of Kilroot, before coming to a decision on what would be the most appropriate additional generating capacity at that time.

The hon. Member for Leicester, South also questioned the amount of support being given in the housing budget in Northern Ireland. He commented on the number of houses that are unfit and in need of repair. While I accept that the figures are not as good as any of us would like, they have improved dramatically in the past seven or eight years, with unfitness coming down from 14 per cent. I am certain that when the new figures come out from the household survey they will be lower than that. The Government accept that there is a major requirement to continue the housebuilding programme in the public sector at higher levels than elsewhere in the country; and this year the amount that will be spent on public housebuilding in Northern Ireland, in capital expenditure, will be double the amount spent in England. The public expenditure contribution is £338 million, with a gross expenditure of £552 million.

The Government are determined to move from public expenditure, where it has fulfilled the needs, to more private expenditure in joint ventures with the private sector. More will be done with housing associations—a point made by the hon. Member for Belfast, North—which is a crucial area of joint partnership. We are spending much more with the private sector on urban regeneration. The sum of £21 million will be spent in Belfast in the forthcoming year. Castle Court is a major new scheme costing £60 million, £50 million of which will come from the private sector, and £10 million from the Government, to rebuild and regenerate the heart of Belfast.

The Laganside proposal will cost £240 million spread over 10 years, £210 million of which will come from the private sector and £30 million from the public sector. The Government will provide the infrastructure for the scheme to go ahead. We have announced in our forward rolling programme plans for new bridges across the Lagan—road and rail bridges, which will cost £60 million.

In Londonderry the William street and Spencer road development will be funded totally by the private sector—a scheme worth some £11 million. Throughout the Province we want to build on the success of regenerating the private sector—industrially, commercially and in retailing.

The hon. Member for Leicester, South referred to the problems facing the construction industry because of the reduction of Government money. The hon. Member must look at the whole construction industry and take in what is happening in the private sector. The industry figures in the third quarter of this year were up by 22 per cent. when compared with last year. Many major public and private construction projects are coming forward in the programme over the next few years. The redevelopment of Great Victoria street, which is crucial to Belfast, involves spending £3·5 million for the provision of a new multi-storey car park and a new bus station, which, together with retailing and commercial aspects, will cost a total of £10 million.

We are not forgetting the need to provide adequate funding in the public sector. The hon. Member mentioned Divis. I am sure he is aware that we have come forward with the proposal to have Divis knocked down, as well as Unity and Rossville flats. It is not only a question of finding the finance; it is a question of priorities and time

and finding the space and a place for those people to go to, particularly in west Belfast, where housing space is not easy to find. So those things must be phased in.

We must proceed as fast as we can, within the constraints of the budget and while ensuring that adequate land is available, not only for construction but for the future of west Belfast; land that can be used for industrial and commercial development.

Mr. Jim Marshall: Does the Minister accept that if the proposals put forward by the Divis residents' association and their planners were accepted, which could form the basis of a planned redevelopment, many of the people who remain in Divis would be able to live on the existing site in the new homes?

Mr. Needham: Many of the people would, but not all of them. We already have a large waiting list. It is not possible to redeploy all the people at the moment and put them into the areas to which they want to go. The balance must be struck between the facilities available and funding in the budget.

The hon. Member for Leicester, South next spoke about education provision and drew particular attention to the backlog of school repairs. He will appreciate that the position has been fully recognised in recent expenditure allocations. An additional £1·5 million has been made available this year for additional minor works and maintenance on schools, and 24 major new school projects have been released at an overall cost of £21 million. The House will accept that this is a clear indication of the priority that the Government accord to education.

While the hon. Member for Leicester, South spoke of reductions in provision for some recreation and community services, he will appreciate, having accepted the overall thrust of the Government's policies, that this has not been an easy year from the point of view of the public expenditure survey in Northern Ireland. We have had to make difficult decisions between the various blocks —to which I will come—in relation to health. The law and order block and the employment and industry block have taken a greater share than we had anticipated, and this has meant our being unable to do all that we would have done in more normal times.

The hon. Member for Belfast, North spoke about post-1956 dwellings constructed in his constituency not qualifying for renovation grant aid. I have written to the hon. Gentleman recently, along with the Housing Executive, pointing out that the latter is carrying out an investigation into the defects in those houses and the possibility of presenting proposals to my Department for some form of assistance to the owners. We shall examine this matter thoroughly and treat it as sympathetically as possible. The renovation grant scheme will be revised in the light of the Government's home improvement proposals for England and Wales which were published in the form of a White Paper in September 1987. These issues will be taken into account in determining the future policy and legislation affecting Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), who is no longer in his place, raised issues about roads that he has raised with me on a number of occasions. I will try as soon as possible to visit the sites with him. I can think of nothing more pleasant than spending a day travelling around the south Armagh border with the hon. Gentleman examining the problems of the roads, even though it is not a subject which is looked at overall in a tremendously sympathetic way by the RUC. Nevertheless, I accept—in the hon. Gentleman's absence—that it is important to visit the area and see for oneself.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh has also been in constant correspondence with me over the water problems of the Granemore area. I am examining ways of trying to assist, for example, by seeing whether there are EC grants which could bring mains water to the farms about which he spoke. They are not that far from mains water, and I was wondering whether a digger and some plastic pipes might be one way of solving the problem. I appreciate the problems that the present situation causes small farmers, and if anything can be done, I will examine it.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to peripatetic pigs. We accept the need to try to find a way, within the EC, of getting rid of the differentials of the green pound and abolishing the differing green rates and the MCA system. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is fully aware of the strong feelings on this subject and I am sure that he will take it up in Brussels. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there is agreement in the EC that these differing green rates should disappear. Although I cannot give him a date, I can tell him that the special aid provisions will be announced shortly. They remain at £7·5 million, which is a significant additional resource for Northern Ireland agriculture.

I turn now to the major issue that has worried and bothered hon. Members tonight—the Health Service. I say to the hon. Members for North Down and for Belfast, North that I take no pleasure in the fact that the health budget has been increased this year by only 5·2 per cent. I am glad to see that the hon. Member for North Down is engaged in conversation with my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne—when he has finished, perhaps he will give me his attention.

If there was any way of increasing funds for the Health Service, I should be the first to want to do so. However, I must point out that we spend 23 per cent. more per person in Northern Ireland than the rest of England and Wales. Opposition Members constantly demand that the percentage of GNP spent in the United Kingdom should be upgraded to something like the equivalent of what is spent in France and Germany. The United Kingdom spends about 6·5 per cent. of GNP on health; France and Germany spend about 9 per cent. But the figure for spending on health care in Northern Ireland is 12·5 per cent. I do not deny that such spending is necessary and important. But when the hon. Member for Belfast, North asks for more, I must ask him where it will come from. It will have to come from some other block of the Northern Ireland budget; it cannot come from the national Exchequer. The hon. Member for Leicester, South and his hon. Friends, by deciding not to divide the House, have shown that they do not completely disagree with the amount of public spending on Northern Ireland.

This year's budget has not been as much as I had hoped it would be because of the additional money spent on law and order. Some Conservative Members, and even some Opposition Members, may think that when taxpayers' funds are spent, as they are on the Health Service, it is not wholly unreasonable that all taxpayers should at least support such spending. Some hon. Members who have not been paying all their taxes in Northern Ireland have,

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through their failure to pay road taxes, rates and television licences, rather put themselves out of court in this argument. Their actions do not give a good lead to the rest of the population. They also cost a lot of money because of police time, court time and prison officers' time involved. The hon. Member for Belfast, North came back — according to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh—with a suntan from where he was last week. I hardly believe that, but it cost £120 a day. That £120 a day could, conceivably, have been better spent on the Health Service than on the hon. Gentleman's suntan——

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: I was not incarcerated with the rest of my hon. Friends last week. Will the Minister accept from me that the people of north Belfast who are interested in the under-provision for the Health Service have, in their opinion, no responsibility for law and order or security work? Is he saying, specifically and categorically, that none of the £100 million that is being discussed for the United Kingdom will be considered for the Northern Ireland budget?

Mr. Needham: I am delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman was not incarcerated with his colleagues. However, as the hon. Gentleman knows, there are rules of parity. Additional money that is made available on this side of the water is made available on the other side.

My argument with the hon. Member for Belfast, North concerned the 5·2 per cent. increase in health provision in Northern Ireland—the hon. Member for North Down also raised this matter—compared with the 6·3 per cent. for the rest of the country. The reason for that is that more has had to be spent on the law and order budget. Everybody in Northern Ireland must accept some responsibility for that. It is difficult for me, as the Health Minister for Northern Ireland, to see how that matter is helped by hon. Members showing their deep opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement by refusing to pay their road tax. I fail to see the connection, as, I suspect, do most people in Northern Ireland.

I say to the hon. Members for Belfast, North and North Down that the vast majority of options being put forward by the Eastern health board are for rationalisation projects that it was considering in any event within its area strategic plan. The hon. Member for Belfast, North knows very well that three legs of our plan are preventive medicine, community care and rationalisation of acute services. As to the proposals for the Throne hospital, I endorse what the hon. Gentleman has said and I pay a warm tribute to the work that has been done there. However, as the hon. Gentleman said, it is an old building and it must make sense for the patients to be properly rehoused in better accommodation, as is envisaged by the health board. I should add that we are not talking about moving them into private nursing homes.

With regard to the accident and emergency service, we have put substantial new investment into the hospital. If proposals from the Eastern board will not make proper use of that investment, I shall have to look carefully at them. The same would apply to proposals in Down, Lagan Valley or anywhere else.

I must return to the other point that the hon. Members for Belfast, North and North Down raised. The proposals that we are bringing forward are within the strategic plan. It may be we shall have to do some things faster than others. I should like to do things that we must do slower faster and those that we must do faster slower. Nevertheless, that is the position in which we find ourselves within the block. I cannot at present foresee any likelihood of finding a large amount of additional funds.

The increase in the Northern Ireland block grant of 4·5 per cent., which is 1 per cent. or more above the rate of inflation, is commendable. I am delighted that the Opposition are not opposing that increase, and I believe that the funds that we have made available will benefit the people of Northern Ireland and will continue to give a high level of services to them.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 10th February, be approved.

Firearms (Amendment) Bill [Money] (No. 2)

11.48 pm

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I beg to move,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of sums required by the Secretary of State for making payments in respect of property the possession of which becomes unlawful as a result of that Act.

The House will know that in Committee on 9 February I announced that the Government had decided on a buy-in scheme. The money resolution is an implementation of that commitment, and it is couched in very wide terms to enable hon. Members to raise any points that they think proper.

The Government's view is that payment under the scheme should be confined to weapons surrendered or otherwise disposed of by persons who lawfully held them on certificate immediately before 22 September 1987, and which will become prohibited by clause 1(2) of the Bill. For people who have already sold such weapons, we shall be ready to pay the difference between the price that they received and the level fixed under the buy-in scheme. It is not our view that the scheme should extend to dealers. Government amendments to the Bill, including an enabling clause, have already been tabled.

I am not yet in a position to give firm proposals on the details of the buy-in scheme. The Government's underlying aim is to introduce a scheme based on a fair price which bears a reasonable relationship to second-hand values in early September 1987.

It is likely that we shall operate a two-tier approach, inviting the choice by the claimant between a flat rate sum or individual claims, with evidence of purchase price or insurance value.

I must stress that a buy-in scheme has been agreed because of the unique circumstances involved; individuals are being prohibited from holding articles that they were expressly authorised to hold prior to the announcement.

11.50 pm

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): The Minister has been commendably brief, and uncharacteristically modest. I hope that the House will accept that this is a victory for the House of Commons and for Members of Parliament. The majority of the members of the Committee insisted on an opportunity, denied them by the earlier money resolution, to discuss possible compensation for those whose weapons now held legally would become illegal under the Bill. I marvel that the Minister did not acknowledge that. I am doing my best to resist the temptation to gloat at his embarrassment at this humiliating climbdown over payments to owners of weapons that will become illegal under the Bill.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): It is democracy.

Mr. Corbett: The hon. Lady says that it is democracy. I do not argue with her, and I welcome it. However, it would have done the Minister more good if, in his brief introduction to the new money resolution, he had acknowledged that. I say, in no partisan sense and irrespective of the fact that we are in opposition at present, that the Standing Committee on this Bill has been one of the rare Committees to behave as I believe Committees on Bills should. The issues were debated, and the Minister was defeated. The Minister has now responded, and I make no complaint about that.

On Second Reading, the Minister and his right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said that they would listen. The Minister was on a steep learning curve in that debate, because every Conservative Back Bencher who spoke—perhaps bar one—got at his throat about the absence of a compensation scheme for weapons that are to be declared illegal. More important—this is my complaint to the Minister, who wound up the Second Reading debate—when I came to wind up for the Opposition and said that Labour was prepared to listen and think again about compensation, the Home Secretary intervened from a sedentary position to say, as reported in column 1180 of *Hansard* for 21 January 1988, "That is a change."

By the way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not know whether you have any authority over this matter, but when I went to the Vote Office earlier tonight to get that copy of *Hansard*, I discovered that it is out of print. We have had enough trouble getting the reports of the proceedings of the Standing Committee. Quite apart from hon. Members, those outside who are trying to follow what we are doing and who go along to the HMSO to try to buy copies of *Hansard* are now denied them.

Under heavy pressure from his hon. Friends behind him, the Minister was needlessly rude at the end of the Second Reading debate. He refused to deal with the constructive points that we had put to him, and at one stage there were complaints that he was turning his back on the Opposition Front Bench from the Dispatch Box. I hope that he has learnt from that, as surely as he is learning from——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Let us not have a debate about a past debate. The motion is the one on the Order Paper. That is what we should be discussing.

Mr. Corbett: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It does not matter that I welcome the new money resolution; the whole House will welcome it, because it is a proper Government response to the views of members of the Committee. The Opposition have been arguing for more effective control of firearms, and we want it to happen. We claim no credit—the Minister said that we were trying to do so—because we share the view that the public are entitled to a proper assurance of public safety, alongside the rights of those who shoot as part of their jobs, or for leisure or sport.

I do not suggest for a moment that this is the right time of night to discuss the matter, but the buy-in scheme raises a number of questions. I understand that the Minister cannot go into the details tonight, and the second money resolution that he has now laid enables the Committee to debate the subject properly. I feel, however, that he owes the House an explanation of the difference between a buy-in scheme and compensation. The money resolution talks about making payments. That is wide, and I do not complain about it. But on what basis will the payments be made? How will the value be decided, and by whom? Why has the date of 22 September 1987 been decided on?

I have a suspicion, which I believe will be shared by some of the Minister's hon. Friends, that the real difference between compensation and the buy-in scheme

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is a silly obsession on the part of the Government, who wish to avoid acknowledging the will of the Committee. I do not say that lightly. The Committee came to a view, and the Government have had to respond. I see nothing wrong with the Government, in the shape of the Minister, acknowledging that.

Perhaps, if he is able to speak again, the Minister will let us know exactly what the buy-in scheme involves. Does it refer to the purchase price, and, if so, is that the price on the date when the weapon was bought? Does it refer to the insured value, or—as the Minister suggested—to the notional market value on 22 September 1987? In the interests of the House and Back Benchers, it is important that we agree the money resolution—I make no bones about it—so that our Committee can debate and decide this important issue.

Some very wide doors may be opened. The Minister has said that he has no idea at present what the buy-in scheme will cost. There is, I believe, a way of avoiding heavy payments to owners of firearms which are to be made illegal, without in any way weakening the Government's attempt — which we support — to introduce more effective control of guns. If the Minister will consider again restricting the capacity of self-loading rifles to carry more than three or perhaps five shots within the weapon without reloading, that will dispose of the argument about whether proper control is possible of the capacity of magazines and their interchangeability. I am advised that that is technically possible and it avoids the difficulties of trying to place restrictions on magazine box capacity.

We welcome this new, wider resolution, not in a narrow or party sense, but on behalf of all hon. Members, whatever their opinion about the Bill. The resolution will enable us to discuss this extremely important matter upstairs and to decide upon a matter upon which, earlier, the Government said we could not decide.

12 midnight

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I am glad to have the opportunity to speak after the grudging and ungracious speech of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett).

I am grateful to the Minister for accepting the representations that were made to him by many hon. Members. I wrote to my hon. Friend about this matter when the Bill was introduced and I have discussed it with him many times. I am glad that my hon. Friend listened to people who put a case to him. It is extremely grudging of the Opposition not to accept the money resolution in that spirit.

There is only one matter that I wish to raise with my hon. Friend. He used the words, "not dealers". There are a number of genuine collectors who, to avoid having to change their licences every time they buy a weapon, have become part-time dealers. All sorts of people operate as part-time dealers and I hope that the Minister will consider their cases so that those dealers, who earn their livings in other ways, are not penalised and are able to take advantage of the scheme.

12.2 am

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I do not wish to detain the House for long at this time, but I would like to welcome the money resolution and the Minister's explanation.

I do not consider the resolution to be the humiliating climbdown to which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) referred. It is a sensible recognition of the considerable body of opinion, inside and outside the House, that greeted the publication of the Government's proposals. On Second Reading I believe that virtually every hon. Member who contributed made reference to the issue of compensation. In the Minister's defence—if he needs me to defend him—it should be noted that, throughout that debate, he made it clear, as did the Home Secretary, that the Government were willing to reconsider the matter of compensation. For that reason I believe that it would be rather grudging to do other than welcome the resolution now before the House.

The resolution is a recognition of the legitimacy of those who held weapons under the law as it stood. Special circumstances attach to the changes to the law now proposed by the Government and under those special circumstances compensation is a proper thing for the Government to consider and to implement. For those reasons, I believe that the resolution should be warmly accepted by the House.

12.3 am

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I wish to thank my hon. Friend the Minister for introducing the money resolution. In fairness it should be said that, despite all the comments that were made when the Government introduced the White Paper and on Second Reading, it seemed most unlikely that we would achieve a money resolution and compensation. It is only in the face of a failed sittings motion that we now have the money resolution and the possibility of debating in Committee either amendments to clauses or new clauses that will introduce the essential compensation. I am somewhat mystified about the difference between buy-in and compensation. There must be some subtle reason for the Government to have changed the wording from compensation to buy-in during the past week or two. I suspect there may be some Treasury small print that no doubt will be elucidated later.

The only point that I wish to make—I have hated having to say this innumerable times—is that all this could have been saved had there been proper consultation during September, October and November with the British Shooting Sports Council. Perhaps in future there will be such contact with the equivalent of an expert committee that can advise the Minister of the hazards that the Government will face if they proceed with such legislation. That is why there have been so many subsequent changes.

I am glad that the Minister accepted so many amendments. I hope that there are more to come. I welcome what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) said about a compromise on self-loading rifles with perhaps a magazine of three or five rounds so that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot anticipate the debate that may take place in Committee. We have to deal with the motion on the Order Paper and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will address himself to that.

Sir Hector Monro: The point is that it will substantially reduce the amount of money required in the money resolution if the Minister is able to accept my proposals. There would be savings for the Government and for many frustrated riflemen throughout the country if that were to happen.

I reiterate that I welcome the fact that the Government have moved the money resolution and look forward to debating the subsequent amendments to the Bill in Committee.

12.6 am

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I merely want to point out that the money resolution exists because of a deficiency in the debate on 21 January. I well recall the horrified looks on the faces of the Minister and other Conservative Members when I stood up to debate the money resolution. As I said then, and as I say frequently, money resolutions should not go through on the nod.

As the debate on 21 January proceeded, it became transparent that the original money resolution was insufficient for the compensation scheme that the Minister said he would introduce. We said so on many occasions. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) also said so, but did not think too much about it as he voted for the money resolution on 21 January.

The Opposition opposed that resolution as a gesture. As I recall, we did not intend to do so, but we said that the money resolution was inadequate, and that it reflected hasty legislation and inadequate consultation and that if the Government were to withdraw the money resolution and think again, we would be prepared to support a proper money resolution which covered a compensation or buy-in scheme—whatever the term. We knew what we were talking about, but the Minister, far from readily acknowledging the error of his position, refused to concede that there was any deficiency and, as I recall, attempted to bluster his way through, with a few sneers thrown in for those of us who were intent on helping the House by drawing attention to the deficiencies of the money resolution.

I am sure that the Minister will not begrudge me the opportunity to say "I told you so on 21 January". It is a case of the biter bit. I hope that the House will take money resolutions seriously. The House very often shoves through money in great quantities on the nod.

On 21 January, I was asking about the extent of the Government's expected revenue from the increase in fees, for the cost of administration which they were preparing with legislation. The Minister was not able to answer me, because the Government had not thought enough about the expenditure involved, and that is why we are here tonight.

I am pleased that the Minister has taken note of the representations, principally of Opposition Members, and of the subsequent representations in Committee. I think that he now recognises that he was a bit quick-tempered on that occasion. Further contemplation of the matter has led him to introduce the money resolution that we said on 21 January was necessary.

12.9 am

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary on what he said. Unfortunately, I did not speak in the Second Reading debate. I did not think then and I do not think now that compensation is necessary. The reason why I am sure that what my hon. Friend has said is correct is that there has been a big public outcry and a demand for compensation, largely stirred up by many hon. Members on both sides of the House who have had representations made to them by organisations that are financed by the trade.

The arms market is international. My hon. Friend has announced that from the relevant date there is to be a floor for such transactions. It should be no more than a floor; it should not be a costly exercise. The order should not prevent dealers from offering the full market value for surrendered weapons. There are ready buyers overseas for weapons that are surrendered here, but can still be used legally abroad. What my hon. Friend has done is circumspect and correct, but I trust that it will not cost a great deal of money.

12.11 am

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): It is regrettable that under our system it is difficult for the Government to adopt a new view once they have drafted their legislation. Whether by choice or under duress, the Government have very wisely changed their mind. I welcome the new clause.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Minister was unable to spell out in more detail the terms of payment. That is crucial to the support that he can look for in Committee from some of his hon. Friends. In its wisdom the Committee removed clause 7 from the Bill. That considerably reduces the cost, because weapons that have been altered will not now return to their original category and need not be purchased by the Government. I hope that when new clause 1 is debated we shall be able still further to reduce the cost to the public purse. I am sure that my hon. Friend will listen with care to our arguments during that debate.

The Bill was a knee-jerk reaction to the sad and tragic events at Hungerford. Compensation will be paid for rifles that are hardly ever used in criminal activities. Out of 9,500 crimes in 1986 that involved weapons, fewer than 60 involved rifles of any sort—0·6 per cent. The idea that this legislation will reduce the use of firearms in crime is erroneous. My hon. Friend did not persuade me or anybody else who listened to the Committee proceedings of the rightness of his case.

The legislation was hasty and ill thought out and will not carry out the Government's perfectly reasonable objective of reducing crimes of any description.

12.15 am

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Like many other hon. Members, I do not wish to prolong the debate unduly, but I hope that the money resolution will be endorsed. I think that it is rather unfair of hon. Members, on whichever Benches they may sit, to beat my hon. Friend the Minister about the head over this matter, because he made the position quite clear on 21 January, when he said:

"my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I are not so arrogant as to assume that the Bill is necessarily perfect." [*Official Report*, 21 January 1988; Vol. 125, c. 1182.]

Throughout the Committee proceedings, and indeed before the Committee even sat, my hon. Friend made it clear that the Bill would not necessarily pass through the Committee intact. So those who feel that they are

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brandishing great swords on behalf of whatever lobby are perhaps deluding themselves, if not deluding the lobby they seek to represent.

I do not think that the money resolution need be seen by my hon. Friend as a climbdown but he might perhaps wish to spell out to the House in terms of the new clause that will follow the money resolution exactly what the difference will be between weapons that are surrendered and those that are otherwise disposed of. I think that many hon. Members would be happy to see the taxpayer pay justified compensation for the surrender of firearms, but they might be less enthusiastic about seeing that money simply paid out on the basis of "otherwise disposed of" firearms, which is the term used in the Government new clause that was tabled today.

I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to make that clear to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker Order. The House cannot substitute itself for the Committee. The House must address itself to the motion on the Order Paper.

12.16 am

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): I just want to ask my hon. Friend the Minister one question, as I understand that he may catch your eye again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The buy-back scheme will apply to firearms. What about the equipment on the firearms? My hon. Friend will know that there are certain types of guns for which sights are expensive accoutrements intrinsic to the design and cost those who own them a good deal of money. I have had representations from various people, not least very senior shooters in the police service, who are anxious to know whether the compensation scheme covers the additional pieces of equipment that are integral to the firearm and have no value if they are removed from the weapon.

This is the time to look forward, and not back, but I would like to say to my hon. Friend the Member for Somerset and Frome (Mr. Boscawen), the Government Whip on the Standing Committee, how grateful I am that he has obviously conveyed to the Chief Whip and the others who run the machinery of government in this place the importance of the money resolution having come to the House in time for the Committee to be able to complete its work in the knowledge that the Government have taken this difficult decision. I am grateful to those who have made it possible for the Committee to complete its work more effectively than would otherwise have been the case.

12.17 am

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I am very grateful to hon. Members who have spoken in this debate for the unanimous support which I have received. It is rather refreshing, and a bit of a change. I am particularly grateful for the support that I have received on this occasion from my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin). That was refreshing too, and a bit of a change.

I found myself in very considerable agreement with what my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) had to say about this matter, and I am grateful to him for his support. This is not a humiliating climbdown at all. In the course of the Second Reading debate, the Home Secretary and I made it perfectly plain to those who had ears to hear that we were reconsidering our attitude. The money resolution that we have laid before the House now is a reflection of that position. So I do not regard it as a humiliating climbdown. I am a realist, but I am not humiliated on this occasion —perhaps on other occasions, but not on this one.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) asked about dealers. It is not our intention, at least at the moment, to make any payments to dealers, basically because dealers are in a position to export and the international market price remains sound. Furthermore, it is extremely difficult to make a sensible distinction, either in law or in logic, between those who are whole-time dealers and those who choose to make themselves dealers in law but are not whole-time. That was their choice, and it is very difficult to make a distinction between them.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I am following the logic carefully. Will the Minister not agree that, while it is their choice, it was their choice at the time when possession of those weapons was perfectly legal in this country, and that dealers, be they full-time, part-time or whatever, are just as much caught in the web as the individual who owns one weapon? If we pass the legislation, dealers, especially part-time dealers, will be caught with the weapons in their hands and they will not be able easily to dispose of them.

Mr. Hogg: That is a fair debating point. It is one of the reasons why we have drawn the money resolution in such wide terms. We have not by its nature excluded any argument or proposition that hon. Members choose to debate. The money resolution is widely drawn, so precisely the kind of point advanced by the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) can be advanced.

But it seems to me that there is a difference between an individual who holds weapons in his individual capacity and a person who holds them in the capacity of a dealer. A dealer is in business, and there are always trades and hazards associated with being in business.

Furthermore, as I think the hon. Gentleman will accept, there remains a strong international market. Those who are in trade as gun dealers are in a much better position to dispose of weapons on the international market than are individuals who hold guns in their capacity as individuals. So, although I expect to debate such issues, I say to the House that the Government's present intention is not to extend the scheme to cover dealers, whether whole-time or part-time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths) asked about equipment. This is a very difficult question, because some items of equipment are attached to the gun itself, whereas others, which might very well have been purchased to be used with that weapon, are not attached to the gun itself. Again I find it difficult to make a distinction either in law or in logic between the two classes of equipment. My present view is that the buy-in policy should extend to the gun. I suppose that it is possible that one could in logic extend that also to the bits which are fixed permanently to a gun. One could argue that they became the gun, but these are the kind of questions that we will have to consider in the context of what has been said.

My hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham understandably asked what we mean by "otherwise disposed of". To him I give this answer: for

people who have already sold weapons, we shall be ready to pay the difference between the price they received and the level that will be fixed under the buy-in scheme.

Hon. Members have asked what the difference is between compensation and a buy-in policy. I am not sure that there is a difference. What we are doing is buying in guns. That is why we have called it a buy-in scheme. In one sense that is compensation; in another sense it is not. Compensation could be said to extend to compensation for loss of use, for example. We do not intend to do that. What we intend to do is to buy in guns. If there be a distinction of importance, I rely on the phrase "buy in" rather than on the phrase "compensation".

This has been a happy debate, because I have received such support. I commend the money resolution to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of sums required by the Secretary of State for making payments in respect of property the possesson of which becomes unlawful as a result of that Act.

Job Losses (Wakefield)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

12.23 am

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am most grateful for the opportunity to raise certain issues which are of deep concern to my constituents within Wakefield. The last time I was present in the Chamber for an Adjournment debate at this ridiculously late hour it was to discuss the closure of the Woolley and Redbrook colliery complexes. The debate was led by my hon. Friends the Members for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) and Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay).

I believe that it is appropriate to start my brief contribution in the early hours of this morning by referring to the problems that affect my constituents directly as a result of the rundown of the coal industry in the Wakefield area. I should like to refer briefly to some statistics which show the major problems affecting my constituents as a direct result of the pit closures.

In 1979, in my constituency of Wakefield, there were 4,395 jobs at eight pits. In 1988, there are only 565 jobs at one pit, the complex at Denby Grange and Calder Drift. In 1979, in the Wakefield district, there were almost 17,000 jobs in the mining industry at two pits. In 1988, there are fewer than 5,000 jobs at six pits. It is important to make the point that there are knock-on effects of pit closures. I am concerned not simply about the issue of miners' jobs, although that is important, but about the effects on the rest of the economy. I am particularly concerned about the fact that, directly following pit closures, job losses arise in manufacturing companies and service organisations supplying the goods and services to the coal industry.

The engineering industry in my constituency is extremely dependent on the prospects of the coal industry. I remind the Minister of the closure of the British Ropes factory in Wakefield in January 1986, with the loss of 180 jobs. One of the main factors contributing to that was the rundown of coal in the Yorkshire area. Several other large employers are very much dependent on the prospects of the coal industry, including British Jeffery Diamond. It currently employs 780, yet as recently as 1986 that company employed 950 people in my constituency. Fletcher, Sutcliffe, Wilde employs 385 people at its factory in Wakefield. In 1981 it employed as many as 781, so, clearly, those two companies, together with a number of smaller companies, are very dependent on the prospects of the coal industry.

In detailing the knock-on effects of the rundown of the coal industry, it is important to discuss job losses in local services caused by loss of spending power among mining families. I refer the Minister to the study carried out by Barnsley borough council, which estimated that, for every 100 jobs lost in the coal industry, an additional 24 were lost through loss of spending power by former employees in the coal industry. I understand that that is a rather conservative estimate of the impact.

There are also similar problems in my constituency in the textile industry. Recently there have been major closures at Paton and Baldwin, Listers, where several hundred people lost their jobs. Clearly, there is a similar knock-on effect in the constituency.

I do not want to give the Minister the impression that local people have not attempted to do something about the

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situation: I wish to pay tribute to the role of the local authority, not just because I was chairman of its Economic Development Committee. Recently, Wakefield district council has made great efforts to attempt to offset the problems that we face in my area as a result of the declining industries, such as textiles and coal. Wakefield district council has established excellent relations with the private sector at local level. People in private industry locally would support that. The district council has worked closely alongside the Wakefield and Kirklees chamber of commerce and, with private industry, has developed a number of initiatives in job creation, which are to be commended. It has developed successful enterprise centres based in the worst hit areas of Wakefield, which are clearly generating new jobs, although not to the extent required to replace the jobs that we have lost in the coal and textile industries, among others.

It is also fair to say that the district council has made strident efforts to attract new investment into the Wakefield district by marketing the area, trying to sell it to inward investment, with substantial success. The Minister will probably be aware of recent proposals by Coca-Cola-Schweppes to open a factory in the Normanton constituency, which, although not in Wakefield itself, will clearly have some bearing on my constituency.

In my opinion, the efforts that are being made by the local authority have been totally undermined by the Government's withdrawal of assistance. I want to give four brief examples of the ways in which I feel that the Government have directly damaged the prospects of the local economy in the Wakefield constituency and in the wider Wakefield district. Way back in 1982, the industrial development certificate system was abolished. Until that point, that system had actively encouraged the movement from the prosperous south-east to areas of unemployment in the north of people who would be prepared to create jobs. I felt at the time, and have certainly felt since, that such abolition was a backward step. In the same year—this is probably the most crucial point—the review of regional policy led to the withdrawal from Wakefield of the intermediate status that it had previously enjoyed. I shall refer to that later.

In 1985, the Department of the Environment announced that Wakefield would no longer be eligible for urban development grant. At local level, much progress had been made as a result of the use of those urban development grants. Indeed, I recently discussed the successes that we have had with the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier). When he visited my constituency before Christmas he was able to see the successes that we have had directly as a result of urban development grants being available to firms in Wakefield.

My request for this Adjournment debate stems from a recent spate of job losses that have hit my constituency. I should like to detail briefly the extent of those job losses. February 1988 was a black month for employment prospects in my constituency. On 4 February, as I am sure the Minister is fully aware, Hagenbach's bakery was scheduled for closure by Allied Bakeries Ltd. I believe that the bakery employs altogether over 300 people, but Hagenbach's and the people at the bakery have run a number of shops in the Yorkshire and Lancashire area. I believe that the total package of losses announced by Allied Bakeries on 4 February was about 430 jobs—more than 300 jobs in the bakery in my constituency and the rest based in shops throughout the north of England.

What was especially worrying was that there had not been any prior warning to the employees about the drastic nature of the step taken by Allied Bakeries, although it is fair to say that 46 redundancies had occurred the previous October. However, there had been no subsequent attempts to cut production or reduce costs. As I understand it, distribution patterns had remained constant and there had not been any staff cuts.

I had subsequent contact with a gentleman by the name of Mr. J. W. Mutch, the personnel director of Allied Bakeries. I explained my concern and that I felt that it was discourteous, when there was such a sizeable closure, that the company had not taken the trouble to notify the local Member of Parliament which, from discussions with my predecessor, I had understood to be normal practice. Because of his concern at my involvement, Mr. Mutch came up to Wakefield overnight and I met him together with the local manager of the bakery to discuss in detail my concern over the issue. I also discussed with the trade union representatives at the bakery their concern about what had happened. Mr. Mutch informed me that the closure decision was

"based on commercial decisions connected with the changing pattern of trade in the bread market, against a background of overcapacity in the plant bread industry."

In a letter to me, Mr. Mutch further stated:

"We very much regret that the closure decision has had to be taken and it is important that we should assure you that the decision is no reflection on the skills and attitude of the workforce—many of whom have given loyal service over many years."

I do not have to tell the House that, in a situation such as this, the staff who had given such loyal service were devastated by the announcement. What particularly concerns me is that many of the staff are female and many are under 40: this poses particular problems when it comes to generating the jobs to make up for the major loss of this bakery.

As if that were not bad enough, in the same month Northern Dairies, which has a plant in Back lane, Wakefield, announced 58 job losses caused by a

"reduction in milk production"

at its Wakefield site. In his official announcement of this reduction, Mr. N. F. Benson, the area manager, stated:

"This decision, which has not been taken lightly, is as a result of the cost of updating the Wakefield operation, the difficulties of the site itself and the need to maximise the effectiveness of production capacity across the company."

To be fair to this company, I understand that it intends to upgrade the remaining operation to what it calls "modern standards" and to spend some £750,000 on the site in the next 12 months. Nevertheless, this changeover has resulted in the loss of 58 jobs in an area where we can do without such a loss. It is likely that there will be other redundancies as a knock-on effect of the Northern Dairies announcement, presumably in the supply of milk to that dairy.

In addition to these two announcements of major job losses, two others were also made in February. An organisation called CAIB UK Ltd., previously based in the Horbury area and owned by an Australian conglomerate, Brambles Europe Ltd., has moved the operation of its railway wagon hire business from the Wakefield constituency to London; seven of its employees

have been offered work in London but the remaining 18 have been made redundant. So here are more job losses directly affecting my constituents.

The fourth major announcement last month was the fact that the Britvic Corona soft drinks depot in Flanshaw lane, Wakefield, is to be closed in the not too distant future. On that site at present there are 35 jobs altogether. I spoke to a Mr. Michael Salter, who is the new company secretary of Britvic Corona, based in Chelmsford. He told me that this was

"part of a rationalisation programme."

He added that there was hope for relocation of some of the jobs in Leeds. But for me, attempting to keep work in my constituency, it is a net loss of 35 jobs for the people of Wakefield.

In a matter of four weeks, therefore, over 400 jobs have been lost to Wakefield people. So I am here to tell the Government that we need some assistance and some response about the situation in Wakefield.

What do Wakefield people want from the Government? We need a recognition that unemployment is a human issue, not an abstract concept. It worries me sometimes, listening to debates in the House, that people forget that it is human beings we are talking about. It certainly hit me when I met the people at Hagenbach's, who told me that when the announcement was made people there who were not prone to show emotion wept openly, because it was the end of the world for them: their future was a complete blank, a mystery, to them from that day.

We require recognition, particularly when it comes to closures in the coal industry, that redundancy payments, however generous, are no substitute for real jobs which are needed by school leavers, by young people and by unemployed people in my area.

We need a recognition of the problems facing the local economy in Wakefield. It concerns me that much of the Government policy at present directed towards local economies is based on figures in the 1984 census of employment. As regards Wakefield, those figures pre-date the huge decline in mining jobs, in particular, which have taken place in the past two or three years. At that stage, of course, there was what I would call a stockpile of miners, awaiting the development of the new Selby coalfield. Things have changed significantly since 1984, and the Minister should be clear about that.

It is important to stress the concern that the Government's industrial policy is aimed largely at inner areas of large cities. Wakefield has small towns and communities, which are not suited to the type of redevelopments undertaken by the Government in certain of the large inner-city areas.

Further, the Wakefield people want recognition that Wakefield's problems are in many ways a consequence of the operation of market forces. We do not believe that free market operations will resolve the serious problems that we are facing. Wakefield people want their area to be granted appropriate economic development status, so that public funds are made available to invest in the infrastructure needed for job creation — roads and factory premises — and to attract direct investment in jobs.

Other Yorkshire Members and I received a letter from the Yorkshire and Humberside Development Association about the urgent need for advance factory units, especially in non-assisted areas such as mine. The letter refers to the reply from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), when he said that in his opinion the issue will be dealt with by market mechanisms. The YHDA said:

"The trouble is, if you compare the 1982 to 1987 figures quoted above with the 1977 to 1982, and with the 1972 to 1977 figures, the general picture remains the same. Taking the entire 1972 to 1987 period, industrial property values rose by 12·5 per cent. in the South . . . If you take inflation into account, at 11 per cent., you will see that there is a positive growth rate in the South and a negative one in the North. We have been waiting 15 years for market mechanisms to sort out the problems we presently face. It is our belief here at the YHDA that those market mechanisms need a gentle nudge."

I am sure that the Minister will take the points I have made seriously.

I am not here with a begging bowl; I am here with pride in my local community, in which I have lived all my life, and a strong conviction that, with the restoration of the minimal assistance from Government that was taken away, Wakefield can begin to tackle successfully the problems I have outlined and start to rebuild its economy.

12.43 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. John Lee): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on having secured this Adjournment debate. I fully understand his concern for the needs of his constituents and his commitment to them.

I accept that job losses have occurred in Wakefield and that the unemployment rate is higher than any of us would wish it to be. I recognise that we are talking about human beings. Like many areas throughout the United Kingdom, Wakefield has suffered from a decline in traditional industries, particularly coal mining. I shall be spending much of this speech talking about matters of particular relevance to Wakefield, but I should first like to put Wakefield's situation in a broader context.

Unemployment is not just a matter for local or even national concern. It is an international problem: over 16 million people are currently unemployed in the 12 countries of the European Community. We are constantly searching for ways to help industry and commerce create new jobs, and to help the unemployed help themselves, and we are having some success.

Unemployment in the United Kingdom has now fallen for 18 months in succession: by almost 647,000 since July 1986. This is the largest sustained fall on record. Over the last six months, unemployment has fallen by a record average of 52,000 per month. Over the past year, United Kingdom unemployment has fallen faster than in all other major industrial countries, and our rate is now lower than in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and Ireland. Of particular note is the fact that unemployment has fallen significantly among under 18-year-olds and among those who have been unemployed for more than 12 months.

Unemployment has been falling for the last 18 months, but employment has been rising for the last 18 quarters. In that time, the civilian labour force in the United Kingdom has grown by over 1·5 million. This is the longest period of continuous employment growth for nearly 30 years. I am particularly pleased about that, although much of this growth has been in the service industries and in the ranks of the self-employed. Manufacturing employment has also been rising over the last three months.

Wakefield and the whole Yorkshire and Humberside region are sharing in these favourable trends.

[Mr. John Lee]

Unemployment in the region fell by 46,600 in the 12 months to January 1988. In the same period, unemployment in the Wakefield and Dewsbury travel-to-work area fell by over 2,600, and in the hon. Gentleman's constituency by 828, which represents over 15 per cent. of the total unemployed in the constituency at January 1987. Unfilled vacancies at jobcentres at January 1988 totalled 878, up 20 per cent. on 1987.

In this same period, in the 12 months to January 1988, youth unemployment in the Yorkshire and Humberside region fell by over 25 per cent. and the number of those unemployed for more than 12 months fell by over 16 per cent. In the period from June 1983 to June 1987, the civilian labour force in the region grew by 97,000. This represents a 5 per cent. increase, which exceeds the growth in the north as a whole.

The specific job losses in Wakefield to which the hon. Gentleman referred are primarily job losses due to colliery closures and cuts, the closure of a bakery and staffing reductions in a local dairy. I am sure that, as in almost all situations where workers stand to lose their jobs, there are arguments, some more valid than others, that can be mounted against these particular cuts. But ultimately they are clearly all decisions for the commercial judgment of the companies concerned. I have to say bluntly that none of them is a matter in which it would be correct for the Government to intervene, and it would be unfair to the employees concerned to pretend otherwise.

It is a fact of commercial and industrial life that companies both large and small sometimes find themselves in a position where closure or a reduction in the workforce is unavoidable. Legislation exists, subject to certain conditions and thresholds, for the notification of redundancies, for consultation with recognised trade unions and for redundancy payments. In many cases employers—the National Coal Board is one—go beyond the strict legal requirements in terms of consultation and redundancy pay, and of course all the facilities of the Department of Employment and of the Manpower Services Commission, to which I shall refer extensively, are available to those who lose their jobs, and that is all to the good.

But it is futile to think that the Government or anyone else can wave some magic wand, halt the process of change or turn the clock back to the employment pattern of some past time so as to prevent these closures and job losses from occurring. Change is inevitable. What matters is how we respond to change.

There is evidence that not all the change in Wakefield is in the direction perceived by the hon. Gentleman. I have referred to the favourable trends in unemployment and employment which can be seen in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Jobs are being created to replace in part those being lost. We had the recent planning decision, taken against a background of some local opposition, to allow a major soft drinks warehouse on the outskirts of Wakefield which it is hoped will create several hundred jobs. I also note that Wakefield district council is encouraging job creation by giving financial assistance provided by the European social fund to local firms taking on young people.

I have taken an interest in the problems of Wakefield, and went there last April. One of my engagements was to visit a job club, of which there are three in Wakefield. They have an excellent record and two thirds of the unemployed who have passed through these job clubs have found employment. I also visited M. P. Stonehouse Ltd. at Albion Mills, Wakefield, a textile company which, certainly at that stage, was trading well.

I also understand that the Wakefield enterprise zone, which exists on three sites in the locality, has shown an excellent record of attracting employment. In December 1986, the latest date for which I have seen figures, there were 65 firms located in the zone, compared with 18 on the dates of designation in 1981 and 1983, and that there were 2,700 jobs compared with 1,200 on designation and 1,700 in December 1985.

Mr. Hinchliffe: While the Minister says that the enterprise zone has attracted jobs, my impression is that the zone, which is not in my constituency, has attracted those jobs from elsewhere rather than having created new jobs.

Mr. Lee: My experience of enterprise zones—I have the experience, I am glad to say, of having two in my constituency — is that, while some jobs move from outside into an enterprise zone, normally some new jobs are created. Also, an enterprise zone creates new factories, which obviously help modern manufacturing processes.

The Government believe that they are creating an economic climate in which industry is becoming more competitive in world markets, and which allows enterprise and job creation to flourish. But it should not for one moment be thought that we are leaving it at that. We are also helping firms, especially small firms, to equip themselves for growth, and helping the unemployed to equip themselves for a return to work. My Department and others have a wide and costly range of measures to help industry and the unemployed.

The Department of Trade and Industry recently launched its enterprise initiative, which will provide assistance mainly to small and medium-sized firms. My Department, through its small firms centres, supports the budding entrepreneur as well as established small firms with low-cost information and advice, offered through more than 300 counsellors in 170 locations, including Leeds. In 1987, the small firms service dealt with 282,000 inquiries nationwide and provided more than 38,000 counselling sessions.

The local enterprise agency movement is also proving to be a potent force for encouraging enterprise and employment at a local level. Nationally, more than 3,000 private sector companies now support local enterprise agencies. Although the Government believe that this movement must be led by the private sector, we have introduced a grant scheme to strengthen agencies and make them better able to attract further private sector funds. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be familiar with the Kirklees and Wakefield venture trust, which was launched in 1981 and which has received assistance under the grant scheme.

My Department is particularly concerned about unemployed people who possess initiative, ideas and some capital, but who hesitate to take the risk of losing unemployment benefit. To help them we have introduced the enterprise allowance scheme, which encourages enterprise among the unemployed by paying them £40 a week for the first year of self-employment. About 274,000

people nationally have so far started a business using this scheme, and more than 1,600 individuals are currently benefiting from the scheme in the Wakefield area.

I have tried to demonstrate that, despite certain job losses, there are encouraging signs in Wakefield's employment position. Unemployment is falling; and employment in the region as a whole is rising.

Assisted area status is a matter for my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, not for me and my Department. However, I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to an article in the *Yorkshire Post* on 26 February, headed

"City on the verge of a job bonanza".

It refers to the comments of Councillor John Pearman, who

"hinted at exciting developments on the jobs front in the immediate future",

and later to the comments of Councillor Peter Box, chairman of Wakefield's employment and economic development committee. He said:

"There's a certain buoyancy at the moment as far as interest from private sector companies is concerned. We are dealing with a substantial number of inquiries from firms large and small."

He went on to say that

"it seemed that Wakefield's geographical advantage being close to the M1 and M62, was central to the attraction, coupled to a reputation of having a good workforce and excellent industrial estates."

One hopes that some of those general optimistic comments will, in the fulness of time, come through in the form of specific jobs.

I have tried to show that the Government are helping Wakefield and areas like it to overcome their economic problems. We are putting in place measures, such as YTS and our new adult training strategy, which are not merely short-term expedients, but are long-term programmes designed to meet the nation's long-term future needs.

Above all, we see our role as establishing economic conditions conducive to enterprise and job creation. We are succeeding in that. We are now well into our seventh successive year of steady growth, and the fifth year in which growth has been combined with low inflation——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at seven minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 2 March 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Somalia

1. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, in the light of recent events, he will make a statement on the relationship between the United Kingdom and Somalia, with particular reference to those parts of that country having historic links with Britain.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): The relations between the United Kingdom and Somalia are very friendly. When I visited Mogadishu last April, I met President Barre, the former Foreign Minister and other senior Ministers and discussed British aid in Somalia, including northern Somalia, and other matters of interest to both our countries. I hope that a senior Somali Minister will be able to visit the United Kingdom later this year.

Mr. Michael: The Minister may be aware that there is a significant Somali community in my constituency — and in others — and that the Somali community has made a significant contribution, particularly to our maritime tradition, to our economy and to the community in general. Is the Minister aware that there is a great deal of concern among members of the Somali community in this country about several aspects of the position in Somalia at the moment? Will she accept that there is also a feeling in the Somali community in this country that Britain should continue to bear some responsibility and take an interest especially in those parts of Somalia that were previously Britain's responsibility? Will she assure us that that interest will continue and tell us how it will be pursued?

Mrs. Chalker: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we continue to take an interest. For example, we brought pressure to bear with regard to the trials of certain prisoners, including prisoners from the north, who had been held for several years without trial. The hon. Gentleman may be aware that our ambassador was instructed to protest when the death sentences were passed. I am pleased to say that on 11 February those death sentences were commuted to terms of imprisonment or house arrest.

This year we gave about £5·1 million of aid to Somalia. That aid is directed to a number of projects in the north, including projects for overhauling power stations.

Mr. Wilkinson: It is good news that the already excellent relationships with Somalia have improved yet further following my right hon. Friend's visit to that country. Is Somalia still having to feed, clothe and house refugees entering the country from Ethiopia, or has the problem eased?

Mrs. Chalker: I am glad to say that the refugee problem in Somalia has eased. Some refugees still cross the border from the Ogaden region. Where possible we help with that. We have helped children from the Ogaden region who have been orphaned. I thank my hon. Friend for the kind remarks that he made at the beginning of his comments.

Television News Service

3. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received seeking the funding by his Department of a television news service, to be operated by the BBC external services.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Eggar): We have very carefully considered a request from the BBC for public funds to start up a world television news service. We note that a British commercial world television news service has been started without public funds, and have concluded that the provision of public funds to the BBC for this purpose would not be justified.

Mr. Yeo: Bearing in mind the role and unique international reputation of the BBC external service radio broadcasts and the fact that it constitutes an important national asset, is my hon. Friend aware that his refusal to back a three-year experiment for a world television news programme at a cost to the taxpayer of £1 million a year will be greeted with great disappointment?

Mr. Eggar: I want to make it clear to my hon. Friend that we are not stopping the BBC from taking an initiative in this area. However, we do not believe that the provision of public funds for start-up or production is justified.

Mr. Dalyell: Did Foreign Office Ministers see the Granada "World in Action" programme entitled "The Taming of the Beeb", and especially did they hear Alan Protheroe's comments on the threat to the historical traditions of the BBC? Can we be sure that Foreign Office Ministers will do everything to protect those historical traditions and ensure that Mr. Protheroe's gloomy predictions are not fulfilled?

Mr. Eggar: I did not see the programme to which the hon. Gentleman referred. This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Mr. Temple-Morris: Does my hon. Friend recollect the considerable support from both sides of the House for additional Government funding of the BBC external services for satellite television news? That was exemplified by an early-day motion before the election which attracted nearly 250 signatures, many from Conservative Members, and by the debate in July. Is my hon. Friend aware that many people will see his announcement as a shortsighted and somewhat doctrinaire decision and, above all, a waste of an outstanding international asset that we are privileged to have?

Mr. Eggar: I recognise the strong feelings that my hon. Friend has on the matter. I agree that the BBC external services and its radio section have a fine record, which we applaud, and which we have recognised by increasing the funding available for the external radio service by a considerable amount over the past seven years. However, that is not justification in itself for making additional public funds available for a world television service.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Minister aware that much of the intransigence among the people of the Falkland Islands stems from the fact that the media of the Falkland Islands is, in effect, in the hands of one person, and there is no television? Do the Government not realise that if they want some flexibility from Falkland Islanders they could do no better than ensure that a full television service is provided for them so that they can see what is going on in the outer world? I put that proposition to the Minister in all seriousness. By that experience they might learn to trust some of their neighbours in a way that, hitherto, they have found impossible.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman has raised that point before. The BBC external service "Calling the Falklands" and the world service are available in the Falkland Islands and are listened to widely.

Middle East

4. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards a middle east peace settlement.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Mellor): We welcome recent efforts to give new impetus to the search for a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israel conflict. We and our European partners support strongly an international conference as the suitable framework for negotiations between the parties directly concerned.

Mr. Adley: I thank my hon. and learned Friend and congratulate him on his active participation in the process during the past few weeks. Has he had a chance to look at the *Hansard* extract that I sent to him dated 23 July 1946 entitled "Terrorist Outrage, Jerusalem" and the statement made by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee? Does he agree that as Messrs. Shamir and Sharon were involved in those terrorist activities it is utter hypocrisy for them to condemn the PLO as a terrorist organisation? On that basis, does he agree that if Mr. Shultz is to play any useful role it is essential that the United States and our Government include the PLO in any discussions if they are to be meaningful?

Mr. Mellor: I appreciate my hon. Friend's sincere interest in this matter. The tragic events of the King David hotel are matters for historians, and our concern has to be with the present. Plainly, the PLO is accepted widely within the occupied territories as the representative of the Palestinian people. We have never accepted it as the sole representative of those people, and there has been an inhibition on the part of the Americans and the British Government at Cabinet level to receive the PLO because of the need for it to make a clean break with terrorist activities of the past. I hope that the PLO will do that, so that it can play a proper role in the unfolding peace process, which, as I said earlier, we very much welcome.

Sir Russell Johnston: Does the Minister accept that the unfolding peace process, as he put it, has been unfolding for a terribly long time without any real progress? We warmly welcome his support for an international conference, but would he go as far as to say that there will be no progress until Mr. Shultz makes proposals which go considerably beyond those that he has made so far?

Mr. Mellor: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his consistent support for a bipartisan approach to the matter. I welcome that. Mr. Shultz is properly taking all possible pains to consult as widely as he can among the Governments in the region. He is trying to break down the old objections to peace, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, in order to see whether some new development is possible. Our role is to assist him in that. Of course, we assist him by talking frankly to him about difficulties and the need for the United States to tackle some of those difficulties. I think the hon. Gentleman will find that that is exactly what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did in her talks with Mr. Shultz yesterday.

Mr. Walters: Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that in 1973 the United Nations Commission on Human Rights described Israeli conduct on the West Bank as "an affront to humanity and tantamount to war crimes"? The only thing that has changed there is the presence of the television cameras. In the circumstances, should not the Palestinians, after all these years of injustice, at least have the right to choose their own representatives?

Mr. Mellor: Our condemnation of many of the practices in the occupied territories by the Israeli defence force is well known. Sadly, those problems appear to be growing rather than diminishing. I believe that they will fundamentally undermine the reputation of the Government of Israel unless something is done about them. I hope very much that out of this will come the progress that my hon. Friend seeks.

We wish to see the Palestinians properly represented at any conference. Of course that is primarily a matter for the Arab side. The idea that has been floated—that there should be an international conference — of a joint Palestinian and Jordanian delegation would appear to be the right way forward.

Mr. Ernie Ross: The Minister must know that the Shultz mission will fail because Shultz is unable to talk to the Palestine Liberation Organisation. If there is to be a peace settlement in the middle east, the Minister, Shultz and the Americans must drop this reluctance to talk to a main player. Shultz can talk to the Israelis, but he must talk to the other side, the PLO. The best thing that the Minister and the British Government can do is to urge the Americans to drop their refusal to accept that the Palestine Liberation Organisation is the representative of the Palestinians.

Mr. Mellor: I know the hon. Gentleman's serious concern for this issue. I urge him, as I have done in the past, to make the PLO aware of the central inhibition of the Americans in talking to the PLO and of the British Government at Cabinet level in receiving the PLO because of the need for it to make a break with the past.

Mr. Skinner: The Minister is not on television now—he has had his knuckles rapped by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Mellor: Of course the Americans would like to talk to the Palestinians, just as a number of us have been able

to do and just as I was able to do when I visited the occupied territories during a visit from which the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) says I am retreating. There is no question of retreating from that or anything else.

It is important that the Palestinians should be able to put their case direct. That will best come about when the PLO has legitimised itself in a form that enables it to repudiate the past, which, as the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) knows, was disfigured by terrorist actions that caused grave difficulty and resentment in Europe. That is the way forward that we all want to see.

Mr John Marshall: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that a necessary condition of peace in the middle east is that Israel's Arab neighbours must accept Israel's right to exist and its right to secure borders? Does he agree that it is an international scandal that, 40 years after the foundation of the state of Israel, only one Arab country has done that? Does he regard it as significant that those Arabs who are willing to bankroll the PLO have also been seen to be supporters of the IRA?

Mr. Mellor: That last observation is a bit strong and I do not think it is in accordance with the facts. Nor do I think that the football supporter approach to this problem —taking a position on one side rather than striking a balance — is at all helpful in resolving this difficult matter. A sensible policy for the peace process, which I believe we have, is based, first, on the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and, secondly, and every bit as important, on the right of all states in the region —including, of course, Israel — to exist behind secure boundaries. I am sure that no progress is possible until all states in the region appreciate that.

Mr. Kaufman: Is the Minister aware that, from my own talks with the PLO and the Governments of Iraq, Egypt and Jordan, it is perfectly clear to me that there is no problem about their taking part in an international conference under the auspices of the five permanent members of the United Nations, which could lead to a settlement that would provide security for Israel as well as self-determination for the Palestinians? Is he also aware that the principal, and so far immovable, obstacle to the holding of such a conference is Mr. Shamir, the Prime Minister of Israel? Is he further aware that, instead of trailing new and circuitous solutions to the problem, Mr. Shultz and the United States Administration should tell Mr. Shamir, in no uncertain terms, to sit down at a conference and negotiate with the Arab countries?

Mr. Mellor: The right hon. Gentleman's progress around the middle east has been most welcome to me, as it has allowed a great deal of bipartisan agreement between the two Front Benches. I certainly agree with him about the attitude of the Arab world towards an international conference. It is our view just as much as his — and I believe that it has all the more authority because it appears to be a view that commands majority support in Parliament—that an international conference is the best way forward. There is no doubt that one section of the Israeli Government has consistently rejected that, and I hope very much that, as part of the tireless work that Mr. Shultz is doing, he will be able to tackle that issue.

UNCHR (Special Rapporteurs)

5. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the question of the reappointment of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights' special rapporteur on El Salvador; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: We have received a number of representations. We find the special representative's repots balanced and objective. He states that the situation in El Salvador has improved, although there is still room for further progress. We will take his view into account when deciding how to vote. We shall also discuss the draft resolution with our European Community partners.

Mr. Turner: I thank the Minister for his reply, although it is somewhat depressing, as there is sufficient evidence of a deterioriating human rights situation in El Salvador. The death squad is on the march, and killing and torturing are taking place at this moment. What do the Government need to be able to commit themselves to supporting the relacement of the special rapporteur to El Salvador? Will the Minister tell the House why the Government are holding back on this important issue?

Mr. Eggar: When the Human Rights Commission appoints a special representative, it is only right that all members of the Commission should take his report into account because it is the most objective report available on human rights in that particular country. If the hon. Gentleman is asking us to vote for the special representative's reappointment, surely he will agree that, in making our decision, we should take account of that special representative's report. That is what we shall do.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Has my hon. Friend noted, from the report of the special rapporteur, Senor Ridruejo, that considerable progress has been made on the civil rights records of the armed forces and the police of El Salvador? Does he not think that we should now see an improvement from the guerrillas, who continue to sow mines causing innocent deaths among the civil population?

Mr. Eggar: The special representative's last report shows that the earlier improvements in the situation have continued and that President Duarte has made efforts to curb death squads. In addition, the special representative found no evidence to prove that the Government connived at human rights abuses. It is right that we should take that into account when deciding how we shall vote. We have not yet made up our mind.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Minister confirm that the Government are as much against repression in El Salvador as they are against it in the occupied territories? Does he agree that, since the special rapporteur produced his report, the situation in El Salvador has worsened? The human rights activist Herbert Anaya has been murdered and there have been attacks on the camp at Calle Real. Does he agree, therefore, that it would be quite intolerable and would be a green light to the death squads and a kick in the teeth for all human rights workers if the British Government did not vote in favour of the reappointment of that special rapporteur?

Mr. Eggar: Naturally, we are concerned about human rights violations wherever they occur. It is also right that where there are improvemens we should recognise them.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the attack on the Calle Real refugee camp. We are aware of it and our chargé d'affaires visited the camp soon afterwards to ensure that the British volunteers were well. We shall take into account the hon. Gentleman's views and those of others concerned about human rights in El Salvador. Equally, we have a duty as a member of the Human Rights Commission to make an objective judgment on the wording of the motion, which has only just been put before us, in discussions with other members of the commission.

Afghanistan

6. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he made to the Soviet Government in the course of his recent visit on their policy towards Afghanistan.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend recalled our long-held objective of a neutral, non-aligned and independent Afghanistan and welcomed the announcement by Mr. Gorbachev of a date for a withdrawal of Soviet troops.

Mr. Stewart: Will my hon. Friend please take note of overwhelming world opinion, which is that the Soviet Union should withdraw its army of occupation immediately and that it would be in its best interests to do so? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Eggar: I agree with my hon. Friend. I find the reaction of Opposition Members extraordinary. They seem to be so pleased with the Russian withdrawal that they forget that the Russians marched in in the first place.

Mr. Ron Brown: Is it not the case that the Afghan Government have done everything possible to secure peace and reconciliation within the country? Indeed, is it not important that the Government understand that to install a bunch of ayatollahs in Kabul will do nothing for the West and will create further disaster, as we have seen in Iran?

Mr. Eggar: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about recent developments in Afghanistan. It may be that a future regime will not be as free with its hospitality to him as the last regime was. I suggest to him that he is as quick to be photographed on Russian tanks leaving Afghanistan as he was when they were in Kabul.

Sir. Jim Spicer: Will my hon. Friend ensure that Her Majesty's Government lose no opportunity to remind the Russians that when they leave Afghanistan they do so with bloody hands, having slaughtered and maimed hundreds of thousands of people, and left 5 million refugees in Pakistan? Should they not leave with shame rather than with their heads held high?

Mr. Eggar: I fully understand the thoughts behind what my hon. Friend says, and naturally it is important that the Russians stick to their commitment to withdraw.

Mr. Anderson: Does the Minister agree that although Pakistan has justified anxieties, there would be a heavy responsibility on Pakistan if the talks beginning today were to fail? Does he agree that both the Soviet Union, to a much greater extent, and the Americans, to a lesser extent, have poured vast sums into the armouries of both sides of the conflict? Will he now use his good offices to ensure that a similar amount of money is used by the super powers for the immense task of the reconstruction of the shattered infrastructure of Afghanistan?

Mr. Eggar: Obviously, we hope that the talks which started today in Geneva will reach a suitable conclusion, and I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about Pakistan. I agree with him about aid within Afghanistan in the light of a settlement. Recently, I returned from a visit to the Afghan border. There is a major problem ahead of the world international community, and it is important that the reaction today, assuming there is a settlement, is a co-ordinated one involving all the major countries.

USSR (Ministerial Visit)

7. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent discussions with the Soviet authorities during his visit to Moscow.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend had full and wide-ranging talks with Mr. Gorbachev, Mr. Shevardnadze and others covering bilateral matters including trade, arms control, human rights and regional issues. He also met human rights activists and was able to put our views direct to the Soviet public in their press and on television. The visit was a further contribution to our active dialogue with the Soviet leadership and to the improving atmosphere of East-West relations.

Mr. Dykes: On the assumption that my right hon. and learned Friend's successful visit also included talks on middle east peace prospects, does my hon. and learned Friend agree that it is no good the United States objecting to the Soviet and Syrian presence in a possible future international peace conference, and it is no good us repeating that we think that the Jordanian cum Palestinian option is the best way forward, if, quite manifestly and clearly, the Jordanians object to the Palestinians being included with them rather than having their own independent and legitimate position in the negotiations?

Mr. Mellor: Perhaps I should explain to my hon. Friend the inhibiting factor in some of the earlier answers. While Mr. Shultz is still active — as he is and there is no question of his mission having come to an end — it is difficult for us to comment on the substance of it when it is at the heart of Mr. Shultz's efforts that the substance should emerge as a result of his careful negotiations. However, in private we advise Mr. Shultz with all candour about the ways we think things should move forward. Let me correct my hon. Friend on one point. I was in Jordan yesterday, and I can assure him there is no question of the Jordanians objecting to a mixed delegation. It is their policy to press for one.

Mr. Mullin: When the Foreign Secretary was in Moscow, did the Russians raise with him the question of human rights in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Mellor: There was a full discussion on human rights and I am delighted that one of the consequences of my right hon. and learned Friend's visit was that Mrs. Sosna has been permitted to leave the Soviet Union. It was also true that, largely as a diversionary tactic, questions of human rights in the United Kingdom were raised by the Soviet side. From the smile on the hon. Gentleman's face,

it appears that he associates himself with those observations, and I think that it is a jolly bad thing that he does.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Did my hon. and learned Friend, in the course of his discussions, give as part of his appreciation of the middle east situation the view that Israel is entitled to secure frontiers, but not to occupy all the territory up to those frontiers?

Mr. Mellor: I think I understand the point that my hon. Friend is making. Israel is entitled to have internationally recognised borders, but those are not the borders that are taken as a result of war, and the occupied territories are not part of Israel. It is the view of the British Government and, I believe, of the world community as a whole, that they should not remain so. Nor will that secure peace, so long as the Israeli Government fail to recognise that the principles of territories at peace will be the crucial element in any future discussions.

8. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had in Moscow on arms control during the recent visit.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend had extensive discussions with the Soviet leadership on issues covering nuclear, conventional and chemical arms control.

Mr. Cohen: Did Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Shevardnadze express their concern about Britain's role in the foot-dragging on conventional and chemical arms talks and on the compensatory build-up of arms in the wake of the intermediate nucler forces agreement? Did they urge the Foreign Secretary to show common sense and abandon dangerous dogmas? Will not the proclaimed friendship be superficial unless the Government show the political will for arms reductions instead of arms expansion, which is what the Prime Minister is arguing for at NATO today?

Mr. Mellor: I am glad to welcome the hon. Gentleman's return, but he might have marked it more appropriately than by acting as a voice and echo of what the Soviet Government officials said to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State while he was in Moscow. The hon. Gentleman should appreciate that the Soviets have their position on these matters. They would like to see a denuclearised Europe, which would further entrench the massive and overwhelming power of their conventional weapons. It should not be the business of any British parliamentarian, from whatever side of the House he comes, to associate himself with those ideas.

The other thing that Opposition Members should recognise is that the Soviet Union respects strength. It was the strength of purpose of the NATO Alliance that led to the INF deal and that will lead to further deals, whereas the weakness of Opposition Members would simply allow the Soviets to roll over by default.

Mr. Madel: Was there any recognition in Moscow that tension can be reduced in Europe only if there is a substantial and permanent reduction of Soviet conventional forces in Eastern Europe?

Mr. Mellor: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Why have the Soviets spent 15 years at the mutual and balanced force reductions talks and failed to agree a mandate on these issues? They do not even tell us exactly what their conventional strength is, but it is clear that they have 51,000 tanks pushed forward, many of them 600 miles from the border of the Soviet Union, and last year they produced some 3,400 tanks, 30 per cent. more than in 1983. That is the reality of the build-up of Soviet conventional forces. Until they are prepared to tackle that seriously and to bring about a reduction there can be no security and no reduction of tension in Europe.

Mr. Kaufman: Is the Minister not aware, when he tells my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) that the NATO Alliance must demonstrate strength of purpose, as is being shown in the NATO summit, that there are different views among the NATO Alliance, that the Prime Minister, to her great discredit, wants to step up the nuclear threshold, whereas Chancellor Kohl of West Germany seeks to negotiate away the battlefield nuclear weapons which would turn Germany into a radioactive desert? Will he, therefore, tell the Foreign Secretary that it would be much better for this country to support the Germans in wishing to bring about a nuclear-free Europe than to go with the Prime Minister, the last nuclear dinosaur?

Mr. Mellor: The right hon. Gentleman, I am sorry to say, is wrong. Perhaps on his next journey overseas he should go and see Chancellor Kohl. He has distorted Chancellor Kohl's position. The Chancellor is not in favour of the third zero. It is true that some elements, representing quite a lot of people, in German politics are in favour, but Chancellor Kohl is not, because he realises as much as the rest of us that if there were to be a denuclearised Europe, what the Soviets mean is a denuclearised Western Europe, which simply builds in the superiority that they possess.

Mr. Kaufman: No, no.

Mr. Mellor: Before the right hon. Gentleman says "No, no", as if he were at the latest Manchester pantomime, coming in, as he does, with a fresh mind to the Labour party's conduct of foreign affairs, surely he should realise that if we had followed the principles that the previous Labour spokesmen laid down with equal dogmatism and certainty that they were right over INF, and failed to deploy Pershing 2 and cruise, we would not have these agreements at all. The right hon. Gentleman would do well to realise that it was the firmness of purpose of the NATO Alliance, led by the Prime Minister, that got us into the good position that we are in today.

EC (Single Market)

9. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what part his Department is playing in furthering progress towards a single market in the European Community.

Mrs. Chalker: We shall continue to work for rapid progress in dismantling barriers to trade within Europe and for early adoption of the measures necessary to complete the single European market. The Government are mounting a programme to ensure that British business is fully aware of the opportunities and challenges involved.

Mr. Watts: While I welcome the constructive approach of Her Majesty's Government, as outlined by my right hon. Friend, does she agree that the ill-judged proposals from the Commission for the harmonisation of VAT, including the abolition of zero-rating, are in no way

essential to the completion of the internal market, and that the facts are rather the reverse and the proposals of Lord Cockfield are likely to be an obstacle rather than a help?

Mrs. Chalker: There are a lot of doubts, including those expressed in the recent study by the Institute of Fiscal Studies, about the need for a regimented approach of the kind that the Commission has proposed. It was only yesterday that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in the House:

"tax harmonisation in the European Economic Community is not necessary for the completion of the single market in 1992."—[*Official Report*, 1 March 1988; Vol. 128, c. 816.]

Nor are we the only member state that would have difficulties with Lord Cockfield's proposals. Each country would have its own particular difficulties. We shall study what is being put forward. There is absolutely no question but that any vote concerning taxation is by unanimity, just as the vote in 1977 was supported by the then Labour Government— a vote which led to the decision in the EC on spectacles just a week ago.

Mr. Cryer: Will not the development of the single internal market lead to a lack of control over drug traffickers, terrorists and the spread of rabies? As the Minister knows, Lord Cockfield is determined to harmonise VAT. As he is a Conservative appointee by the Prime Minister, will the Minister say, in order to make the Government's position clear, that they will not renew Lord Cockfield's appointment when it becomes due?

Mrs. Chalker: The last point of the hon. Gentleman's question is not for me to answer. As for drugs, terrorism and rabies, the general declaration, as the hon. Gentleman probably knows, as he is a Member of the European Parliament, in articles 13 to 19 of the Single European Act, makes it clear that member states such as Britain and others are not prevented from taking their own measures to combat drugs, terrorism and other problems. At the same time as moving towards a single market, controls at the Community's external frontiers are to be strengthened.

Mr. Gow: Will my right hon. Friend continue to bear in mind that there are large numbers of hon. Members on both sides of the House who believe that the scope and rates of value added tax in Britain should be settled by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and approved by the House?

Mrs. Chalker: Indeed, they will be settled by the Chancellor and will come before the House, but my hon. Friend should note that no such changes to our present system could be made without unanimity. Unanimity is required, and we have no intention of changing our position on zero rates.

Sir Russell Johnston: How did the Minister respond to the criticisms of the Government's proposals on the internal market by the director general of the CBI?

Mrs. Chalker: I believe that the job of the director general of the CBI is different from that of the Government and politicians in general. It is right that if the CBI has a view it should put it forward, but it is not necessarily one that is in the interests of the British people and the European Community.

Mr. Curry: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the debate on the internal market does not become sidetracked by repetitive remarks about VAT, terrorism and all the byways of Europe, but concentrates on the essential task of creating a single industrial market place, which would be overwhelmingly in the interests of Britain?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Certainly there is a danger that the behaviour of the press, Opposition Members and some others, will mean that the real issues of a single market, which would so benefit this country and the whole of Europe, will be bypassed. We are pressing for progress in key areas such as the liberalisation of capital movements, financial services including insurance, the opening up of public purchasing across the Community, and the improvement of standards. We hope for progress in all those areas in 1988. It is no mistake that in our six-month presidency 48 out of 100 measures taken on in the internal market were achieved.

Mr. Heffer: Is it not clear to the right hon. Lady that there is deep concern that in 1992 the sovereignty of the British people will take a further step backwards, that we shall increasingly come under the control of multinational companies and that Britain will suffer as a result? Is it not also clear that the time has come, despite what right hon. and hon. Members on my Front Bench might say, when we should say that the option is still there for the British people, if they so decide, to come out of the Common Market, if they consider that it is in our interests to do so?

Mrs. Chalker: I have often thought that the hon. Gentleman was living in the past. I am now sure. He cannot even keep up to date with his own Front Bench.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Whatever the rights and wrongs of tax harmonisation, does my right hon. Friend agree that if we are to get to 1992, which is in the clear British interest, there has to be a great deal more give and take than has been evident in the exchanges so far?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is right. I cannot understand why something that is in the interests of this country and, indeed, of the whole of Europe—the high priority which the British Government have given to completing the single market by the end of 1992—is not understood by Opposition Members. The recent speech by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) about the managed economy was protectionism by yet another name. It may have been published in Madison avenue, but its contents were firmly Bennite.

Mr. Robertson: As Lord Cockfield is so out of touch on VAT with the views of the Government who nominated him, how could he possibly be nominated by the Government for another period in Brussels? Will the right hon. Lady confirm to the House the rumours that she is brushing up her languages and that her flitting has been ordered from Wallasey to the Berlaymont?

Mrs. Chalker: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no truth in the rumours that he and others have been peddling in the press for some time. Whatever view any commissioner takes, it is his view and that of the Commission, and not that of the country from which he comes.

Drug Trafficking

10. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is satisfied with the action taken against drug trafficking in the British dependencies of the Caribbean; and what

action the Government are taking to facilitate international co-ordinated action against the drug trade in the Caribbean as a whole.

Mr. Eggar: We have taken the lead in promoting co-operation to combat drug trafficking and strengthen drug law enforcement both in our dependencies and in independent Caribbean states. Next week we will be jointly hosting a Caribbean regional drug law enforcement conference in Barbados to discuss ways of improving co-operation further.

Mr. Butler: My hon. Friend will be aware that the big money involved in drugs can easily corrupt small countries. Is this not an area where we should co-operate urgently with our American friends?

Mr. Eggar: Yes, indeed. One Caribbean Prime Minister has said to me that he regards drug traffickers as the biggest single threat to the long-term stability of his country. We are working very closely with the Americans; indeed, they are a co-host of the conference next week.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Minister tell the House whether there is any truth in the story in *The Times* of 27 February that Sir Lynden Pindling, the Prime Minister of the Bahamas, has been receiving millions of dollars from drug-smuggling cartels for laundering? Indeed, it is said that the British Turks and Caicos Islands are also being used as a major drug-trafficking area. Will he tell us whether these stories in *The Times* are true? Does he agree that if the United States Government did something to cut down on the market for drugs within their own country supplies would not come from the Caribbean or Latin America?

Mr. Eggar: Not for the first time, the hon. Gentleman is behind the game. The whole attitude that he is putting forward, of it being the fault of the consumer countries or of the producer countries, has long since passed. There was an important conference in Vienna as long ago as last June when all countries — producing countries, countries involved in trafficking and consuming countries—agreed to co-ordinate the fight against drugs. Because drugs are a common threat, we have to have a common action plan against them.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in the light of experience in the Turks and Caicos Islands, it is dangerous to give independence to small dependencies because they can easily come under the influence of the major drug barons without being able to protect themselves?

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend is right to point to the fact that the then Chief Minister of the Turks and Caicos was convicted of a drugs offence in the United States. We have since that time strengthened the resources available in that territory against the threat of drug traffickers. I know that my hon. Friend is aware of the announcement that I made just before Christmas about our policy on independence in the remaining dependent territories.

South Africa

11. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the South African ambassador to discuss human rights in South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: I last met him on 25 February. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and I have made plain to the South African Government on numerous occasions our concern at human rights abuses in South Africa.

Mr. Galbraith: Would the Minister care to reflect on the fact that if recent events in South Africa, such as the arrest of religious leaders, had been taking place in the Soviet Union, the Conservative Benches would have been filled with hon. Members jumping up in indignation and demanding action? Today we have heard nothing. Will the Minister tell the House whether recent events in South Africa have altered the Government's position in any way? Have the Government moved at all — even a "teeny weeny" bit or even a smidgeon? Is there any change at all?

Mrs. Chalker: Whatever the hon. Gentleman may think he sees, I can assure him that all my hon. Friends are at one in condemning the action in South Africa *[Interruption.]* There is no way that we should take hasty and ill-judged actions on the very serious move by the South African Government last week and their further failure at the weekend to intervene in a very nasty march towards the Parliament building. We are having discussions, and at that I shall leave it for today.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. John Carlisle.

Mr. John Carlisle *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Every hon. Member has equal rights in this Chamber.

Mr. Carlisle: Does my right hon. Friend accept that some of the organisations that had their activities controlled and curtailed—*[Interruption.]*—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Carlisle *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Flannery: Why is he always called?

Mr. Speaker: Order. It very frequently happens that we hear things in this Chamber with which we may not all agree.

Mr. Carlisle: Does my right hon. Friend accept that some of the organisations——

Mr. Winnick: He is paid by South Africa.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is disgraceful behaviour. Every hon. Member has a right to speak.

Mr. Flannery: He is always called and he is nobody.

Mr. Speaker: To those who say that the hon. Gentleman is always called, I must reply that I seek to balance opinion in the Chamber. Mr. Carlisle.

Mr. Carlisle: At the fifth attempt, may I remind my right hon. Friend that some of the organisations that have had their activities curtailed by the South African Government were nothing more than respectable fronts for those perpetrating violence? Does she agree that Archibishop Tutu, having deliberately got himself arrested, is now advocating illegitimate acts as a form of protest?

Mrs. Chalker: All Governments are entitled to protect law and order, but in the Government's view the recent suppression of peaceful political activity is totally wrong.

My hon. Friend tried to say that some of the organisations affected by last week's ban advocated violence. I have no proof that any of them adopt violent means. I believe that they have sought to follow the legitimate path of civil protest and peaceful political activity, and that some of those organisations are primarily humanitarian. Furthermore, we are completely opposed to the suppression of protest by Church leaders. I do not believe that Archbishop Tutu was going along to create trouble as my hon. Friend sought to suggest. I have to say to my hon. Friend that, knowing people who were at that church service, I think that the story is very much more serious than he perhaps appreciates.

Mr. Winnick: Leaving aside the contemptible remarks of the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle)—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Again, it is a question of balancing the argument.

Mr. Winnick: Leaving aside the contemptible remarks of the hon. Member for Luton, North, who prostitutes the House of Commons by his remarks, is the Minister aware that the Opposition accept her sincere intentions regarding South Africa? They are in no doubt whatever, but is she aware that, unhappily, there is a feeling that although the British Government, the Foreign Secretary and herself, condemn the actions of the South African authorities, they are not willing to take any effective measures? Is it not time that the British Government realised that the only way to make the South African Government recognise the strength of feeling in this country is by the use of sanctions? Will the Government therefore recognise that sanctions are essential if we are not to condemn South Africa by words alone?

Mrs. Chalker: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the spending of £45 million for projects through the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference, the pledge to provide 30 per cent. to the new Commonwealth special fund for Mozambique, the continuing scholarship programme for black South Africans, and other help, are not positive measures to help Southern Africa, he is living in a very peculiar world.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Is my right hon. Friend aware that if she continues to speak out firmly against the abuses of human rights, be the victims unknown blacks in Soweto or leading clerics in Cape Town, she will have the support of the vast majority of the people of this country? Secondly, does she agree that the best way of communicating with the South African Government is through diplomatic channels, which should remain open, and by using every other form of contact, including commercial contact, available to us?

Mrs. Chalker: I thank my hon. Friend for what he has said. I made it quite clear in the debate on Monday, if anyone could hear what I was saying in the end, that we shall not close the diplomatic channels, which provide us with the most important information from all sectors of the South African people. We shall certainly continue those contacts far and wide.

Mr. Cohen: In view of the deteriorating situation in South Africa, the gravity of which the Minister appreciates, will the Government consider making mandatory the sanctions to which we have agreed in the United Nations, the Commonwealth and the EEC, and if not, why not?

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that if the measures already taken were made mandatory the front-line states would suffer in a way that they themselves consider they could not bear. Otherwise, why have some of them not taken the sanctions to which they committed themselves in name? They believe that for the economic future of their own people they should not take that action, and I believe that they know more about the situation than does the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Forman: In the frequent representations that the Government have so rightly made on this matter, has my right hon. Friend made it clear to the South African Government that if they persist in their lamentable record on human rights they will increase the rate at which private companies disinvest, which cannot be in the interests of the black community?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The effect of disinvestment by foreign companies has meant that many shares were picked up cheaply by Afrikaners, who will not continue the social programmes and the education and health programmes which have been helping the black community to advance. We want to see more ways in which the black community is helped by business to advance. I believe that companies with interests in South Africa can help the black community to further not only their experience but their opportunities.

Chile

12. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom votes at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights with respect to Chile.

Mr. Eggar: Human rights in Chile were first considered by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 1975. We have consistently spoken out about human rights abuses. This has been reflected fully in our votes on resolutions or in our explanations of vote.

Mr. Flynn: I thank the Minister for that answer. He will be aware that last year the United States attempted to withdraw the mandate of the special rapporteur of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Given that such a withdrawal would almost certainly lead to an intensification of the breaches of human rights, detentions and tortures by the army in Chile, will he give an assurance that the Government's policy will continue and that any future attempt to end the mandate of the special rapporteur will be opposed? Will he say what the result of the withdrawal of the special rapporteur would be on exiles from Chile who are now in Britain? Does he think that such a withdrawal would lead to an increase, or decrease, in the instances of detention and torture?

Mr. Eggar: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is entirely right in his assessment of the position. We support the work of the special rapporteur in Chile, and we are in favour of a renewal of his mandate. We do, however, have some reservations about consideration of Chile in the UNCHR under the separate agenda item, but that is another and rather technical issue.

Mr. Wells: Will my hon. Friend mark the 40th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter on Human Rights by writing to all the countries, such as Chile and El Salvador, who are offending against that charter? Will he bring to their attention the undertakings that they gave when they signed it 40 years ago?

Mr. Eggar: Chile and other countries are well aware of our views. During the speech that I made in Geneva to the commission — that was during my second visit to the Human Rights Commission—I made our views on these matters very clear.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I urgently seek your advice, on a matter affecting the honour and integrity of the House?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will take it after the statement.

Mr. Ewing: My hon. Friends——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does it arise out of questions?

Mr. Ewing: No.

Mr. Speaker: I will take it at the proper time.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have dealt with this matter already. We take points of order——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It is different today.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It always is different.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It is different today.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will take the point of order immediately after the statement.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It does not arise then. It is not convenient——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It may not be for the convenience of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) to return——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: We are all affected by it.

Mr. Speaker: —but for the convenience of the whole House, I shall take it immediately after the statement.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that I am not prepared to take it now. I ask him to sit down, please.

Scottish Electricity Industry (Privatisation)

3.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement about privatisation of the electricity supply industry in Scotland.

The Government's proposals to privatise the electricity supply industry represent a major extension to our successful programme of privatisation, and they will put one of Scotland's most vital industries on to a new and dynamic basis. They will make an important contribution to the continuing regeneration of Scottish industry and to the growth of the private sector in Scotland.

Scotland is fortunate in having an efficient, well-managed and successful electricity industry, which has an impressive diversity of generation sources, including hydro, pumped storage, nuclear and the full range of fossil fuel capacity. In framing proposals, my aim has been to build upon the strengths of the present structure and to correct its weaknesses so that an even more efficient industry, which is sensitive to the requirements of all its customers, can develop. My purpose is to give the industry's customers and its employees a better deal, and to ensure that it strives towards greater efficiency and better standards of service.

I wish to create a structure that is appropriate to the full range of circumstances faced by the industry in Scotland. Prominent among those are the sparsely populated character of much of the area served, the high level of nuclear capacity and the level of surplus generation capacity.

I therefore propose to create two companies based on the present regionally based utilities. This will build on the existing structure of the industry in Scotland and ensure that it maintains its distinctive characteristics. I have considered carefully the attractions of other structures. I do not consider that it would be acceptable to create a single monopoly which would place the ownership and control of the entire Scottish industry in a single set of hands, whether or not involving a regional sub-structure. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Scottish Members have been waiting for this statement. I ask them to listen to it.

Mr. Rifkind: This would ignore the regional diversity of the present industry, which has brought considerable benefits to consumers. A single company would also require heavy regulatory oversight. This option is inconsistent with the Government's overall objective to maximise the competitive potential and commercial pressures within the electricity industry, and it would be contrary to the interests of consumers. The two-company structure will provide competitive pressures within the industry in Scotland. In the short term, there will be potential for competition by comparison—*[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Rifkind.

Mr. Rifkind: —by which means customers will have a basis for comparing and assessing the prices and service they receive. By helping to ensure effective regulation of prices, this will be an important gain for the consumer. The shareholder will similarly be able to compare the performance of the two companies. A two-company structure will also increase the scope for direct competition for large industrial loads and for marginal exchanges of energy within Scotland.

The Scottish industry has an important competitive role to play in the overall electricity market in Great Britain. There is significant over-capacity in the Scottish system, which can be used to export electricity to England and Wales to the benefit of both buyer and seller. In the longer term, the structure will provide scope for substantial direct competition in generation: the regulatory framework will be designed to encourage independent generators to enter the market on a profitable basis.

I have considered whether the existing boards are candidates for privatisation as independent companies in their present form. My conclusion is that the generating assets in the system are not ideally distributed between the two boards. However, I am confident that two strong, well-balanced and commercially sound companies capable of independent operation can be established by means of some modest reallocation of assets and possibly customers between the existing boards.

I shall therefore invite the boards to consider, in consultation with Government, detailed proposals for achieving this reorganisation to create two companies which, although of different sizes, will be satisfactorily balanced in terms of mix of generating plant, the amount of spare capacity and forecast levels of profitability. The Government will ensure that neither company has an undue competitive advantage in the areas where there is scope for competition between them. We shall also ensure, as a first priority, that security and stability of supply are maintained.

One of the central principles underlying the restructuring will be a sharing of the benefits and costs associated with nuclear assets between the two companies. All of Scotland's electricity consumers have contributed to the creation of these assets, and it is therefore right that they should benefit from that investment in terms of economic baseload of electricity. I propose that the nuclear stations should be owned jointly by the two companies, with each receiving its proportionate share of the benefits and meeting its proportionate share of the total costs. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have an important Welsh debate in front of us. Hon. Members will have an opportunity to ask their questions when I call them, rather than from a sedentary position.

Mr. Rifkind: The legislation that I propose to introduce will create strong and effective safeguards for the customer on prices. An effective regulatory regime will be established to safeguard the interests of consumers, including those in remote rural communities, and to promote competition. Tariffs will be regulated. The development of the regulatory system will require the close consideration of a wide range of complex issues, and will be the subject of detailed consultation with the industry. An electricity supply code will also be included in legislation updating the laws governing electricity supply and setting out the basic statutory rights of customers to receive a supply. Safety standards will be fully maintained.

I propose that the legislation should also establish new rights for the consumer and provide for a new system of guaranteed standards of service. When a company fails to meet these levels of service, customers will receive a

predetermined level of financial compensation from the company. The companies will also be required to provide a range of indicators, which will be published. They will enable comparisons to be drawn between companies, and encourage them to improve their efficiency and standards of service to the benefit of consumers.

The interests of the industry's employees will be carefully considered. Pension obligations will be safeguarded and the legislation will not change the present negotiation and consultation machinery. Employees will also be given attractive opportunities to acquire shares, as will the general public.

My proposals are of major importance to the future of Scotland's economy, and I am today publishing them in a White Paper.

My proposals for privatisation will help to secure even greater efficiency in the supply of electricity in Scotland, thus ensuring the maintenance of stable and competitive prices. They build on what is best in the industry and provide opportunities for further improvements. In this way, a modern competitive private-sector industry will be created in Scotland, with a major stake held by the Scottish public; it will be fully responsive to the needs of customers and employees. Privatisation of electricity offers real benefits and new prospects for the customer, the employee and the Scottish economy.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman's statement was well received by the House, because privatisation of electricity is no more than asset-stripping. The Government are living like spendthrifts, selling the future to finance today's expenditure. There is no case for replacing public utilities with a brace of private monopolies. If it is not acceptable to create a single monopoly—the Secretary of State has just said it is not—is he really arguing that if there are two the problems will somehow disappear? A monopoly is a monopoly and "competition by comparison" is nonsense. If the industry is

"efficient, well managed and successful",

what is the case for privatisation? Why should the public believe in a scheme that makes nuclear safety the responsibility of directors whose overriding duty is to maximise profit for their shareholders?

Is it not nonsense to hand the most basic of utilities over to commercial instinct and then to struggle to build in regulatory machinery in an attempt to prevent the profit-driven companies from abusing their power? There is a startling silence in the Secretary of State's statement on safeguards of the independence of these privatised companies. What guarantees can he give that they will be in a position to withstand the attack of a determined predator? What price such guarantees after the Britoil fiasco?

Privatisation makes no sense, but if the Government insist on it the decision to maintain a Northern board at least gives some prospect of preserving the Hydro board's social charter. The Government must produce a workable structure that will protect the interests of the consumer and guarantee services at a fair price to scattered rural communities. The White Paper is strong on prejudice but thin on argument and detail. No one will be impressed by promises of a new and dynamic future selected at random from the Scottish Office's glossary of Toryspeak.

The House will notice the accuracy of the many leaks that the nuclear stations will be jointly owned and operated. What arrangements are being made for the apportionment of debt, and will the restructuring mean large sums being written off by the taxpayer? When will we know about the transfer of population or the redrawing of the boundaries between the boards implied in the statement? Is it true that the Government are considering the transfer of a coal-fired station to the Northern board? Does the Secretary of State accept that there are real problems in joint control of nuclear capacity when commercial interests may diverge? What would happen, for example, if there were a disagreement between the boards, or the privatised companies, over pressurised water reactor and advanced gas-cooled reactor technology for future plants?

Guaranteed standards of service must be enforced, and we want to be sure that the consumer watchdog has the power to protect customers on prices and to insist on a humane and balanced approach to personal debt and disconnections. Is the Secretary of State aware that the number of disconnections for non-payment of gas bills in that privatised industry rose by more than a third in the first nine months of 1987? Will the Secretary of State assure us that that will not happen in a privatised electricity industry?

The crisis over the South of Scotland Electricity Board's coalburn graphically underlines the dangers of privatisation with thousands of jobs at risk and the national interest pushed roughly aside in the rush to make shares more attractive to the market. The way in which the Secretary of State has shirked his responsibilities and watched the developing tragedy as though it was a spectator sport does not inspire confidence. His sale of the electricity industry will no doubt produce windfall profits for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but it represents a real threat to the consumer and to the wider interests of the Scottish economy and we will oppose it to the best of our ability and right to the end.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Arising out of this statement?

Mr. Madden: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I will call the hon. Gentleman to put his question in a minute.

Mr. Madden: May I put a point of order that arises directly from the statement. It is not a question——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is very difficult for me to judge whether it is a point of order as we are at the beginning of the statement. I will hear it when the hon. Gentleman raises his question afterwards.

Mr. Madden: But it is a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will call the hon. Gentleman at the end after the statement, but I cannot interrupt the statement in the middle.

Mr. Madden: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I do not see——

Mr. Speaker: No, if the hon. Gentleman will be patient——

Mr. Madden: I cannot see how I can raise a point of order arising directly from the statement at the end of the statement rather than at this stage.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman would wait until I call him, I will hear his point of order and judge it then.

Mr. Madden: I cannot see how I can raise a point of order in a question when my point of order is a point of order for you.

Mr. Speaker: Is the hon. Gentleman alleging that an unparliamentary expression has been used?

Mr. Madden: No, Mr. Speaker. I think——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Exceptionally — it is quite exceptional—I will call the hon. Gentleman. But I warn him that he will do his colleagues and the House a grave disservice if his point of order is not a genuine one.

Mr. Madden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am glad that you have confirmed the right of hon. Members to raise a point of order at the appropriate stage.

My point of order is that, as there are only a handful of Conservative Members on the Conservative Benches —in fact, less than 20—would it be right for us and for journalists reporting the proceedings of the House to assume that the absentees are either drunk, lazy or incompetent——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is an absolute abuse of a point of order. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] It is reprehensible and it merely confirms what I had hoped would not happen.

Mr. Rifkind: I was somewhat intrigued by the questions raised by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). He began by saying that the Government's proposals do not involve the introduction of meaningful competition, but simply continue a system of monopoly. I suggest that the hon. Member for Garscadden might like to consult his hon. Friend the Member Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) who only last Thursday was quoted in the press as saying:

"If the Government's justification is competition, the only way Scotland can have competition is to have separate boards."

I suggest that the Opposition get their act together. Clearly they have failed to do that so far.

The hon. Member for Garscadden then asked about the safety of nuclear power stations. If he had done his homework, he would be the first to appreciate that the ownership of a nuclear power station has little to do with questions of safety—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] On the one hand, many power stations in the United States are in private hands and on the other stations like Chernobyl in the Soviet Union are in public hands. Few people who know anything about the nuclear industry would agree with the hon. Member for Garscadden that the question of ownership is relevant in one way or another. Of course the regulatory framework ensuring matters of nuclear safety remains exactly the same irrespective of questions of ownership; the hon. Gentleman should have been aware of that already.

The hon. Member for Garscadden also asked about safeguarding the interests of rural communities. I am very conscious of the fact that one of the great achievements of the Hydro board in the north of Scotland has been to ensure easy access to power for island communities and remote rural communities in its area on a common tariff basis. That is one reason why we said in the White Paper that the successor company will be required to maintain a common tariff throughout its area and that that will protect the interests of those in the island communities in a way that will be warmly welcomed.

The hon. Member for Garscadden suggested that considerable problems would arise from joint control of nuclear power stations. He ought to know that, around the world, particularly in the United States, joint ownership of nuclear power stations has been a common feature. It does not create insuperable problems. Indeed, it does not create any substantial problems of the sort referred to by the hon. Gentleman. That is a factor that he should bear in mind.

I am well aware that, inevitably, the Opposition have a knee-jerk reaction to any proposals for privatisation. That is their philosophical position and they are entitled to it. However, they should realise that the interests of the Scottish economy will be greatly boosted by the creation of important companies of the sort proposed. The interests of the consumers will be greatly assisted by the downward pressure on prices that the structure proposed will achieve. If the hon. Gentleman does not appreciate that, he does not have the best interests of the Scottish economy or Scottish consumers at heart.

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): Contrary to the dogmatic prejudice against change held by the Labour party, does my right hon. and learned Friend realise that his proposals will be broadly welcomed by Conservative Members and in the country beyond? I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his decision to retain the integrity of the North of Scotland Hydro-electric board, which is valued in the north of Scotland. Can my right hon. and learned Friend say what arrangements will be put in place to ensure across Scotland the best use of low-cost generation and the best opportunity of exporting south of the border? Will they be in the legislation or will they be left, contractually, to the companies after privatisation?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my right hon. Friend for his welcome for the proposals I have outlined today. It will be in the best interests of both the companies concerned to maximise the use of the capacity available. There is plenty of evidence from elsewhere in the world where companies operate together to ensure the maximum use of capacity in terms of the interests of their consumers. I have no doubt that both boards will be responding in a constructive and responsible way to ensure that the opportunities that exist for export of Scottish capacity to markets south of the border and the provision of cheap, secure supplies of electricity to consumers throughout Scotland will be not only safeguarded but enhanced as a result of the proposals.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Secretary of State reflect on the fact that what he has produced is a two-headed pantomime horse over which we put a nuclear veil? Does he accept that joint ownership of nuclear power stations is really joint ownership of baseload capacity? How does that come under the argument of competition? Can he tell us whether any of the power stations in Fife are likely to be transferred to the Hydro board and who will own the gas-fired station at Peterhead?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman has not said whether he would have preferred the creation of a single monopoly in Scotland.

Mr. Douglas: I do not support two boards.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman may have his views about the principle of privatisation, but he should appreciate that, if privatisation is to take place, we will be interested in hearing his views as to the form of privatisation—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I will answer the question. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Give the Secretary of State a chance.

Mr. Rifkind: Scottish Opposition Members were quoted last Thursday as saying that they believe that there should be a two-company structure if privatisation takes place. The hon. Member for Cathcart, speaking on behalf of the Labour party, specifically said that.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) began his question by referring to competition and the structure of the proposed industry. On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, the issue concerning an exchange of assets is, as my statement clearly said, a matter that is being discussed with both the electricity boards. Once we have had the benefit of their advice, we will be able to tell the hon. Gentleman and others what is proposed. The hon. Gentleman must appreciate that this is not a matter on which we should like to reach a conclusion without a most detailed discussion with both boards and those who are interested in it.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I give the warmest possible welcome to my right hon. and learned Friend's statement, since it concentrates on the future economy of Scotland and the interests of industrial and domestic consumers. I have total confidence in the nuclear generation plant's being run by private industry. Is there within my right hon. and learned Friend's plan a long-term future for the British Nuclear Fuels plc plant at Chapelcross to generate electricity?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. Friend for his warm welcome, which I believe will be replicated by many people throughout Scotland. In the past, the precise role for Chapelcross had to be discussed with the South of Scotland Electricity Board. Any needs of the future South company with regard to Chapelcross will obviously be a matter for that company to discuss. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall keep a close interest in this matter.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Do these public utilities operate efficiently in respect of the provision of services and prices? Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman give a comparator, other than the boards themselves, against which we can measure the new boards' effectiveness, efficiency and prices?

Mr. Rifkind: The present joint generating agreement has certain advantages and disadvantages. It has advantages in that it allows, through the merit order system, the best utilisation of capacity. It has the disadvantage that it conceals almost entirely the relative efficiency of both boards, because they are required to share costs according to a predetermined formula and not according to the basis on which they run their establishments. Therefore, there are major problems as well as major disadvantages in the present joint generating agreement. The proposals which I have outlined will substantially remove that difficulty, because there will be a basis of transparency that will enable the public to be safeguarded with regard to costs and tariffs.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that his announcement represents a major opportunity for employees, customers and financial institutions in Scotland and elsewhere to take a direct stake in a major Scottish industry, which will have the great advantage of now being free from the inevitable constraints of Treasury control?

Further to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith), can my right hon. and learned Friend give a categoric assurance to those in industry, such as the CBI and the Scottish Council, who have expressed concern that the end of the present integrated generation system might result in increased costs? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, if he can give that assurance, his statement should be unequivocally welcomed by Scottish consumers?

Mr. Rifkind: I can give that assurance. I am happy to say that I believe that consumers, especially industrial consumers, will benefit from the kind of structure proposed. As to the earlier part of my hon. Friend's question, it is significant that the Labour party appears to prefer a situation in which the investment requirements of the Scottish electricity industry are decided by Labour or Conservative Governments rather than by the Scottish industry.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that there is an element of farce in suggesting that the disposal of a public utility will be the principal engine of growth in the Scottish economy? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that there is an element of farce also in introducing the concept of competition by comparison? We oppose privatisation but of course we welcome—*[Laughter.]* As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said, if there has to be privatisation, we welcome it being done on the basis of two boards. What safeguards will exist to ensure that these two boards are not prey to companies outside Scotland moving in and buying them up? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give an assurance that the social contract presently in the Hydro board's provisions and charter will apply not only to the Hydro board but to the SSEB in the new set-up?

Mr. Rifkind: I noted with some amusement that the hon. Gentleman said that his party was opposed to the privatisation of the electricity industry. Yet only a few days ago, he was quoted as saying that the Liberals were "not wildly keen" on privatising electricity.

Mr. Dewar: "But".

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, there was a "but". The quotation from the hon. Gentleman continued by saying:

"but if it was going to happen, certain conditions were absolutely essential to its success."

That appears to be a traditional Liberal approach. We wait with interest to hear the textual analysis and to see the precise difference between "not wildly keen" and "opposed".

The social contract has been a feature not of the SSEB, but of the statutory basis on which the Hydro board operates. It was intended to ensure that the distribution system extends to the remote rural and island communities. As the hon. Gentleman will know, that has largely been completed, but there is another major factor

[Mr. Rifkind]

—the maintenance of common tariffs in the island and remote rural communities. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will be pleased to see that the White Paper states specifically that the successor to the Hydro board will be required to maintain common tariffs throughout its area.

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): May I warmly congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on returning to the Scottish people, for the first time in our programme of denationalisation, the assets of Scotland, which go solely to the workers of Scotland and benefit consumers in Scotland, because they can sell the product to consumers in England? If he had proposed a monopoly, would not the Opposition have complained that it was a monopoly? When he has proposed competing boards, they now complain that those boards are competing. Is not the Opposition, both from the Liberals and the Labour party, a sign that they are horrified that Scotland is having its assets given back to its people to the benefit of industry in Scotland?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. and learned Friend. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I appeal to the House to settle down and listen to the answers, in the interests of Welsh Members whose debate is to follow. It is rare to have a Welsh day. I shall endeavour to call those hon. Members who are rising, within the time scale, but I ask them to put only one question each, bearing in mind that there will be subsequent opportunities to ask questions on this matter.

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for his question. As the House will be aware, in previous examples of privatisation, preference has been given to employees and consumers of those industries with regard to the acquisition of shares. All the employees and consumers of both Scottish boards reside in Scotland, so it will be a unique opportunity for those living in Scotland to acquire a significant proportion of the shares in the electricity industry. My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely entitled to draw those conclusions.

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): Is the Secretary of State aware that much of what he has said this afternoon was positively farcical? The business of competition between the two boards does not bear serious examination. Is not the Secretary of State creating two private monopolies which will be able to operate with scant regard for the interests of consumers, not to mention the overall Scottish interest, as we are already seeing with the outrageous behaviour of the SSEB in respect of coal purchases? When will he do something about that, instead of standing back and allowing the Scottish coal industry to be destroyed?

Mr. Rifkind: There will indeed be opportunities, particularly for industry, to acquire power from either of the two companies. There will be access to the transmission of both companies, so bulk purchasers of electricity will have a choice that has not been available in the past. In addition, we are establishing a structure that will exist for many years. The right hon. Gentleman may approve of the creation of monopolies, but neither I, the Government nor the vast majority of people in Scotland approve of that.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Do not these proposals represent a double mugging of the Scottish electricity consumer? Has not the strength of those companies — their asset base and capacity strength — been paid for by Scottish consumers through their electricity bills? Why, therefore, should the proceeds from a sale go to the Treasury rather than being returned to Scottish consumers? Furthermore, is it not inevitable that, in the private sector, electricity bills will rise because the two companies are saying that they want to double their rate of return? Is not privatisation just another word for higher electricity bills?

Mr. Rifkind: It is interesting to note that the hon. Gentleman had not thought it appropriate to agree with the structure proposed by the Government and has therefore shown himself to be entirely out of touch with opinion in the north-east of Scotland. It is significant that he appears to be uninterested in the views of his constituents and those who represent the interests of the north of Scotland.

The idea that a single state monopoly or a single private monopoly is in the interests of consumers is not a view with which those who have any knowledge of the real world would normally associate themselves.

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a United Kingdom Parliament.

Mr. Rost: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that both the Scottish boards and Scottish industry have sent detailed submissions to the Select Committee on Energy welcoming privatisation because the competition will benefit the Scottish economy and lead to a better deal for the electricity consumer? Is it not typical of Opposition Members to show yet again that they are not interested in representing the interests of the electorate whom they are supposed to represent and the interests of the consumer and the Scottish economy?

Mr. Rifkind: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has more knowledge of the electricity industry, through his work on the Select Committee on Energy, than most Opposition Members. He is absolutely right in reminding Opposition Members that the electricity industry, in the shape of both the SSEB and the North of Scotland Hydro-electric board, has expressed its view that privatisation is entirely in the interests of the industry and the consumer. Opposition Members may not like that, but they will have to appreciate it.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): Since, in his preamble, the Secretary of State talked about the regeneration of Scottish industry, does he think that it is a good start that we should wipe out the Scottish coal industry as a consequence and lose thousands of jobs in Scotland? The Secretary of State was cagey when we mentioned the debt. How will this proposal be implemented so far as the debt is concerned? He is aware that the SSEB owes £1·8 billion. He knows that it has £1·1 billion of foreign debt as a consequence of Torness and that it pays £240 million per year in interest. How do the Government propose to tackle that? Do they propose to wipe off the debt, as the Treasury will get the filthy lucre involved in the privatisation?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman will know that, as in previous privatisations, those matters are dealt with at a later stage; therefore, I cannot give a detailed response on that matter at the moment.

With regard to the earlier part of his question, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that, because of the present legal proceedings, it is difficult for any of us to comment in detail on the matter, but I understand his reasonable concern about the future of deep-mined pits in Scotland as a result of the present issues. It is perhaps unwise of him to refer to the death of the Scottish coal industry, because about half the coal produced at present comes from opencast mines in Scotland, which have grown substantially over the past 10 years.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): When the Secretary of State said at the start of his statement that he had been seriously considering the privatisation of the electricity industry in Scotland, why does he not be more frank with the House? Why does he not tell us that he considered nothing and that he comes along, like the lapdog he is, to do what he is told?

There is one significant omission from his statement in comparison with the statement made by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy, who made a statement announcing tariff increases before the privatisation statement itself. When will the SSEB announce its tariff increases? Contrary to what the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) says, does the Secretary of State realise that there is widespread anxiety throughout Scottish industry that the SSEB tariff increase will be of the order of the CEGB tariff increase to fatten up the industry for privatisation?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman should do his homework first. Then he would appreciate that the announcements made about tariff increases south of the border related to the need to attract the necessary level of investment because of the gross under-capacity of the electricity industry. I presume that the hon. Gentleman is aware that under-capacity is not a problem north of the border, where we have considerable over-capacity in the system.

If the hon. Gentleman is interested in a way of dealing with the requirements of the industry while recognising the Scottish dimension, he should appreciate that there are three specific Scottish characteristics of the industry, all of which have been recognised and safeguarded by my statement. The first is vertical integration, which exists only in Scotland and which is maintained under these proposals. The second is the high proportion of nuclear power in Scotland, unlike south of the border, which is also safeguarded by the joint ownership proposals. The third is the great over-capacity, which is more than safeguarded by the exciting opportunities that exist for exports south of the border.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Will the successor company of the SSEB have built into it a social clause along the lines of that of the North of Scotland Hydro-electric board? Can the Secretary of State give an absolute guarantee that those successor companies will remain, post-privatisation, in Scottish hands?

Mr. Rifkind: I would have been somewhat appreciative if the hon. Gentleman had recognised that today's announcement coincides with what I believe are the interests of his constituents. He, like his Liberal friend, appears to like to take that for granted and not to comment on that matter.

Mr. Kennedy: Answer the question.

Mr. Rifkind: Indeed. The hon. Gentleman is the first spokesman for his party to speak, and it might have been relevant to have some reference to that fact. The particular points that he raised on the social clause have never applied to the SSEB. As I said earlier, the main requirement with regard to the Hydro board is the preservation of a common tariff which has been safeguarded by the terms of the White Paper and by the preservation of the Hydro board as a separate company post-privatisation. That is what the Hydro board said was necessary to protect the interests of those who live in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and similar areas.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Oppenheim.

Mr. Oppenheim: Have not Opposition Members got their priorities wholly wrong? Scottish electricity generation does not exist to provide an easy, safe, uncompetitive, overpriced market for Scottish coal; it exists to provide low-cost electricity to Scottish consumers, and that is what the priority should be.

Mr. Rifkind: That is indeed the case, and why the electricity industry as a whole believes that privatisation will be in the interests of its consumers. I agree with that view.

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): While I am opposed to the principle of privatisation, I welcome the Government's decision to privatise the two existing companies separately. As Hunterston A nuclear power station is bound to be decommissioned soon, who will finance it — the shareholders of the new privatised company or the Treasury?

Mr. Rifkind: First, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome of the two-company structure if privatisation were to take place. No decision has been taken on whether Hunterston A should be decommissioned and, if so, when. Clearly, these matters will have to be determined by the successor private company whenever a decision is reached that the decommissioning of Hunterston A is appropriate.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): How does the Secretary of State propose to ensure that the ownership of the two boards remains within either Scotland or the United Kingdom? What is to stop the boards in future selling their shareholding to an Arthur Daley or Eddie Clockerty of the electricity industry?

Mr. Rifkind: The question whether there should be specific requirements to prevent foreign ownership or other changes in ownership will be addressed in due course. There are no proposals on that for Scotland or England and Wales in the White Paper, but the Government will consider these matters in due course.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Since the Tory party was rejected by more than three quarters of the people of Scotland, what possible mandate does the Secretary of State have to sell two great Scottish electricity companies, which were created by the people of Scotland

[Mr. Dennis Canavan]

for the people of Scotland and which are the property of the people of Scotland? What right does he have to sell them to some rich friends of the Tory party whose main motivation will be to line their pockets, rather than public service and public safety which will best be ensured when a future Labour Government restore these companies to public ownership?

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman is genuinely interested in Scottish control of Scottish industry, I am sure that he will be in the forefront of encouraging his constituents, who are either consumers or employees, to buy shares in the Scottish electricity industry. That will help to achieve the objective which he so rightly seeks.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Is my right hon. and learned Friend convinced by the mindless reaction of Opposition Members this afternoon that he certainly has this absolutely right and that he will deliver to the consumers of electricity in Scotland the best possible deal for the future? Can he assure the House in the interests of industry in Scotland and jobs in industry throughout Scotland that he will liberate the electricity industry to provide its energy from whatever source provides it best and most cheaply?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right to assume that the fact that we are subjected to an enormous volume but little content from Opposition Members speaks louder than words. Naturally, the SSEB has a statutory duty to put the interests of its consumers before other considerations, and that factor must be borne in mind.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Is the Secretary of State aware that his statement is an act of industrial sabotage of the Scottish economy? Is he further aware that nobody believes either the Government or the SSEB when they suggest that the argument over coalburn has nothing to do with privatisation? How can it be right to write off thousands of jobs and thousands of millions of pounds of investment in the Scottish coal industry for what at best is a marginal, temporary, short-term economic gain? Does the fact that these matters are now in the courts mean that the Secretary of State has abdicated any responsibility for Scotland's industrial base?

Mr. Rifkind: It means that, even with two nationalised industries, it is at times impossible for them to agree.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Albeit that the Secretary of State thinks that he has his Gatling gun, could he return to the unanswered question that was first put by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), which was, given that there will be joint ownership of the baseload nuclear power stations, where will the competition come from that supposedly will put a downward pressure on prices?

Mr. Rifkind: It will come from several places. First, it will come from the opportunity for industrial consumers to consider placing their requirements with either of the successor companies. Secondly, it will be provided in the long-term access for new generators to come on to the market. Thirdly, it will be provided by a basis by which the regulator, who will have to protect consumers' interests on tariffs, can compare the relative efficiency of the two companies.

If we have a single monopoly structure in Scotland, given that Scotland is the only part of Britain with vertical integration, there is no way in which the regulator could check the claims of the company in question and thereby give full protection to consumers. If the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends are interested in the protection of consumers, there is no doubt that yardstick comparison is an important, indeed essential, requirement to ensure that tariffs are maintained at the lowest possible level for the purposes of both industrial and domestic consumers.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): Is it not the case that the governor-general's statement, backed up by his entourage from the Institute of Directors and the Confederation of British Industry, amounts to one thing —legalised robbery with violence against the people of Scotland? The electricity supply industry belongs to the people of Scotland. It was built up by their efforts. It is wrong to suggest that to privatise it is to create a wonderful new world for the people of Scotland. It is a wonderful new world for the big business interests behind the Tory party, and that is clear.

Will the governor-general accept that the slogan outside the power stations will be, "Capitalism rules OK"? That may be OK for his friends, but the struggle will continue and Scottish workers will fight back. The Labour party has to carry out its historical role to organise the working classes because we are ready, willing and able to challenge any statement such as this.

Mr. Rifkind: As we are providing a unique opportunity for Scottish employees of the electricity industry and for Scottish consumers of electricity, which covers the whole of the Scottish population, to acquire shares in the ownership of this industry, the Government are entitled to say that our policy can be summed up by the phrase, "Power to the people".

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Given my right hon. and learned Friend's emphasis of the fact that the Scottish industry has considerable over-capacity, does not his statement have considerable significance for consumers in England and Wales, as well as for consumers in Scotland? Is he aware that those of us in England who are keen to see greater competition, and who believe that that is essential in the provision of electricity, will heartily endorse all that he has said today?

Mr. Rifkind: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Serious consideration is being given to strengthening the interconnector between Scotland and England, because that would double the export potential of electricity from the Scottish boards to the markets south of the border. That is entirely in the interests not only of the electricity industry but of consumers in Scotland. It is a United Kingdom electricity industry, and the requirements of the public as a whole are entirely safeguarded by our proposals.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Does the Secretary of State recognise that he is bringing the unitary state of this Parliament into disrepute by having here this assortment of English Tory Back Benchers, no fewer than four of whom have put questions about the privatisation of Scottish electricity? If they are so interested in Scottish affairs, why are they not serving on the Scottish Standing Committee? Will he also recognise that the Scottish consumers do not want this privatisation?

Mr. Rifkind: I am interested that the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends do not apply the same criteria to Scottish Labour Members serving on the community charge Bill.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Earlier, the Secretary of State expressed his confidence that the nuclear capacity of the two electricity boards could safely be placed in private sector hands. Is he not aware of a report by the European Parliament committee on energy, which looked into this very matter in great detail and which concluded that the running of nuclear installations and the management of nuclear radioactive wastes must be kept in the public sector because the private sector cannot be trusted to put the interests of safety above its own interest of private profit?

Mr. Rifkind: Of course, there has to be a regulatory body answerable to Government to ensure that standards of nuclear safety are fully safeguarded — that goes without saying. However, the hon. Gentleman does not seem to appreciate that the ownership of a nuclear power station will not, in itself, determine questions of safety, as long as the highest standards of regulatory control are maintained. As the Government have every intention of doing that, he should be reassured.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Will the Secretary of State recognise that it is arrant nonsense for him and his colleagues to claim that there is widespread support for this measure in Scotland? Is it not a pathetic sign of what little support he has that he has to rely on the support of hon. Members with no direct interest in Scotland, some of whom did not even have the interest to be in the House when the Secretary of State made his statement? Is not the truth that there are so few supporters in Scotland for this case that they could easily have fitted on to the Benches behind the Secretary of State? Had it not been for the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), which sent the Tory Whips scuttling to the Tea Room, one could have fitted almost the whole population of Scotland on to the Benches behind the Secretary of State.

Despite promptings from my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), the Secretary of State has not admitted that there will be no guarantee to defend the independence, economic autonomy and Scottishness of these boards. Will the Secretary of State give us a guarantee that, unlike the "Kuwaiti Kid", he is prepared to defend the Scottish industry over the coming years?

Mr. Rifkind: I have already said clearly that the future ownership of industries post-privatisation is a matter that the Government will be considering in the weeks and months to come. If the hon. Gentleman had been in the House since 1979, he would have found that every time the Government put forward proposals for privatisation or to extend home ownership, the Labour party always said that there was no demand for it. Despite that, in Scotland and elsewhere, hundreds of thousands of Scots have used these opportunities and have become owners of industry, homes and other sectors where the Government have, for the first time, provided such opportunities.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): The Secretary of State referred to competition by comparison. Would he care to contemplate how he might get on if he were to compete in the court of Scottish public opinion with the memory of the late Tom Johnston? Will he contrast the social commitment for which that former holder of his office stood with what he is putting forward today? In particular, will he comment on the fact that his analogy between Hunterston and Chernobyl is not only crass and glib but deeply offensive to the people of my constituency, who have been responsible for levels of safety and efficiency second to none within the public sector? Will he accept that there will be no welcome for the privatisation of the nuclear industry in Scotland, except from the tiny rump that he represents? Selling off the family plutonium will be a deeply unpopular policy within his party.

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman were aware of his party's history, he would have been aware that Tom Johnston's great achievement was the creation of the North of Scotland Hydro-electric board and that his main interest would undoubtedly have been to ensure the preservation of a board serving the interests of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has asked his question and he is now getting an answer.

Mr. Rifkind: Precisely, Mr. Speaker, and he does not like the answer. The hon. Gentleman should appreciate that one of the central elements of this statement is recognition of the distinctive needs of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. The Hydro board has welcomed that fact, as have many interests that represent various points of view in the north of Scotland. The hon. Gentleman knows that the preservation of a separate structure which guarantees common tariffs throughout the Highlands and Islands has been the greatest single achievement of the Hydro board.

Mr. John. M. Taylor (Solihull): Will my right hon. and learned Friend reassure the House that nothing in his statement, which we welcome, will stand in the way of the progress of the fast breeder reactor at Dounreay, and the important contribution that it makes, and will make, not merely to Scottish but to United Kingdom, technology and energy generation?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, I can assure my hon. Friend that the position of Dounreay is not affected by the proposals that I have announced today.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Paragraph 70 of the White Paper says:

"the Scottish public will have a major stake".

What guarantee does the Secretary of State have that the Scottish public will have this major stake? Will he be setting aside 51 per cent. of the shares for present electricity consumers?

Mr. Rifkind: For the first time, all the consumers of a privatised industry will be located in Scotland, for obvious reasons. Therefore, this is a unique opportunity for residents in Scotland, if they so wish, to acquire the shares of the industry concerned.

Mr. Canavan: It serves part of England too.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is correct. The SSEB also serves the needs of Berwick-on-Tweed, in that small part of England, which emphasises that my statement is of relevance to English Members as well.

Mr. Calum MacDonald (Western Isles): The Secretary of State has said a couple of times now that he is conscious

[Mr. Calum MacDonald]

of the importance of the social role of the Hydro board in the Highlands and Islands, but he has given no guarantee that this social role will continue. The social role was embodied in two successive Acts of Parliament, of 1943 and 1979, in the unique social clause. Will the Secretary of State give a guarantee now that that social clause will also be embodied in the new power companies? If he does not give such a guarantee, will he accept that his proposals will be greeted with dismay throughout the Highlands and Islands?

Mr. Rifkind: They will not be greeted with dismay, because the White Paper specifically guarantees the preservation of common tariffs throughout the area of the North company. The hon. Gentleman, as Member for Western Isles, should welcome that fact.

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): Most sensible Members will appreciate and acknowledge that the general proposals in the White Paper are ill-conceived and half-baked—nothing new for the present Government. But what is worrying is the part dealing with the nuclear industry. Will the Secretary of State accept that he has not a clue about how to deal with this measure in relation to privatisation? If that is the case, will he give the Scottish people an assurance that this very important matter will be sensibly dealt with, instead of being treated in the cavalier fashion in which he has dealt with it at the Dispatch Box and in the White Paper?

Mr. Rifkind: With regard to the proposals affecting the nuclear power stations in Scotland, if I have not a clue then neither has the SSEB nor the North of Scotland Hydro-electric board, because these proposals are very much in accordance with what both boards wish to see.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): Will the Secretary of State explain—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that I did not hear an unparliamentary remark. *[Interruption.]* Order. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) is a very senior Member of the House, and he knows perfectly well that he should not react by saying things like that.

Mr. Doran: Will the Secretary of State explain what he means by the expression "competition by comparison"? Will he advise me exactly how my consumers in Aberdeen will benefit from what, to me, is a completely new form of competition?

Mr. Rifkind: I can explain it to the hon. Gentleman. If one had gone for the alternative structure of a single company, that would have been the only part of Britain where there was a system of vertical integration, with generation, distribution and transmission all under the control of a single company. The regulator, who will be a public official whose regulatory function will be to ensure that any tariff proposals are defensible and in the public interest, would have no basis for examining the claims made by a single monopoly company as to whether the factors that had led to such tariffs justified them. By the existence of at least two companies operating in comparable fashion, we have an important amount of information which enables the public interest to be safeguarded.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I was interested in the Secretary of State's comment that prices would be kept down because industrial concerns would be able to choose which board they obtained their electricity from. Will the Secretary of State explain the mechanism by which an industrial concern in, say, Inverness or Lochinver, which gets its electricity from the Hydro board, then switches to the South of Scotland Electricity Board?

Mr. Rifkind: As the White Paper makes clear, there will be in Scotland, as elsewhere in the United Kingdom, common access to the transmission system. The transmission system in each area will not be the sole prerogative of the company covering that particular area.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Secretary of State not admit that part of the fattening up for privatisation is the reason for the disgraceful decision by the South of Scotland Electricity Board to renege on its contract with British Coal? Why did the Minister of State or the Secretary of State not intervene before this matter got into the courts? Have they totally abandoned all their responsibility for employment and industry in Scotland? The effect of this decision in my constituency will be catastrophic, with the potential loss of 400 jobs, in an area where the unemployment level in the Cumnock and Sanquhar travel-to-work area is the highest in the whole of Britain. Why is the Secretary of State abandoning his responsibility for my constituents and for the other people of Scotland who will be affected by this?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman likes to suggest that this is a nice, simple, straightforward matter, yet he knows perfectly well that the interests of Scottish industry as a whole, including Ravenscraig, the largest single user of electricity from the SSEB, are materially affected if it is required to pay tariffs which are higher than necessary. If the hon. Gentleman has the interests of Scottish industry as a whole at heart, he will realise that these are all matters that must be taken into account.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): The White Paper refers in paragraph 36 to the achievement of
"a balanced set of generating assets".
Before the Secretary of State starts talking to the SSEB and the Hydro board, will he bear in mind that, because the Longannet complex comprising two mines and two power stations — Kincardine and Longannet — both receive the coal from the one source and share the same work force at present, it would be the height of lunacy to try to split these two and to break up what is at present a flexible working arrangement, which operates to the benefit of everybody—and which will continue to do so as long as he is prepared to back the miners who produce the coal that these two power stations are prepared to use?

Mr. Rifkind: The particular circumstances of each power station will be taken into account when these matters are considered.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Has the Secretary of State got the message from these exchanges that Scotland wants no part of this daft exercise, an exercise of Tory dogma and fake competition? Does he recognise that the present lay-off of coal miners in my constituency is a bitter foretaste of the effects of this experiment on the Scottish economy? Is it not painfully clear that the prospect of privatisation is already promoting the import of foreign coal rather than the export of Scottish electricity?

Will the Secretary of State accept that people living near Torness and Hunterston will be alarmed by the proposal that these nuclear installations will be run by a surrogate private nuclear company? How will local communities be able to deal with this organisation on matters of day-to-day management or employment or on the vital matter of safety? The Secretary of State cited experience in the United States. Has he forgotten all about Three Mile Island?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the record of the British nuclear industry is second to none. He knows that that is a matter that has been determined by the regulatory framework under which it operates.

If the hon. Gentleman is interested in the well-being of those in his constituency who require electricity and wish to buy low-cost electricity, he should realise that the interests of the consumers will be advanced by the proposals being put forward. He must appreciate that, outwith the ranks of the Labour party, there is very little support for the belief that state monopolies are somehow in the public interest.

The hon. Gentleman's hon. Friend the Member for Cathcart said that, if competition is required, then the creation of two separate Scottish companies is the best way to achieve it. I disagree with the hon. Member for Cathcart on many things, but that is one area where I am only too delighted to approve of what he has said.

Points of Order

4.38 pm

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will take the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) first.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I received on the letter board a letter from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about equal opportunity legislation in employment, on which I had an exchange yesterday with the Prime Minister here in the House, which seemed to attract a fair bit of sympathy and support from Opposition Members. The letter refers to a statement which is being made today.

May I ask you, Mr. Speaker, whether you had any knowledge of any intention to make such a statement in the House earlier today? I ask the question because I understand that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland held a press conference at 3.30 this afternoon at Stormont, at which he answered questions from journalists. Is there any reason why the Secretary of State has avoided answering questions from hon. Members, and has that avoidance not constituted a contempt of the House?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no notification of a statement today, and I know of none that may be forthcoming—but we will have to wait to see about that. I did hear what the right hon. Gentleman asked yesterday, and I heard — *[Interruption.]* Order. — and I heard the Prime Minister reply.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During the Secretary of State for Scotland's statement, when you, Mr. Speaker, rightly, in the United Kingdom House of Commons, called one of the English hon. Members to ask a question—albeit that he had not been present for the statement—you said that this is the United Kingdom House of Commons. You may recall that, during the debate on the Inner London education authority, my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) and for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) and I intervened. You reproved us, saying, "This is a debate on the ILEA and not on Scotland." On that issue, I wonder whether you will make it clear that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander and that every debate, even the Welsh debate later on, is open to all Members of the House of Commons?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must take care.

Mr. Foulkes: All right. I shall take care about that.

My second point, also arising from the statement, is that you, Mr. Speaker, will have observed that a large number of English hon. Members wanted to get in on the Scottish statement. Will you consider that, in spite of the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) helpfully wrote to the Leader of the House — the right hon. Gentleman said during business questions last Thursday that it was a helpful letter —about the Scottish Select Committee, the Leader of the House, who is here today, seemed to be unable to get any Conservative Members to sit on the Scottish Select Committee? That is a great paradox.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me deal with the hon. Gentleman's other point. I repeat that there is a Welsh debate today and that a large number of hon. Members wish to take part in it. Of course, what is sauce for every goose is sauce for every gander, and every hon. Member has an equal right to participate in the United Kingdom Parliament. I said what I said to the hon. Member the other evening because he was seeking to intervene from a sedentary position.

Mr. Foulkes: No.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, he was. I was present. It was in the middle of a speech, and the Minister did not give way.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman was another. Both hon. Members were sitting on the Back Benches.

Mr. Maxton: On that very point of order—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Members did not seek to participate in the debate; they sought to intervene in a speech.

Mr. Maxton: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that on that occasion I was trying to raise what I thought was a perfectly legitimate point of order in relation to that debate. I was on my feet raising a point of order when you made that comment. Every hon. Member is entitled to do that.

Mr. Speaker: I do not recollect that it was a point of order.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): Further to the point of order raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), Mr. Speaker. I was appalled that the Secretary of State should show contempt for the House by making a statement on equal opportunities to a press conference in Northern Ireland. When I was told that a statement was to be made, I assumed that normal parliamentary practice would be followed, and that a statement would be made to the House.

Therefore, through you, Mr. Speaker, may I urge the Government to produce the Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box today, at no matter what time, so that he can be cross-examined about those proposals? We do not object to fair employment anywhere in the United Kingdom. The Secretary of State ought to say why he has not introduced—as I have always wanted—a Bill of Rights for the whole of the United Kingdom, and if not for Great Britain, at least for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the Leader of the House will have heard what has been said about that statement.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Does it not appear that the Government have achieved a unique treble, in that they have insulted Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales on the same day? It is very embarrassing for you, Mr. Speaker, but it is even more embarrassing for hon. Members for Wales who are being pushed to the end of the list on this debate. The Leader of the House is responsible for that muddle. When he arranged for the Secretary of State for Scotland to make a statement today, he must have known the uproar that legitimately would come from this side of the House. The Leader of the House must have known that the Secretary of State was going to sabotage the Welsh debate. What remedy can he give to the House?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): Far from insulting Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales, we have scored three bull's eyes. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland made a very welcome statement to the House today. As for Wales, we have arranged a debate today, 2 March. That is better than the Labour Government achieved. When the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) was Leader of the House, he failed to arrange any debate on Welsh Affairs in certain years. As for Northern Ireland, my right hon. Friend has answered a written question on that matter today.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on the Licensing (Retail Sales) Bill had its first meeting today and the Chairman of that Committee advised hon. Members to refer to you the actions of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) who has written to churches in the constituencies of hon. Members calling for prayers and fasting—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a matter on which I have received a letter from the hon. Gentleman alleging a matter of privilege. I am considering the matter.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I apologise to Welsh colleagues on both sides of the House for raising this matter, but just over two hours ago, Mr. Speaker, you kindly called me on question No. 3 to the Foreign Office on the funding of the BBC. The issue of order is the habit of Ministers of saying that matters are the responsibility of another Department when the Table Office has rightly accepted a question of particular relevance for the Foreign Office. Alan Protheroe said:

"The BBC will lose its abilities to make programmes that are challenging, programmes that do expose issues that people, politicians, whoever, do not wish to have exposed"—

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is the point of order for me?

Mr. Dalyell: It is a point of order — [AN HON. MEMBER: "Cheeky."] It is not at all cheeky. The Minister said that that was a matter for the Home Office. That statement by the former assistant director general of the BBC was a matter for the Foreign Office. When, apparently, the BBC has to submit scripts if it is to have injunctions lifted, it is quite wrong for Ministers to shirk their responsibility on questions on the Order Paper. On the funding of the BBC, Mr. Protheroe was quite right.

Mr. Speaker: He may have been, but I cannot be responsible for answers given to questions.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a Welsh day.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I appreciate the difficulty of the House over applications to you, Mr. Speaker, on prima facie breaches of privilege, but some hon. Members are in a difficult situation on the Standing Committee on

the Licensing (Retail Sales) Bill, to which reference was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham). Letters have been sent——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is the very matter on which I have received not one but several letters alleging a matter of privilege. The hon. Member and the House know that matters of privilege cannot be raised on the Floor of the House. I am dealing with the matter.

Mr. Harris: It is a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: It may be, but the hon. Gentleman must not raise it as a matter of privilege on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members on both sides of the House are in some difficulty in trying to discharge their duty as members of Committees for which they have been selected. They have a legitimate right to examine private Members' Bills, put down amendments and move new clauses in Committee. At present, they feel grossly inhibited by the actions of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) and they are seeking an urgent ruling from you, Mr. Speaker. It is quite unreasonable for us to expect them to do their duty on those Committees while they are under such pressures.

It is an urgent and important matter, and I urge you, Mr. Speaker, to give a ruling as quickly as possible, or to ask the Chair of the relevant Committee — [HON. MEMBERS: "Chairman."] — to adjourn the proceedings until your ruling has been made; otherwise members of that Committee may feel abused simply for carrying out their ordinary tasks—*[Interruption.]* It is no good one of the Government Whips laughing at the embarrassment and difficulties of two of his hon. Friends. He should have some sympathy for their quandary.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Some years ago the House changed the rules with regard to matters of privilege. They must now be raised by letter to the Speaker. I received that letter just before I came into the Chamber. I shall certainly consider the matter seriously.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There have been a number of statements recently, such as the one today, about privatisation. They raise a new aspect which the House has not considered before. It was revealed yesterday that in the Register of Members' Interests the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) is shown as the honorary adviser to British Aerospace plc which is involved in privatisation. The Table Office has accepted a question from me on the involvement of the right hon. Member for Chingford. It has been accepted because there has been an involvement, I understand. We have had a statement today. I think that it is incumbent on Ministers, when there is involvement among a wide range of business interests of Tory Back Benchers, who are very keen on privatisation to get their greedy fingers into the profits which are accruing, and Ministers—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): We are just getting to the kernel of it.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a day on which many hon. Friends of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) wish to participate in the Welsh debate. Will he come to the point of order for me?

Mr. Cryer: May I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to use your authority to draw the attention of the Procedure Committee to the new set of circumstances so that there may be a Standing Order which makes it incumbent on Ministers making statements on privatisation to list in the Orders of the Day hon. Members who will make approaches to their financial advantage on the Stock Exchange?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is not at the moment a Procedure Committee, but when one is set up the hon. Gentleman could refer that matter to it.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): As of 4.15 this afternoon, I would have wanted to be in the Public Accounts Committee which is taking evidence on the privatisation of Rolls-Royce, but I could not be there because of the rule which you introduced earlier last year, Mr. Speaker, whereby points of order could be taken only at this time of the day——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not allege things like that.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: That is the truth.

Mr. Speaker: That is not the truth. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well the background. That it was not convenient to him to stay to raise a point of order, I fully appreciate, but he has to have regard to the convenience of the House.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: That is precisely the point that I wish to raise with you. I wish to raise an article which was published this morning in *The Guardian* under the name of Mr. Andrew Rawnsley which has caused offence to many of my hon. Friends. *[Interruption.]* It is a very important matter. This scurrilous article, which will lead to representations being made to the editor of *The Guardian*, alleges in reference to——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have now seen the article. I think that I can help the hon. Gentleman and the whole House on the matter. In particular, I think I can help Welsh Members. I have been handed a copy of the article and I have received a letter from an Opposition Member alleging a breach of privilege. I shall give the matter most urgent consideration.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot hear it. It has been raised as a matter of privilege.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am not raising it as a matter of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: An hon. Member has raised it. I cannot go into the details, because it may prejudice my decision.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: My point of order is not a matter of privilege. If other hon. Members wish to write to you on matters of privilege, that is their and your concern. I raise the position of hon. Members who have other duties. That is not a matter of privilege. The article refers to yesterday's proceedings.

[Mr. Campbell-Savours]

Yesterday, I was in the Select Committee on Members' Interests. At 4.15 pm, there was not a quorum to enable that Committee to commence. I had a choice: I could either attend the Chamber or attend the Committee. I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that in the event that journalists write articles suggesting that Labour Members of Parliament are drunk, lazy or incompetent — *[Interruption.]* — that may be a matter which my hon. Friends have to take into account when they decide on the allocation of their time to the carrying out of their public duties. I put it to you *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will those on the Front Bench refrain from shouting across the Chamber?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I was placed in the same position today. At 4.15, I was faced with a decision: do I attend to my public duties in the Public Accounts Committee in questioning Sir Brian Hayes on the privatisation of Rolls-Royce, or do I wait here on the Floor to raise a point of order or to attend a debate? I look to you to advise the House today, and, indeed, the 500,000 readers of *The Guardian*, that this article is a totally unfair and unreasonable presentation of what happens in the House of Commons, in so far as it does not indicate to the country accurately the way in which Members of Parliament legitimately carry out their public duties.

Mr. Speaker: I shall consider the matter. I hope that the hon. Gentleman has not prejudiced what I will do.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. Let me say that all of us recognise that hon. Members have other responsibilities as well as attendance in the Chamber.

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): Further to the point of order raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), Mr. Speaker. May I ask whether you accept the implication in the statement made by the Leader of the House, that an answer given to a planted question by a Conservative Back Bencher is equivalent to a statement made on the affairs of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Speaker: No, it is an answer to a written question.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I ask for your guidance on a matter relating to the use of House of Commons stationery and pre-printed envelopes. Evidence arose in a Committee this morning which I do not believe is a matter of privilege but may be a matter for yourself or the Serjeant at Arms. An hon. Member may have written, or may have caused to have written, a large number of letters to the constituents of other hon. Members, unsolicited, the letters being in a standard form. There is much evidence to suggest that the letters were on House of Commons headed notepaper and used House of Commons pre-printed envelopes. If this were the case, can you guide me as to whether this is something which I should refer to you or to the Serjeant at Arms? I believe that there is strong evidence that an hon. Member has abused his privilege and the facilities of the House in order to stir up trouble among the constituents of other hon. Members.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member can produce evidence of that, he should certainly refer it to the Serjeant at Arms, because there are strict rules about the use of stationery.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Ah.

Mr. Alton: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) is referring to letters which I sent out, I can assure him that the stationery and envelopes which were used by me were paid for with the Serjeant at Arms.

Further to the point of order which was raised earlier, I should like to raise a new point of order which concerns a prayer vigil which was held in Norwich recently. I refer you to the *Eastern Daily Press* of 16 February which described a prayer vigil which had taken place the night before as being broken up. What happened——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I find it extremely difficult to see what point of order can arise for me, as Speaker, about a prayer vigil which took place in Norwich.

Mr. Alton: The point of order is a clear one for you, Mr. Speaker. It is that the protection of hon. Members is a matter for you. When mobs are incited to break up prayer vigils, when mobs picket the homes of hon. Members, and when mobs picket their surgeries and impede their normal parliamentary business, is that not also a matter of privilege, and is that not also something which should be referred to the Privileges Committee?

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman alleges that he has been impeded in his duties, he should certainly write to me.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Were you notified by the Serjeant at Arms about what happened yesterday? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would be grateful if hon. Members would refrain from having private conversations when I am listening to points of order.

Mr. Winnick: Were you, Sir, notified by the Serjeant at Arms and the police authorities of what occurred yesterday? Three groups of people lobbied Members of Parliament, and between 3 and 4 o'clock there were literally hundreds of people outside — mainly teachers, who were rightly lobbying against the Education Reform Bill. Did the Serjeant at Arms inform you of the number of green cards that came in for hon. Members and the number of hon. Members who rightly responded by going to see their constituents, many of whom had travelled hundreds of miles to put their point of view?

Perhaps you, Sir, will guide us. In those circumstances, was it not right for hon. Members to be absent from the Chamber to attend upon their constituents? Surely hon. Members' constituents should be able to lobby this place when they have strong feelings.

Mr. Speaker: I was aware of a lobby yesterday. I understood that the meeting took place in the Grand Committee Room. I was not notified of any problems about green cards.

Mr. Harris: Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), Mr. Speaker. Has the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) applied you to make a personal statement on the ground that he has written to the

constituents of a number of hon. Members, myself included, I believe, on House of Commons paper making completely and utterly unfounded allegations——

Mr. Alton *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Harris: He certainly has.

Mr. Alton: No.

Mr. Harris: He says not, but I had a letter from an organisation called the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children which was circulated widely in my constituency. The letter began, "I believe you have received a letter from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill," or words to that effect. Whatever else has happened, unfounded allegations have certainly been circulated widely in my constituency and I believe that this is an attempt to impede me in my work as a Member of this House. I resent deeply and bitterly tactics such as this and hon. Members' going behind other hon. Members' backs. It is a pity, because, actually, I have much sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's Bill.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman alleges that, he too should write to me. I shall consider his letter together with the others that I have received on this matter.

Mr. Dobson: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not know which hon. Member has written to you about the matter raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). However, it seems appropriate to make it clear—even before you have had an opportunity to consider the representations made to you—that my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis), who was named as being inexplicably absent from the Chamber yesterday, had been ill since the weekend—to the knowledge of Opposition Members and the Whips. Most hon. Members—even those who mock us from time to time—will agree that it is in the interests of all of us to expect the Press Gallery to exercise professional standards and find out the truth before they vilify hon. Members.

Mr. Speaker: I shall certainly be considering all those matters.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that this will be the last one, because it is a Welsh day.

Mr. Ewing: When you have considered the letter that you have received complaining about Andrew Rawnsley and his appalling article, Sir, will you make a statement to the House about it? Most of us would want to follow up this matter one way or another once you have made your decision.

Mr. Speaker: I shall follow the procedure laid down in dealing with matters of privilege.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is now after 5 o'clock. There is only one day in the year for Welsh affairs. Therefore, can we have "speaking-up time" or an extension?

Mr. Speaker: There is a lot of business after this. However, as the hon. Gentleman has raised the matter, I must say that I have great sympathy for Welsh Members. I hope that those who are called will speak briefly.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 18 MARCH

Members successful in the ballot were:
Mr. Michael Fallon
Mr. Stephen Day
Mr. Tim Yeo

BILL PRESENTED

FORESTRY COMMISSION ADVISORY COMMITTEES (PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION)

Mr. Ron Davies presented a Bill to provide for access by the public to meetings, reports and documents of Forestry Commission regional advisory committees; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 22 April and to be printed. [Bill 112.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered.

That the draft Local Loans (Increase of Limit) Order 1988 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

Polyurethane Foam (Miscellaneous Provisions)

5.5 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to ban the sale of secondhand furniture and bedding which contains polyurethane foam or other dangerous inflammable substances from January 1989.

It is with much humility, tinged with anger and frustration, that I introduce a Bill that will be one of the last pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that has taken almost 20 years to complete. It follows two decades of official Government neglect and criminal negligence by the furniture manufacturing industry. Since the mid-1960s it was known to all concerned that polyurethane foam is lethal as a primary and secondary source of fire ignition. Despite the spiralling toll of death and injury, little has been done to end the carnage, and much was done by a complacent industry to frustrate advances in foam technology.

The statement made to the House on 11 January by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, as he now is, represented a major U-turn in Government policy and set out the Government's resolve to ban the sale of both standard and high resilience polyurethane foam by February 1989. In 20 minutes the Government moved 20 years.

It was no coincidence that changes were announced following what must have been the most intense public campaign over the past decade. For those of us involved it was sickening to realise that for the necessary pressure to be brought to bear on both the Government and the industry 17 children and 10 adults had to die between Christmas eve and 10 January. Hundreds before them died in household fires, and firemen and those in the industry died, too, as a result of this appalling foam, which should have been banned 20 years ago.

The changes that we make will stand as a memorial to the tragic loss of life, to the bravery of those who vainly tried to save lives and to the courage of those left to cope.

The pressure was maintained and, following a meeting between the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs, the hon. Member for York (Mr. Gregory) and myself, the Government extended the ban to beds and mattresses. The Minister's written answer yesterday to the hon. Member for York contained further changes in the fire safety regulations. The draft regulations, now in the Library, make further concessions on a number of key matters, and I recommend that the House study these proposals carefully and that hon. Members submit their views to the Minister by 12 May.

The Minister's proposals are, however, deficient in two major aspects, both of which are central to eliminating the 300-plus deaths and 7,500 injuries a year caused by polyurethane foam fires. First, there is the failure to ban the sale of secondhand furniture and bedding with polyurethane foam fillings and ignitable coverings. Secondly, the ignition source test for other dangerous substances, such as fibre fillings, is significantly less stringent than the proposals for the new safer combustion-modified high resilience foam.

If we are to tackle the real source of carnage and horror in polyurethane fires, we must recognise and understand the social, economic and housing conditions that give rise to the overwhelming majority of such fires and the subsequent deaths and injuries. The Home Office report, "Housing Factors and Fires", issued two years ago, made it crystal clear that there was a direct link between low incomes, old age, large families, social problems, bad housing and high fire risk, and the death toll proves that link.

In practical terms, the Government's proposals mean that those who can afford new, safer furniture and beds will be protected by the law, but the poor will be denied that protection. It will still be legal to sell furniture and bedding stuffed with polyurethane foam, which will kill a family in three minutes if ignited, so long as it is labelled "Secondhand." This black hole in the regulations means that thousands more of our citizens will die or be injured. That is totally unacceptable. It is absurd that a shop can legally sell secondhand killer foam furniture in one part of the premises, and the new, safer foams in another. The new-for-old sales discount schemes currently in operation, and the dumping of current stocks on the secondhand market, will lead to three specific problems—confusion and danger for customers, policing difficulties for fire authorities, and legal nightmares for trading standards officers.

My Bill will achieve a number of improvements. Clause 1 will ban the sale of secondhand furniture and bedding containing polyurethane foam, the definition of which is set out in section 10(5) of the Consumer Protection Act 1987. Clause 2 will create an offence of supplying secondhand furniture as defined by that section. This is essential because of the unscrupulous nature of some people in the industry who will seek to dump stocks on the secondhand market before February 1989. Clause 3 will strengthen the suspension of sale powers given to trading standards officers under section 12 of the 1987 Act. Clause 4 will make fibre fillings subject to the British standards specification to be adopted for the safer foams, as set out in the appendices to the draft Furniture and Furnishings Fire Safety Regulations 1988.

I urge the House to join the fire authorities, the Institute of Trading Standards Administration, the Fire Brigades Union, the Furniture Timber and Allied Trades Union and the Consumers Association in supporting the Bill and ending once and for all the vile and evil trade that has brought so much misery, pain and death to thousands of our fellow citizens.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Ian McCartney, Mr. Frank Doran, Mr. Keith Bradley, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Ms. Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Eric Martlew, Mr. Roger Stott, Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe, Mr. Terry Lewis, Mr. John Battle, Mr. Henry McLeish and Mr. Sam Galbraith.

POLYURETHANE FOAM (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS)

Mr. Ian McCartney accordingly presented a Bill to ban the sale of secondhand furniture and bedding which contains polyurethane foam or other dangerous inflammable substances from January 1989: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 13 May and to be printed. [Bill 108.]

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I ask that the record should show that while my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) was moving his important ten-minute Bill only six Conservative Back Benchers were

present, only five journalists were in the Gallery and Mr. Andrew Rawnsley left before my hon. Friend had even moved the motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Welsh Affairs

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

5.15 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance for future reference. I am sure that you or the Speaker's Panel could do something about this. When St. David's day falls on a Tuesday and a Welsh day debate is declared for the same week, surely you and others could use your influence on Government sources to ensure that the debate is held on St. David's day. I understand that the Secretary of State could not attend a Welsh day debate yesterday because he was busy launching press statements all over the country. I am sure that most people in Wales view with disquiet the fact that when the whole of Wales was celebrating St. David's day the foreigner—the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker)—who is Secretary of State for Wales could not find time to come to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The hon. Gentleman and the whole House will know that that is not a matter for the Chair. However, I am about to call the Secretary of State.

5.16 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Walker): In response to the point raised by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), I should make it clear that I had nothing whatever to do with the fixing of today's debate. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that in the years since the new arrangements were made in 1979 the debate has never been held on St. David's day, so perhaps his point of order will be considered in the right perspective.

I rejoice at the opportunity of opening the debate and reflecting on the considerable improvements that have taken place in the past year in many aspects of the Welsh economy and Welsh development. One of the first tasks that I undertook when I took on my present duties was to read through the *Official Report* of similar debates on the Welsh economy that have taken place at this time of the year.

For seven or eight years, those debates were introduced by my predecessor and I begin by paying tribute to him for the considerable work that he did in the interests of the Principality during his period of office. Many of the improving trends that we have witnessed in the past year —in unemployment, take-up of factories, derelict land improvement and many other spheres—have been due to decisions and actions that my predecessor took before giving up the position of Secretary of State.

My predecessor was Secretary of State in a very difficult period. There was a worldwide recession on a considerable scale. Manufacturing industry throughout the Western world declined considerably and employment in those industries decreased considerably throughout Europe. Added to the problems in Wales was the considerable decline in manning in the coal and steel industries. Since 1973 the number of people employed in the coal and steel industries in Wales has fallen by 76,000, creating considerable problems for the Welsh economy.

Unemployment is still much too high and a great deal of progress remains to be made in reducing it. We have

[Mr. Peter Walker]

inherited, partly from those industries of the past, a considerable volume of bad housing which needs to be tackled, as well as a range of problems connected with health which do not apply to many other regions. There is also a great deal of land dereliction with slag heaps and former premises no longer required. The phasing out of a substantial part of the employment in coal and steel which has taken place over the whole post-war period but on a very substantial scale in the past 15 years has thus created considerable problems.

The good position for Wales now, for the first time in several decades, is that the decline in the number of people employed in those two basic industries has very much come to an end. The steel industry that remains in Wales has enjoyed high levels of investment. It is showing remarkable production figures, and after privatisation it will be in a strong position to compete and to do well throughout the European market.

It is interesting to reflect that over the past few years the number of people employed in the coal industry has declined from 30,000 to 10,000. The pits that remain have substantial reserves and there has been substantial investment in them. It is also interesting to note that when 30,000 people were employed in the Welsh mines, they produced 7·9 million tonnes of coal. However, with two thirds of the work force gone, and with only 10,000 people left, the current production figure is about 7 million tonnes, which shows the strength of those pits and the heavy investment that has taken place in them.

There is one sector in which I should like the coal industry to expand. I should like the Margam project to proceed. Some £90 million worth of investment has been given to that new element of the coal industry, and that pit will provide 800 jobs. I hope that negotiations will be completed quickly so that that important development can take place.

In the context of the considerable problems that remain, we can look upon last year as being one of considerable achievement. Unemployment has fallen by 26,900 on a seasonally adjusted basis and by 28,400 on an actual basis. The number of lettings of the Welsh Development Agency's factories over the past 12 months is an all-time record. The number of WDA factories that are vacant is down to the low figure of 8 per cent. In many areas, there is an urgent demand for more factories to be made available quickly.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The reported figures show a decline in unemployment. Everyone welcomes a decline in unemployment, but some areas are experiencing considerable difficulty in reducing unemployment and in some places, such as the Dwyfor area, the problem is worsening. The Secretary of State has concentrated his attention on the valleys — we accept that there are problems in the valleys — but will he assure the House that he will bear in mind the very difficult problems in other areas?

Mr. Walker: I shall make some remarks later about the difficulties affecting those areas.

We have announced a substantial factory-building programme. Factory building is going ahead at the highest levels on record. Regional assistance over the past 12 months has provided 27,500 new jobs, compared with 20,000 during the year before. Investment from overseas is at an all-time record, and Wales has achieved a far greater proportion of investment from overseas than any other region of the United Kingdom.

In the past year, we have seen signs of substantial improvement in financial services. Anybody visiting Wales recognises that much activity is taking place in every region. Recently, a leading German banker and myself —I am anxious that his bank, which has considerable influence on German industry, should take an interest in potential development by German manufacturers in Wales —flew over Swansea, Cardiff, Newport and some of the valleys.

Mr. Ray Powell: We read about that yesterday.

Mr. Walker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will rejoice at the fact that that gentleman commented that one cannot see any other place in Europe in which so many factories that have been built over the past five to 10 years are now operating. That was his reaction at what is taking place.

I visited the Heads of the Valleys with the local authority leaders for that area, and they took me to the parts of the valleys that they wished to develop and described the activities that are taking place. Having visited many parts of the valleys, we remarked on the considerable volume of activity in building new factories, opening new workshops, improving high streets, houses and a range of other matters.

Mr. Ray Powell: When the Secretary of State was flying over parts of Wales, I assume that he flew over Maesteg, Ogmore valley and the Garw valley, where in his previous appointment as a Minister he closed every pit in my constituency because of the economic policies that were being pursued by the Government in 1979. That policy led to the closure and bankruptcy of a number of firms in my constituency. Did the right hon. Gentleman draw his visitor's attention to those matters?

Mr. Walker: If I had wanted to, I could have flown over many more pits that were closed by post-war Labour Governments. The hon. Gentleman knows that if we were to have a competition about who closed the most pits, Labour Governments would win hands down. The difference is that when Labour Governments closed pits there was no coal board enterprise company trying to provide other jobs in the areas concerned.

During my recent visits to north Wales, I have seen a great deal of activity, with many new factories opening. A diversity of new firms are moving into areas in which Courtaulds used to be so dominant. In mid-Wales—the area with which the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) is concerned—many rural areas are experiencing particular problems. It is pleasing to note that Mid-Wales Development has, on average over the past 12 months, made a new letting every three days. That shows that a great deal of activity is taking place in the area.

If one wishes to know the updated position, one has only to consider the recent surveys carried out by the CBI and the Cardiff chamber of commerce, which both show a more optimistic position for Wales than at any time since such surveys were made. One should take particular note of the most recent Wales CBI survey, which said:

"Welsh industry is preparing for a huge injection of investment cash over the next 12 months . . .

A record number of firms are planning to increase investment in plant and machinery with a sizeable proportion aiming to plough money into new buildings.

The Welsh investment prediction, which is well ahead of that for the UK as a whole, follows several months of booming order books which have reached record high points in the past three months.

Jobs growth during the past four months has also been higher than expected and the upward trend is set to continue well into 1988 . . .

Overall, Welsh manufacturers are in a very confident mood. Eighty-nine per cent. said they were either as optimistic or more optimistic than they were four months ago. This represents a significantly more buoyant mood than is displayed by UK industrialists in general."

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I am pleased that the Secretary of State has referred to that survey, which shows that investment in manufacturing industry is finally reaching the levels of 1979. Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the survey shows that when he, in conjunction with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, scrapped regional development grant, all that he did was to save the Government a great deal of money? Much of that investment would have been eligible for regional development grant, and it might have been redoubled into further investment if regional development grant had been available. By chopping regional development grant he has saved the Government a great deal of money. He has not, as he told the public of Wales and the House, granted Welsh industry a facility. He has taken it away.

Mr. Walker: As always, the hon. Gentleman has got it completely wrong. I am pleased to say that the enormous uplift in regional aid that I have announced will be of considerable further benefit. I shall be delighted to give the hon. Gentleman some figures to show how those changes in regional development grant have resulted in a large additional boost.

The present position is one of considerable buoyancy. The number of vacancies in various parts of Wales has increased considerably. Advertisements in last week's newspapers in the Swansea area show that the number of situations vacant is 51 per cent. higher than at the same period last year. Job vacancies in the major newspaper in north Wales are 106 per cent. up on the level of a year ago. That reflects a considerable improvement.

I am delighted to say that there are signs that regional policy will have a considerable impact over the next three years. I stated emphatically that one of the benefits of not ending regional grant immediately but allowing applications to be submitted before a certain date is that a considerable boost is given to investment decisions, which can be brought forward. That will bring a considerable amount of additional money to Wales. I am delighted to say that, since my announcement, 570 applications have been made in two months. In January and February of last year, which was a good year for regional development grant, there were 303 applications. It is likely that the amount coming from the regional development grant will be substantially larger than the estimates. That will be of great benefit to Wales.

I am pleased to tell the House that, as a result of the additional provision of money, the Welsh Development Agency has now embarked on a three-year factory building programme, with a direct investment of £130 million in new factories, and 4·5 million sq ft of new factory space to be built. Moreover, substantial improvements will take place as a result of our encouragement of private investment in factory building.

The Welsh economy has benefited from other factors that have resulted from the general trend. I am delighted to tell the House that Dow Corning announced today that it is embarking on an investment programme involving a further £20 million in its silicon plant, which will enable the firm to become the key silicon supplier in Europe. That is on top of the £100 million programme that is coming to an end, and it is possible that still larger programmes are being contemplated.

I am also glad to say that a major American electronics firm which has been operating in the United Kingdom for the past 15 years, with a base in Cambridge employing 58 people, has now decided that owing to the nature of the European market it wishes to obtain major provision for supplying that market. It has chosen the Baglan industrial park, and is going in quickly to develop a factory there, which will provide 300 new jobs in the area. That is an example of inward investment decisions that are now taking place on a considerable scale, and will, I believe, continue to do so in the period that lies ahead.

With such economic progress, the economy is also stronger and better able to tackle some of the major social problems in Wales. In spite of the considerable extra provision that has been made in the health services in Wales—39 per cent. more in real terms, a £500 million capital programme and more nurses and doctors—there is no doubt about the considerable demand and need in Wales. I am reviewing the need element in regard to the distribution of health expenditure in Wales, and examining the various ways in which we can improve the services still further.

In housing, there was a remarkable achievement over the period of my predecessor, when 142,000 homes in Wales were improved. As every hon. Member knows, that programme completely dwarfed the previous one. I am pleased to say that it is continuing, and we have arranged that the expenditure next year will be some £101 million, an increase of 19 per cent. over that of the past year. The new Housing Corporation that I have announced will, I hope, start operating quickly, and that too will make an important impact.

There are, however, a number of other spheres in which we need to concentrate our activities and policies over the next year or two.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Minister has drawn attention, quite properly, to the substantial increase in house improvement. Was there any particular reason for his not mentioning new build? Is he not aware that there has been a complete slump in new build in Wales over the years of his Government, at a time when household formation and homelessness are both increasing?

Mr. Walker: The operation in new build of the housing associations has increased massively in recent years. Moreover, figures for new build in the private sector are substantially up. In addition, Wales had a very large stock of housing needing repair—which, alas, was incredibly neglected under the last Labour Government, as the hon. Gentleman knows. I am delighted that my predecessor concentrated on that to the degree that he did.

We should always remind ourselves that the present Government have spent an average of £93 million a year on house improvement, compared with the £29 million

[Mr. Walker]

spent by the Labour Government. Anyone who is interested in improving housing in Wales should judge the differing records of the two parties.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): We are all very much in favour of the home improvement scheme, and, indeed, want it reinstituted on a larger scale as soon as possible, because the clamour for it is very great. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will make an announcement about that.

As the right hon. Gentleman gives figures for home improvements, why does he not give us the figures for new housing that his Government stopped, and for the number of people thrown out of their jobs on that account?

Mr. Walker: I should be only too happy to ask my hon. Friend who is to reply to give the right hon. Gentleman whatever figures he wants on new houses. However, as the right hon. Gentleman knows from his constituency, the all-important need was that of the large number of houses requiring renovation. Perhaps when he speaks he will explain how the number of grants provided went from 7,000 in 1977 to 5,900 in 1978, and to 1,100 in 1979, compared with the 19,000 to 20,000 a year now being provided. Perhaps, as the right hon. Gentleman wants to hear of an even bigger increase, he will explain the decline that occurred when he was a member of the Cabinet.

Mr. Foot: Will the right hon. Gentleman now give us the figures for which we asked? If he came to the House so well equipped on the issue of housing, and so determined to tell us the truth, will he tell us why his Government, while he was a member of it, brought housing in our constituencies to a standstill? We want to see a great expansion of the house improvement scheme and of new housing, and our people getting back to work. That is what the right hon. Gentleman ought to be doing, instead of prating about irrelevant matters.

Mr. Walker: Whenever the right hon. Gentleman explodes like that, we know that he is on a very bad wicket. He now says, "Although you are doing four times as much as I did when I was responsible, we should like you to do still more." I have given him the good news: we are increasing expenditure by a further 19 per cent. in the coming year—increasing a record that is already better than his.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Has my right hon. Friend seen the figures from the National House-Building Council, which show that in Wales last year 8,300 new homes were built—four times the increase in the rest of the United Kingdom? That shows the progress that is being made.

Mr. Walker: There is considerable expansion in private building at present. In view of the housing stock and the requirements of Wales, I feel that it is absolutely right to concentrate on house improvement to the degree that we have.

The Government will be concentrating on a number of matters over the coming 12 months or two years. For instance, we wish to continue the considerable reduction in unemployment that we have achieved, and the considerable injection of investment and activity throughout the Principality. We shall be conducting with WINvest — which we are providing with greatly enhanced resources — further campaigns on inward investment, on a considerable scale. Ministerial visits will be made to a number of countries where we believe that there is very good scope for improving inward investment, and a specific and detailed programme will be carried out.

First, we are in close competition for inward investment with other regions of the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe, but our record over the past couple of years has been better than anywhere else. I am determined to see that that trend continues as a result of the increased resources that I have provided.

Secondly, we wish to organise a far more detailed and active drive to involve the Welsh economy in exports. Wales' export record is not good. A number of Opposition Members have pointed out the failure to take up grants and services available in Wales, compared with other regions. A classic example is that of the export services. Only 2·4 per cent. of applicants for the export intelligence service provided by the Department of Trade and Industry come from Wales. Only 1·76 per cent. of participants in trade fairs come from Wales, and for export representative services the figure is 0·75 per cent. We shall, therefore, conduct firm by firm an active campaign of briefing, taking note of the current information. We shall also endeavour to make Wales far more European market-oriented during the next few years, with a range of campaigns that we intend to conduct with Welsh business men. We are also arranging a number of special export missions from Welsh business.

The third area in which I hope for increased activity is Welsh agriculture, and particularly the food industries. Welsh agriculture, like a great deal of European agriculture, will have its problems and difficulties during this period, but there is no doubt that one of the most important aims in assisting the rural areas and Welsh agriculture is to try to improve marketing and value-added processes to link with Welsh food products.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): Will the Secretary of State consider the urgent business of providing extra funding for the Welsh Agricultural Organisation Society, which has a good record on the marketing of Welsh agricultural products, to enable it to start new initiatives?

Mr. Walker: I have been discussing with the WDA the whole programme of actively supporting the food industries, and, in the important areas of horticulture, cheese, lamb—and others—it is coming forward with imaginative new schemes. Overall, I hope that, in conjunction with the farming communities, the food industries and the retailers, we can have much more concerted activity on getting more value added to Welsh agricultural production.

The fourth area of activity will be the craft industries. I have published the report done by Tony Ball on how we can reorganise them. I await the response to that report; I have asked for it to come in during the next few weeks. Shortly thereafter we shall make a range of decisions to give a new momentum and drive to the craft industries throughout Wales.

The fifth area is tourism. For the next year, we have provided a 9 per cent. increase in financial facilities for the Welsh tourist authority, added to which we shall obtain through negotiation better facilities for overseas marketing. Welsh tourism is an important and expanding

industry and a great deal of investment is now being made in it. With the many major urban developments taking place in parts of Wales, the role of the hotel industry will grow. In that context, I appreciate and am grateful for the manner in which the leaders of all the parties that are represented in Wales condemned the actions that took place in Chester last weekend and the damage that they could do. Whether they were the actions of one person, two people or a small group, they do not reflect the attitude of the people of Wales to welcoming visitors from overseas and other places.

Sir Raymond Gower (Vale of Glamorgan): The Welsh tourist industry has a good record in the United Kingdom, but its weakness is that it attracts relatively few people from overseas. That underlines the bad decision not to permit Wales to have its own Welsh tourist board with powers to advertise overseas — such as the Scottish tourist board has. This issue must be pressed. Wales needs that power.

Mr. Walker: I understand, but disagree with my hon. Friend. There will be greater benefit from the new arrangements we have made with the British tourist authority. As a result of the Select Committee's report, we have negotiated new arrangements that will greatly help to attract more visitors from overseas. They will serve greatly to improve the position.

The sixth area in which I want to take action is the continuing programme of removing derelict land. The amount of money allocated to that work by the WDA in 1987-88 was 30 per cent. up on the previous year. We have now decided to allocate a further 18 per cent. for 1988-89. The WDA has now agreed a three-year programme that is 40 per cent. up on the land reclamation programme that was originally planned. It includes land reclamation, urban renewal and environmental improvement. The WDA has decided that, with the extra money made available to it, it will increase those facets of its programme by 40 per cent. for the next three years. The removal of dereliction is taking place on a considerable scale, but there is a vast amount to be done. I think that the whole House will welcome the substantial increase I have announced today for improving the programme.

The seventh area in which we must continue to be active and in which I hope for further successes is that of encouraging the service industries and financial services to come to Wales. It is important that not only the Companies Registration Office but the Patent Office is coming to Wales. The decision by the Chemical Bank to establish its European administrative headquarters in Wales has been a considerable success. This year there was the important decision by the Trustee Savings Bank, and almost every major international firm of accountants and management consultants has, over the past two or three years, decided either to expand greatly or to create an office in Wales. I hope that we can attract one or two overseas banking houses to take an interest in the considerable developments in Wales, and attract many of the service industries in the south-east to profit from the considerable advantages of coming to the Principality.

The eighth area is education and training, and it is linked with some of the things I have already mentioned. I hope that the business school connected with the University of Wales in Cardiff and the new research programmes available to the universities will strengthen the Welsh universities and their connection with industry. I also hope that we can persuade the university system that provision should be made for teaching Japanese, because of our becoming the principal choice in western Europe for Japanese inward investment. I believe that our university system has a good facility for that, and it would be an important aim to achieve. I hope that the provisions in the Education Reform Bill to enable teachers and pupils to have a closer association with industry and commerce will be executed even more successfully in Wales than anywhere else. That will benefit——

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): On the higher education aspect, and the link between higher education research and industry, is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the proposals of the DES include the setting up of university research centres? The Secretary of State for Education and Science referred to three such centres earlier this week during the debate on science. None of them is planned for Wales, so will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that one of those centres will be established in the University of Wales?

Mr. Walker: Research is important, and I shall discuss these matters with my right hon. Friend.

There is an important role for the Manpower Services Commission to play in training. I am pleased that it has budgeted to spend £200 million in Wales during the coming year. I hope that when it examines its training programmes it will consider the new and diverse needs of Wales, particularly in some of the service industries, and will train people for them.

Mr. Anderson: The Secretary of State mentioned the link between schools, business and exports. Will he take a close look at the decline in foreign language teaching in our Welsh schools, in which foreign languages — apart from one — are being phased out? That must surely have an effect on the training of Welsh entrepreneurs.

Mr. Walker: Yes, I shall look into that. Language tuition throughout the United Kingdom is not necessarily linked with the important and expanding languages of the world. The lack of the teaching of Spanish in the United Kingdom — including Wales — despite its growing importance worldwide, shows that.

The ninth area in which I wish to carry out some changes is that of improving the activities of the enterprise agencies, which have been highly successful in Wales. In the past year the WDA has had no fewer than 39,000 inquiries from people wanting to know about starting businesses and the various facilities that are available. That shows the need in every region of Wales for a substantial improvement in the quality of advice and of the enterprise agencies that operate there. We are reviewing the position to see what action can be taken to improve it.

Communications is the tenth area for fundamental improvement. I hope that swift procedures will be followed so that the Severn bridge crossing can be in place in good time for the mid-1990s. The growth in traffic and in the Welsh economy shows how important that will be. In north Wales, we have already completed two thirds of the dual carriageway on the A55 between Chester and Bangor, but the one third that has yet to be finished is important. When it is completed in the early 1990s it will have a considerable impact on business development in north Wales.

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): Will my right hon. Friend consider the need for access roads to the A55 from industrial and tourists areas? All hon. Members from all parties representing constituencies in north Wales are concerned about that.

Mr. Walker: I recognise that fact. My hon. Friend is aware that the county authorities have responsibility in that respect. However, we will want to have positive discussions with the authorities. At present, £285 million worth of roads are under construction in Wales and they include some important bypass schemes in mid-Wales which will help those areas.

The Welsh economy is progressing at a good pace. Many new enterprises are entering the area from overseas, and new enterprises are starting in Wales. Several major schemes will take place in the years ahead including the Cardiff Bay development, and the development of several other south Wales ports, the garden festival at Ebbw Vale, which will have considerable implications for all the valleys, and the building of the new world trade centre in Cardiff.

We can now take full advantage of the potential of the European market. With the extension and freeing of the market by 1992, we can argue that Wales is in a particularly strong position as it has a unique geographical position in relation to Portugal, Spain and Ireland. That position could be very important.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Before the Secretary of State begins his peroration, I must say that we were expecting him to clarify the position of the valleys initiative. Over the past month or so several programmes have been announced including the reclamation and industrial development programmes. What will the valleys initiative be now? Will more money be available to those areas than has already been announced or half announced?

Mr. Walker: I have made it perfectly clear that I will announce the valleys initiative when I have completed my discussions with the various authorities, local authorities and agencies concerned. I am glad to say that good progress is being made. Of course the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) must be delighted at the considerable factory programmes that have been announced, even before my announcement, and the considerable improvements that have been made. The hon. Gentleman must be very pleased at the progress that is being made around Merthyr Tydfil. I am sure that he will be delighted by the good news that will come soon. I understand his impatience, but I look forward to him cheering loudly when the good news comes.

This has been a year of very good progress. If we apply ourselves positively in the areas that I have suggested today, even better progress will be made in the years ahead.

5.52 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): May I first register the Opposition's objection to the fact that a highly controversial statement was made before the only Welsh debate of the year. It was known that Welsh Members were already angry about the fact that the debate was taking place today—we do not want to enter into that issue again—and it was ridiculous to have a statement that inevitably would take an hour or more to complete in advance of this debate.

This is our first debate on the Floor of the House on the present state of Wales and its future since the Secretary of State took up his post. It gives us an opportunity to check the progress that has been made after six or seven months. The debate also gives us the chance to see whether the reality matches the hype. One thing that we have not been short of in the past few months is hype from the Welsh Office.

Let us first consider the background. Let us establish the wide range of deprivation with which we must contend in Wales and measure that against the rather narrow objectives that the Secretary of State has set himself.

The high level of unemployment—it has doubled in Wales—is a problem in itself, but it tends to divert attention from equally serious problems in Wales. We are, after all, one of the poorest parts of the United Kingdom. Only one other region has lower average earnings than Wales.

Mr. Morgan: Northern Ireland.

Mr. Williams: Average earnings in the south-east are a full £3,000 a year higher than in Wales. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) said, Northern Ireland is the only area with a lower income per head. Our internal purchasing power and our internal ability to generate demand is the most limited in the United Kingdom. The gap is widening.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Williams: No, I want to make some progress in my speech.

The gap is widening. If the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) cares to consider the figures, he will see that from 1979 to 1987 average full-time earnings increased by 110 per cent. in Wales, but by 135 per cent. in the south-east. Other parts of Britain, which already have a purchasing power advantage over Wales, are seeing a higher rate of increase in purchasing power.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that he has left out part of the equation whereby one must consider gross disposable income after taxation and after making allowances for mortgages? When we consider the high cost of housing in the south-east and elsewhere in parts of the United Kingdom, we see that the disparity in spending power between Wales and other areas is not as great as the right hon. Gentleman claims.

Mr. Williams: I would be fascinated to hear the hon. Gentleman produce some figures—perhaps in his speech rather than in mine—to demonstrate his point. I have seen no figures to substantiate that view. Indeed, the figures that I have seen for mortgages, which tend to vindicate our fears about income levels in our part of the country, reveal that the repossession rate is at its highest in Wales.

Faced with the problems of poverty and low pay, the Government's answer is to tell the lowest paid, including manual workers in local government and in hospitals, that they should take pay cuts and lose their jobs. The Government have told the impoverished and people on supplementary benefit that from 1 April they will not need to look to the Department of Health and Social Security for grants. If they want help, they will have to accept loans.

The lowest income families in Wales are being told that they must live on credit. That is the Government's soulless approach to the problems of low incomes and low pay.

A similar argument can be made about homelessness. I must state right away that I recognise and welcome the achievements that have been made in renovation. I am glad that more renovation work will be carried out. There is no point of difference between us on that. However, homelessness is about roofs over heads. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) tried to make the point that while homelessness has increased by 28 per cent., and while we are confronted with record housing lists in virtually every housing authority in Wales, it is not good enough to look to the council house building programme and discover that it is now one fifth of what it was in 1978. The figure of 744 new council houses built in 1986—the last year for which figures are available—must be seen against the background of the "Welsh Digest of Statistics", which dates back to 1949. In that context, the 1986 figure is the lowest ever for public sector housing. The Government's policies are not meeting the needs of the homeless. Indeed, their policies are not aimed at meeting those needs.

There are also enormous health problems in Wales and we went into these problems in great detail in the Welsh Grand Committee recently. There are shortages of nurses and doctors. There is a shortage of hospital beds, and we now have the smallest number of hospital beds in Wales since the Health Service was established. Not surprisingly, the corollary to all those circumstances is that waiting lists are intractable and defy all the efforts of the Minister to meet his commitment that from 1 April no one would wait more than a year for in-patient treatment. In fact, there are still more than 9,000 people on the lists.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): Will my right hon. Friend cast his mind back to Question Time on Monday, when we tried to get a response from the Minister about the position in Mid-Glamorgan where there have been such drastic cuts to the Health Service that there is a shortage of nurses and in their final hours old people are being left to die literally without nursing care? Does the Secretary of State for Wales not have a responsibility and an obligation to be accountable? It is his Health Service and he is responsible for it now.

Mr. Williams: Exactly. One of our misfortunes is that it is virtually impossible to get answers on anything from the Secretary of State for Wales. Question Time is almost a farce. The Secretary of State even answers questions that have not been asked.

The problems of health, homelessness and low incomes are just a few of the problems that we find in what the Secretary of State likes to describe as booming Wales. Those problems exist in addition to the problems of unemployment. They exist at the present level of spend and that is important for what I want to say.

Mr. Raffan: The right hon. Gentleman was fair in acknowledging the amount that the Government have spent on home improvements. I know that he would not be so churlish as to refuse to concede that vastly increased amounts have been spent on the Health Service in Wales. There has been a 39 per cent. increase. I am sure he will acknowledge that that has been made possible by the strength of the economy within the United Kingdom. How much extra would his Government spend on the Health Service if they were ever returned to office, and what waiting lists would be acceptable to his Government zero, or a few thousand here and there? Can he give us some answers?

Mr. Williams: The hon. Gentleman knows that we went into those matters in detail just the other week and I shall deal with them later. However, as he has asked the question, I shall give him a passing answer. The hon. Gentleman referred to the affluence and strength of the economy, which he said had enabled the Government to increase their annual spending, after deductions for inflation, by 4·1 per cent. That is still below 4·6 per cent., which is the rate at which it increased under the previous Labour Administration. I do not want the Secretary of State to anticipate what is to come, because I am sure that he will be delighted with the comments that I intend to make about his programme. — *[Interruption.]* It is difficult for the Secretary of State when he is trapped on the Floor of the House. He cannot run out and hold one of his press conferences. He has to communicate vicariously through his Parliamentary Private Secretary.

As I have said, the problems I have described exist with the present level of finance. Therefore, they can be solved only if extra finance is devoted to them. I was intrigued to read the article in *The Observer*, entitled "Brave New Wales." It talked about the funding that the Secretary of State had obtained for Wales. It contained the delightful quotation about when he asked the Cabinet for money. He said:

"I received every penny I asked for".

Many newspapers went overboard when the right hon. Gentleman announced his new programme for spending in Wales for the next year. He talked about an enormous increase of £259 million. It sounds very good. The trouble is that when it is matched against what was being spent this year, and once we deduct 4·5 per cent for inflation, the increase of £259 million becomes a cut of £6 million. That should not have been a surprise to the Secretary of State, because the figures are stated clearly in table 2.2 of the Treasury's White Paper on public expenditure. Therefore, the man who received every penny that he asked for is receiving £6 million less than last year, and £54 million less over the next three years. Perhaps it is not the Secretary of State's fault. Perhaps the crafty Chancellor of the Exchequer did not show him table 2.2 and he was conned in the same way as the press.

The Secretary of State has a bit of a problem. Wales is expecting more because it has been told by the Secretary of State that there is to be more. He has the additional problem of having to spend 2 per cent. more on health just to stand still, and he has to finance the new valleys initiative. All that has to be found from the new sum of money, which is £6 million less than the amount that caused all the problems that I mentioned at the start of my speech.

The hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) asked about health, and I am glad that he did. I will tell the hon. Gentleman what has happened. One of the ways in which the Secretary of State will achieve some of the other things that he has announced today is by pruning the pattern of spending on the Health Service. As I pointed out in the Welsh Grand Committee, the right hon. Gentleman boasted that spending under this Administration has

[Mr. Williams]

increased by 4·5 per cent. a year after allowing for inflation. I pointed out that, because he had left out the first year, the figure was 4·1 per cent.

It is in the Secretary of State's interest to accept my figure rather than his, otherwise what is about to come will make his plans look even worse. His predecessor achieved an increase of 4·1 per cent. but for the next three years the Secretary of State will have a total increase of only 3·3 per cent., or 1 per cent. a year. At a time when the NHS in Wales is near collapse, we have Mr. 1 per cent. in the Welsh Office. If he had sustained his predecessor's level of increase — not even the level that we reached — £30 million more would be spent on health in Wales next year. Think of what could be done with that money in Rhonnda, Mid-Glamorgan and other parts of Wales. It would help deal with the problem of waiting lists and the shortage of nurses. If the right hon. Gentleman had sustained that increase, we would see an extra £190 million spent in Wales over the next three years. That is all happening under the smiling, genial, good-hearted Secretary of State who believes that he has his priorities right.

There is no hope of reducing waiting lists or of eliminating the shortages on the programme that the right hon. Gentleman has proposed. As I said on Monday, I never thought that I would say that we were better off when his predecessor was holding the office of Secretary of State. The achievements are certainly very different from the image the Secretary of State has tried to portray.

Let us look a little more closely at some of the right hon. Gentleman's claims about jobs. I was delighted to hear the announcement of 300 jobs at Baglan. I am pleased about the location of the Patent Office, which will create about 500 local jobs. That will go a small way towards replacing the 8,000 Civil Service jobs that we have lost since the Government took office. At least it marks an about turn on their part. The Government abandoned the dispersal policy which, under my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), brought the DVLC to Swansea. They have now had to say that they got it wrong and that they will start doing it again. Not only does it make regional sense, but, as the Secretary of State had the cheek to say, it makes economic sense because it is cheaper. If that is so, why have they not been doing it for the past eight years? We welcome the Japanese investment. It is a continuation of a programme pursued by successive Governments. Inward investment is welcome in Wales. There is no difference of opinion about that.

A measure of the inadequacy even of those achievements is that in the week of the announcement about the Patent Office we lost 2,000 jobs in the coal industry. We gain on one hand and lose on the other. The latest figures show that since the Government took office there are 170,000 fewer people in employment. We should put that in perspective. I have mentioned the 300 jobs at Baglan. It would need 10 Baglans every week for a year to replace the jobs that have been lost since the Government took office. Understandably, we are delighted about Baglan, but we need one and a half Baglans a day just to get back to where the Government started. In the employment figures published within the last fortnight the Government announced the changes by region from June 1983 to June 1987. Wales was the only region that had a decline in civilian employment — employment plus self-employment — in the past four years.

The unemployment claims of the Secretary of State are also interesting. As we have already said, unemployment in Wales is still double its former level. We obviously welcome any decline, but the Secretary of State is not satisfied to say that there has been a change. Whatever it is, he has to be doing better than someone else. He could not just report the information blandly. He had to say:

"unemployment . . . has fallen faster in Wales than in any other part of the United Kingdom." — [*Official Report, Welsh Grand Committee*, 2 December 1987; c. 1.]

I asked the Department of Employment whether that was true. I thought that that Department should know, because it collects the statistics. In the Welsh Office they cook them; in the Department of Employment they collect them. Yesterday the Department of Employment gave me an answer. Over the past year, from January 1987 to January 1988, Wales was seventh—not first—out of the eleven regions for the rate at which unemployment had declined — 56 per cent. behind East Anglia, the best. I thought that it was not fair to judge over just one year and that I should find out the rate over two years as well. I found that, again, sadly we were not first, but fifth—23 per cent. behind East Anglia. Over three years we were fourth — 19 per cent. behind the south-east. Over four years we were fifth — 44 per cent. behind the west midlands. Our relative position is worsening, not improving. We have slipped from being fourth at one time during the four-year period to being seventh over the past 12 months. In fact, in the past 12 months our position has fallen below the United Kingdom average.

Mr. Morgan: I wonder whether my right hon. Friend is being entirely fair to the Secretary of State. Perhaps there was a day or a week in which unemployment in Wales fell faster than in any other region. Has my right hon. Friend considered that?

Mr. Williams: Yes, I have. The trouble with us Welsh is that we are too good natured. I thought that those figures might be unfair to the Secretary of State and that he merited a chance. Why should he be lumbered with what happened over four years? He has been Secretary of State for only six months, so I thought that I should look at the past six months, because perhaps it is true that we have done better over that period. Sadly, the position is even worse — [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] We are fourth from the bottom, eighth out of 11 regions and 75 per cent. behind East Anglia, 53 per cent. behind the south-east, 32 per cent. behind the south-west, 23 per cent. behind the west midlands, 21 per cent. behind the east midlands, and so on. This is the Wales that the Secretary of State says is doing better under him than any other part of the United Kingdom and better than most parts of Europe.

Let us look again at the right hon. Gentleman's policies in relation to these basic facts. It is important to get the basic facts on the record. It is only fair to those who write the reports on what is happening in Wales that they should be given an alternative view from another Government Department.

Mr. Ray Powell: If the Secretary of State has been misleading the House and the nation with his replies and statements, he should be called to the Dispatch Box to

explain whether his figures are correct, or whether the departmental statistics that my right hon. Friend has announced are correct.

Mr. Williams: On the basis that I never expect a real answer from the Secretary of State, I am sure that we can expect the Minister of State to try to cover it.

Mr. Peter Walker: I shall quote the figures from the Department of Employment. These are the figures published by the Department, in which every month for the past 18 months it has pointed out that the two regions with the biggest drop have been Wales and the west midlands. In the 12 months to January 1988 Wales is placed second, as regions are ranked by falling rate of seasonally adjusted unemployment, at minus 2·3 percentage points. The west midlands pips Wales at the post with 2·4 percentage points. The United Kingdom plus GB is 2 percentage points. When change as a rate of unadjusted unemployment is considered, Wales is first over 12 months, minus 2·8 percentage points, and second over 20 months, minus 2·7 percentage points, compared with the west midlands rate of minus 2·9 percentage points. That is the manner in which the Department of Employment has always published its monthly figures.

Mr. Williams: I invite the right hon. Gentleman to discuss the matter with the Minister who provided the answer and to look at the record during his own period in office.

Mr. Morgan: I think that the Secretary of State will admit that what he has just quoted was not the percentage fall in unemployment. But the difference between percentage unemployment at the beginning of the period and the percentage unemployment at the end date is 2·3 per cent. That is not the fall in unemployment expressed as a percentage of its previous level, which is the true measure of the fall in unemployment.

Mr. Williams: No doubt the right hon. Gentleman will have to explain himself to the House, and perhaps, on some occasion, he will condescend to talk to us here, instead of going into little private rooms to talk to the press, and we can then examine these matters in greater detail.

Faced with a decline in civilian unemployment—the only decline in all the regions in the United Kingdom—and a slip in the charts of regional unemployment, what does the Secretary of State do? He abandons the regional development grant and then has the effrontery to say, "It shows how right I was to do it, because everyone is scrambling to get the grant before it finishes. It is so good that we are going to get rid of it." That is the most peculiar argument that I have heard in my life—no, I am wrong, it is not. There is another argument—the justification of what is coming instead of regional development grant.

The Secretary of State is getting rid of regional development grant but, glad tidings for the valleys, they are to get his new regional investment grant. Well, that is delightful. What is it all about? The right hon. Gentleman spells it out with pride. *The Observer* article refers to it glowingly. Under the right hon. Gentleman's new scheme firms will get 15 per cent. of fixed capital costs, up to a ceiling of £15,000, for only 24 jobs. That is an average of £625 a job, which is taxable—so firms even have to pay tax on the assistance that they receive. The Secretary of State says, "That is a good deal, but in exchange you must give up your regional development grant." That also happens to be 15 per cent. of fixed capital. But there is an option: instead, one can go for an untaxable £3,000 a job, not £600 taxable, and up to 200 jobs, not up to 24 jobs. I reckon that when the right hon. Gentleman went to the pantomime with his parents he was unduly impressed by Abanarzar. Up and down the valleys it is a case of new lamps for old, a £600 grant instead of a £3,000 grant. The Secretary of State thinks that he is doing well by the people of the valleys and that they will swallow the proposal.

The Secretary of State said that there was to be an enormous increase in regional aid. A recent article in *The Observer* stated:

"Walker is adamant that the higher budget will be sustained for another two years."

What is this enormous increase? The increase in spending on the Welsh Development Agency this year is £3 million. The enormous increase in combined regional development grant and regional selective assistance amounts to £6 million. Will that enormous increase be sustained, as the Secretary of State promised, over the next two years? The figure goes up by £3 million next year, comes down by £4 million the year after and remains at £4 million for the following year. Over the period, therefore, the figure remains virtually the same. So much for enormous sustained growth.

Perhaps that is unfair. Perhaps the enormous increase is occurring elsewhere. Regional grants go up from £98 million this year to £104 million next year, an increase of £6 million. Next year, they come down to £87 million—£11 million below what they are now. The following year they come down to £80 million—£18 million below what they are now. Instead of enormous sustained growth, there is a cut of £21 million over the next three years. In each of those years the amount of regional assistance is over £100 million less than when the Labour Government were in office. The cumulative loss to Wales from the time when the Government came to office to the end of the Secretary of State's planning period is almost £1 billion.

We are to be fobbed off with the valleys initiative. It might compensate the valleys for being robbed of their development area status, regional development grant and rate support grant. The Secretary of State has said that the funds must come from within the existing budget. The valleys initiative will be paid for by other parts of Wales. Those other parts of Wales do not begrudge the valleys having extra money, but it should be just that—extra money for Wales. It is not good enough for the Secretary of State, in a week or two, to go on television and claim the credit for that extra money for the valleys, while his officials are scurrying around other parts of the country picking the pockets of local authorities to make up the cash needed.

The Secretary of State referred to the improvement in derelict land. We welcome that and are glad that the WDA will use some of its money for that purpose. However, I am fascinated by the Secretary of State's claim in respect of an earlier valleys initiative. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent and my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) will be particularly interested in the article in *The Observer* of 21 February. In that article the Secretary of State stated:

"When I was Secretary of State for the Environment in 1970, we launched the first derelict valleys clearance. I toured the valleys—some of the places I saw were horrific. Now they're attractive again."

[Mr. Williams]

When I was a Minister at the Department of Economic Affairs in the 1960s, I remember dealing with derelict land clearance in England. I wondered what the Secretary of State for the Environment was doing in the Welsh valleys, given that his remit does not extend there, so I took the trouble to telephone Lord Cledwyn. We eventually unpinned him from the ceiling and got him to the telephone. He was incredulous, because he, as Secretary of State for Wales, set up the derelict land programme after the Aberfan disaster.

I thought that perhaps Lord Cledwyn and I had got it wrong, so we telephoned the official in charge of the derelict land clearance unit under Lord Cledwyn and under the Conservative Administration.

Mr. Rowlands: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Williams: Do not spoil it, Ted. It is good at the moment.

I did not even have to ask the official. As soon as he was told who was on the telephone, he said, "Do not worry. I know what you want to talk about. I have written a letter because I am so annoyed about it." He went on to say, "The Secretary of State did not even visit Wales." Then he qualified that statement by saying, "I have got it wrong. He came to Wales later, when he was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I met him in Cardiff and took him to Ebbw Vale. He said that he was rather nervous because they had been throwing tomatoes at him in Cardiff and, as he was going to Ebbw Vale to announce the closure of part of a steelworks, he was not eager to do so." The official assured him that the people in Ebbw Vale were very genteel, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent will confirm, and the Secretary of State was treated with courtesy during his visit.

The Secretary of State is claiming responsibility for the land clearance initiative in the valleys, but that started years before he came to office. It was the responsibility of another Department and he had no hand in it whatsoever, yet he expects credibility in Wales. They will call him "Shoni Walker" in the valleys.

Mr. Rowlands: My right hon. Friend is right. I cannot improve upon his devastation of the Secretary of State. I was the Minister responsible for the derelict land unit in 1969-70. My predecessor was Mr. Ifor Davies and the unit was established by Lord Cledwyn. I cannot recall the Secretary of State being involved in any such initiative. The Welsh Office led that initiative as a result of the terrible tragedy at Aberfan. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Williams: We are only too happy to look at the record. Perhaps the Secretary of State would care to send it to us. I see that he is staying firmly in his place at the moment.

Wales has been bled by the Government. It is not just a question of £1 billion of regional assistance. We have lost £750 million in rate support grant to our local authorities. We have lost spending power through the increase in unemployment. That is why Wales does not have the capacity within itself. It is so financially weakened that it can solve its problems only with more public expenditure.

The resources are not available within Wales itself, yet the Chancellor of the Exchequer has £6 billion to £9 billion at his disposal in the Budget. No Government in our history have ever had such freedom to solve problems in this country, if only they chose to do so. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State thinks it funny that we shall have long waiting lists and shortages of nurses and operations, yet he received every penny that he wanted. Although there is £6,000 million, he settled for peanuts. Indeed, he went further. He threw some of our money into the kitty and said, "Give that in tax handouts, too. It will help the people in the south-east. They need it."

The Prime Minister and 68 per cent. of her Tory Members of Parliament want tax cuts. They want to pretend that the poor, the homeless and the cash-starved schools and hospitals do not exist. To them the dogma of a tax cut is more important than dealing with needs.

Mr. Peter Walker: Go back to the IMF.

Mr. Williams: Good Lord. Is that the level of contribution that we can expect from the Secretary of State? There is £6,000 million — every penny that the right hon. Gentleman could want. Everyone who is on a waiting list in Wales should receive a note saying, "You are waiting because the Secretary of State could have had every penny he wanted, but he did not choose to ask for money to help you."

As Welshmen, we want the resources to be used for our people. We want to return to a prosperous Wales, but we also want to retrain our values to be those of a caring society. Neither is possible under the policies of this Government.

6.30 pm

Sir Raymond Gower (Vale of Glamorgan): The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) had a good deal of pleasure in making his speech. He seemed to enjoy himself hugely, but some of his comparisons were extremely far fetched. I cannot understand why he should have compared the standard of living in Wales with that of the south-east of England. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] The south-east contains a capital city, London, with about 6 million people whereas only 2·25 million people live in the whole of Wales. To compare the two is absurd and the right hon. Gentleman must realise that.

It cannot be gainsaid that for the past two years there has been a steady and sustained improvement in, and better news of, the Welsh economy. There is every reason to hope that that will continue for a good time to come. For 20 successive months unemployment has decreased. I do not know whether Labour Members when listening to the figures were reflecting shock or dismay — [HON. MEMBERS: "Dismay."] It was probably dismay. I do not think that they want good news about the Welsh economy. They seem to glory in any misfortune that afflicts it and anything that is an improvement seems to be a matter for regret. What is more, the improvements have been fairly well spread over the whole Principality. I know that some areas have not done as well as others, but the improvement in the unemployment figures has been spread over most of Wales and that is encouraging.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned the decline of our basic industries which is a most painful process. I tend to agree with him that the worst may now be behind us, but occasionally another coal mine is closed. Coal mining is labour-intensive. *[Interruption.]* Recently we had one—[HON. MEMBERS: "Two."] Two, then. One recent closure undoubtedly created more unemployed

people than closures in smaller industries which we have as substitutes in an effort to replace basic industries. It is against that background that we must consider that we will probably still have troubles in these industries, but the worst is behind us.

There have been great improvements in our older industries and my right hon. Friend referred to some of them. There has been a good deal of investment. I have noted the £171 million invested in the strip mill in Port Talbot—that is not a negligible sum—the £30 million invested in the new project at Shotton in north Wales and the £50 million invested in the Trostre tin-plate works. Those are large sums and we now have a smaller, slimmer industry which is successful and highly competitive.

I wish that I could comment in the same way on the coal industry. It is sad that we still do not have the development at Margam which could be so advantageous to south Wales. British Coal cannot achieve an agreement for six-day working which is necessitated by the large investment involved. What a prize that would be for south Wales, if only the agreement could be reached. I hope that wiser counsels will prevail and that all those concerned will reach agreement and enable the project to be launched because the sooner the better. I understand that if it is deferred unduly some grants from Europe could be prejudiced. I may be wrong, but that is my information.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Does my hon. Friend agree that if we could get the enthusiasm and support of the Labour party and it had a word with its paymasters in the NUM to support the six-day working week, we could go ahead with this £90 million scheme which would provide 800 mining jobs?

Sir Raymond Gower: I was about to comment on the number of jobs. There will probably be 500 or 600 during construction, so the scheme would be beneficial to industry in south-west Wales.

The omens for the development of Welsh industry are decidedly good. Whatever the Labour party may feel, I am sustained by the views of the CBI. Its latest reports have in every case been optimistic. In Wales we command about 20 per cent. of all inward investment. That is a remarkable proportion, especially when one reflects that geographically Wales is only a small portion of the United Kingdom and has only about 5 per cent. of the United Kingdom population. I am delighted that part of that is to come to my constituency at Dow Corning in Barry. Such investment does not usually create a lot of jobs, but it makes existing jobs far safer and shows that the American company has great confidence in the future of its industry in my constituency. We should all be pleased about that.

The extent of inward investment in Wales is reflected by the fact that more than 250 of our undertakings are in overseas ownership. That is a high number. I understand that more than 50,000 people are employed in those industries which are the result of inward investment. In other words, one in five of all employed people in Wales is now working for companies from abroad, so that shows the importance of this type of investment.

Despite many of the doubts expressed by some of the prophets of doom on the Labour Benches, Welsh industry will continue to expand. Support for industry increased by £54 million over the past year to £194 million in 1988. I imagine that the figures given by the right hon. Member for Swansea, West, which bore little resemblance to those quoted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, will also have to be looked at carefully.

Although the right hon. Gentleman has doubted it on a number of occasions, it is advantageous that my right hon. Friend has arranged that the benefit of much of this money will be in the hands of the Welsh Development Agency. It is well equipped to help the Welsh Office in preparing packages that can be attractive to investors either from overseas or from other parts of the United Kingdom. Also impressive is the huge factory building programme, to which the right hon. Gentleman made little reference, which the WDA has promised for 1988-89. That will cost £130 million, and it is likely to create 1·5 million sq ft of factory space and provide employment for more than 4,000 people. This is a formidable factory building programme which must be of benefit for south Wales.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): The hon. Gentleman has been telling us about the factory building programme, and foreign investment, both of which are good to see. However, does he not realise that there about are 140,000 fewer people in full-time employment in Wales today than there were in 1979? On the basis of the good news that he is bringing us, when will unemployment be less than it was when his Government came into office?

Sir Raymond Gower: Making statements of that kind is useless. Such forecasts are usually most inaccurate and liable to disappointments or to overstatement. One thing is certain. It is not easy to replace by these methods the large number of jobs lost from the old basic industries. It is a difficult task, but considerable progress has been achieved. We have reason to be optimistic about our chances of improving on what has already been achieved.

The right hon. Member for Swansea, West spoke as if one can diagnose the effect of moneys voted by Parliament for particular purposes without any reference to the interchange between those moneys, the activities of companies and the provision of private capital. It is a combined process. Economics and industrial science are not exact sciences and it is far too difficult to make prognostications in that way.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should be impressed with the needs of the industrial valleys. He should not deprecate that. This is analogous to the position in other parts of the United Kingdom. We do not have the inner city problems but we have industrial valleys, which are similar. In due course, much will be done, but this is a continuous process.

Even with all the difficulties facing us, the progress of the Welsh economy is such that we can have optimism about the years ahead. We cannot forecast events overseas. We may have problems similar to that caused by the Arab increase in the price of oil in the 1970s, or difficulties with the American economy. Such factors will have an effect on us, but the Welsh economy is leaner, more efficient and more able to meet these unforeseen difficulties than it ever was before. It is more varied. It is not on a narrow base and it is not in the precarious position that it was in when we took office. We have a much stronger economy to face the challenges of a new world. In that spirit, I hope that we will wish Wales good luck.

6.45 pm

Mr. Brynmor John (Pontypridd): Many people think that the greatest disadvantage of the Secretary of State is that he is not a Welshman. That is a convincing argument, but there is an equally convincing argument for another disadvantage. It is that he was the lead Minister in the local government reform of 1972, which split Glamorgan into three, and created Mid Glamorgan, an area in which I was born, in which I live and part of which I have the honour to represent. In doing so, he created, in material terms, a poor county with a disproportionate number of problems in health, employment, housing and poverty. It is so impoverished that it has never had enough central Government money to reverse the legacy that he bequeathed to it. I make no apology for reminding the Secretary of State that his parentage of this county imposes on him obligations to rectify the situation; I shall take the opportunity to remind him of this on every possible occasion.

I said that it is an impoverished county and the economic trends for January 1988 show that Mid Glamorgan is Britain's poorest county, with a gross domestic product per head of £3,248, which is less than half that of Greater London. I know that the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower) thinks that we should not aspire to the standards of Greater London, which are far beyond us, but we cannot generate our own resources with such a low GDP.

Spelt out, as I spelt it out to the Welsh Grand Committee, in health terms, that means a lower standard mortality rate, longer stays in hospital, higher rates of permanent sickness, more visits to general practitioners and the highest number of prescriptions. We need more public money and we need it redistributed, as the Secretary of State half said that we should, to take account of those problems.

Health problems also have a local government dimension. Therefore, I shall remind the Secretary of State of those problems, because many of the permanently sick are in the community, where we want them to remain, if only because it is more expensive to have them in hospital. However, if they are to stay in the community, they need to be provided with invalid aids and adaptations. The provision of these facilities does not cost the same in every part of the country. Mid Glamorgan is probably the most expensive county in the whole of Britain for those requiring such aids and adaptations. The nature of the terrain, with steep hills, narrow valleys and steps to houses, is just one factor.

Mr. Win Griffiths: My hon. Friend referred to the need to keep our sick in the community wherever possible. Is he aware that in Mid Glamorgan, for example in the Ogwr district, we are about 31 per cent. short of community nursing, based on the Telford scale which itself is not over-generous?

Mr. John: I was going to refer to that. As I live in Mid Glamorgan, I am aware of what my hon. Friend has said. However, the cost is greater and the demand, for obvious reasons, is greater. Because we are such a poor country, the generation of self-help is less easy to achieve. Therefore, one places a greater reliance on statutory services.

Let me tell the Secretary of State about the situation in Mid Glamorgan. I believe that what hon. Members can bring to this debate is an extrapolation of local conditions, based on their knowledge of their own areas, to illustrate problems all over Wales. Demand is expanding very rapidly for telephones, under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, for invalid aids and for house adaptations. Next year, just to keep the present level of provision, Mid Glamorgan county council needs to spend £500,000 more than it is spending this year.

At the moment, it has had to suspend its issue of telephones under the Act, in order to review the number being issued and what is happening to the applications —because they are dealt with on fairly harsh criteria, so great is the demand. The demand for aids and adaptations has created such a backlog that our people wait many months for a visit from the technical officer. The position has now been reached where Mid Glamorgan has had to say that no new cases will be processed until it has cleared the backlog. No new chronically sick people will have any adaptations to their homes or any aids to mobility until the backlog is cleared.

Mid Glamorgan county council may not technically be fulfilling its statutory duty, but, even if it is barely doing so, it is as conscious as we are that it is not meeting the need, coping with the demand or alleviating the discomfort, pain and anxiety felt by these invalids who try to live in the community but who find it increasingly beyond them.

This is what the Secretary of State calls a rich, booming country. Can he and his Government tolerate this situation in Mid Glamorgan under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act? Are the Government concerned about invalids in the community in Mid Glamorgan? If so, what do they propose to do about them?

Turning to coal mine closures. I will ignore the rather bizarre contribution of the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan on that issue. We have had three colliery closures and one coke oven closure in my area in the past two years: Lady Windsor, technically in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clywd) but on the borders, Cwm and Nantgarw collieries and Nantgarw coke oven—with the loss of 3,000 jobs.

It is characteristic of the extractive industries that they impose a tremendous amount of environmental damage on the localities in which they are situated. I have been upset by the uncaring attitude of British Coal towards its responsibilities when it closed these industries. It lacks a sense of obligation to put right past damage. Not merely does it spend no money—perhaps that would be too much to expect—but it does not care what industries take over the sites it leaves.

At Cwm colliery, for example, there is a proposal to set up, as part of a larger company, a zinc and copper smelting process. That is unacceptable to people who have put up with years of obtrusion by the coal mining industry. It is unacceptable that this should be the new standard. The local authority and the local inhabitants demand that henceforth industry should chime with residential needs and not the other way about—which is why in south Wales we got into our present environmental mess: residential development was supposed to chime with whatever industry saw fit to set itself up in a particular area.

When the Minister replies to the debate, he will tell us that there is a planning appeal on this matter. He must assure the House that this appeal will be held in public and

not be done by an exchange of documents. Both he and his inspector must take into account the inherited disadvantage which people are simply not prepared to put up with for an industry which shows every sign of being the fly-by-night type.

I appeal to the Welsh Office to take the closest possible interest in the redevelopment of the Nantgarw colliery and coke oven site. Two main obligations must be met before we think about future use. The first is to provide play areas for the use of the children of the Rhydyrhelyg and Oxford street area, who have lived cheek by jowl with this most noxious coke oven industry for many years and who have inadequate facilities. That should be a charge on British Coal, but it is a charge on the Government rather than on the local authority.

Secondly, we have an obligation to open to the public the site of the old Nantgarw china works, one of the two most famous porcelain works in Wales, which I believe deserves a much wider exposure to the public gaze.

This is a prime site. It is within a quarter of a mile of the dual-carriageway A470 and less than three miles from the Coryton interchange. We must reserve this site for a major employer and not allow it to be dissipated in a number of small units. We need a major concern that will enhance the reputation and stature of south Wales. This is almost a test case on how we should be able to do it and, I hope, a model of how it will be done.

I hope that the Welsh Office will take that into account. It is as responsible as the Welsh Development Agency and local government for ensuring that this is done. We do not want this site frittered away; we want it used for a prestigious major development.

I want to make two other constituency points which highlight general points that could be made about Wales. I am glad that the Secretary of State flew with the German banker over the areas to which he referred, because if he came down on the ground he would see traffic congestion much at variance with the idyllic picture from 3,000 ft up. He would see the position on the A473 between Tonteg and Talbot Green, serving not only a number of industrial sites but the potential site of a new district hospital and many shopping facilities. He would see the utter congestion which has brought the traffic at the roundabout in Talbot Green to a complete standstill; it was caused by a particularly foolish planning decision of an inspector from his office, which sited a market there. It has reduced the whole area to chaos.

What we want there, and what I hope the Welsh Office will take an interest in, is not merely, before the end of the decade, a start on the Talbot Green end of the bypass but a complete bypass of Tonteg and Talbot Green, so that industrial sites can be properly serviced and our industrial future assured.

My last point is one that I am very diffident about making. I hope that the Secretary of State will recognise that I do not delight in rumour-mongering, but from several people whom I believe to be trustworthy and who are certainly not themselves rumour-mongers I have heard disturbing reports about the future of the Mint, that it is not to remain in south Wales and that the site is to be turned into an open prison. That may be a sick joke in the area, because the architect of the Royal Mint made it fit to be an open prison without any adaptation at all. The Secretary of State will readily accept that if this was true it would be a devastating blow to our whole region, and would do away with the very enlightened work of the Labour Government in bringing the Royal Mint to my constituency.

I do not believe the rumour myself, and I have said as much. I hope that it can be firmly and categorically denied when the Minister replies, thus putting an end to anxiety in the area.

The Secretary of State must face the fact that, while we are glad of every amelioration of the situation in south Wales, if we are faced, as we may be in the Budget, with a situation of public squalor versus private affluence, we in Mid Glamorgan will react very angrily. We are already a poor county, but in so far as we are rich it is in our people and in our public provision.

I expect the Secretary of State to fight with his customary vigour — perhaps with more than his customary vigour, in view of what my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) has said — to secure from the Chancellor a commitment to public investment in Mid Glamorgan, so that its people enjoy in the future the decent conditions which many private industrialists have denied them in the past.

6.59 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): I do not propose to follow the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) in what seemed to me a model constituency speech, although at times he sounded as if he were demanding from the Welsh Office 365 days of sunshine for his constituency.

It may be hard for hon. Members who entered this House since 1979 to believe that, when the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), who is no longer in the Chamber, was in the Department of Trade and Industry, he was one of the most effective members of a Labour Government who were not notable for the effectiveness of their Ministers. It is sad for those of us who retain some affection for him to see how cheaply he has descended into vindictiveness and vituperation to make his points, thereby destroying his reputation and damaging the cause of Wales.

The right hon. Gentleman said that he had been in contact with Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos. He should find half an hour to pop along the corridor to another place and have a word with Lord Cledwyn to find out how one can be the Leader of an Opposition, make points effectively and validly and still retain the respect of the other side of the House and enhance the reputation of one's own party.

The debate must start from, and keep coming back to, the inescapable fact that Government policy has put Wales firmly back on the road to recovery after what inevitably has been a very painful transitional period when we have moved away from over-dependence on industries which were doomed to obsolescence. The evidence, from British and foreign experience, is that the policies which were pursued by the Labour party when it was in power, and which it still advocates in opposition, would have perpetuated and intensified the process of seemingly inexorable decline by steady loss of competitiveness. I set any criticisms of Government policies against that background.

My criticisms derive from analysis and deduction; the prosperity is there for all to see. Certainly, the Government are not to be faulted on the road programme. Work on the vital A55 expressway is proceeding at a fine pace. I want

[Sir Anthony Meyer]

particularly to congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister of State on his wise second thoughts about the junction to be built at the bottom of the Rhuallt hill improvement scheme. Now the traffic really will be able to flow westward without interruption. And there's the rub. That will mean real trouble for Rhyl and Prestatyn, unless we get a proper link road very soon to bypass the notorious Rhuddlan bottleneck and connect with the coast road.

That is supposed to be a matter for Clwyd county council, which is showing no sense of urgency whatever in bringing forward the planning and construction of a link road which is vital to the very survival of Rhyl and Prestatyn as tourist destinations—as my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) pointed out in an intervention.

Can my hon. Friend impart some sense of urgency to Clwyd county council? Is there any chance that the Welsh Office might take over that road as a trunk road and get on with building it? Can the Minister get Clwyd county council to start acting in the spirit of the Government's directives on the proper signposting of tourist facilities? There is still no proper signposting of Rhyl, still less of its tourist attractions along the A55 expressway.

On the subject of roads, may I give a public airing to a minor but annoying matter on which I have already written to my hon. Friend the Minister of State. It seems absurd to build a spanking new dual carriageway and then, a few months after it is completed, to dig up one lane and cone it off to lay the approach roads to service stations which were planned when the expressway itself was planned. It is really not good enough to say that private contractors are responsible for building access roads to service stations: it is plain bad planning. It costs a lot of money and causes a great deal of annoyance to motorists. There must be a better way of doing those things.

I do not propose to come back to the subject of the poll tax, beyond saying that the more I listen to the arguments on both sides, the fewer advantages and the more defects I see in the whole measure. Nor do I want to go on about the Health Service, which we debated in the Welsh Grand Committee. The Government's record is good, but they will have to find some way in which to ensure that increases in the pay of Health Service workers are not paid for by cuts in Health Service facilities. I know that the Budget is not concerned with those matters, but if it introduces tax cuts without any clear sign that something will be done to fund NHS pay increases, the Government will face considerable difficulties with their own supporters in the House and outside.

I am a good deal more enthusiastic about the great Education Reform Bill. That seems to me to be about 85 per cent. good, which is as much as anyone could reasonably expect from a Government measure. The one aspect that seems to worry my constituents, or fill my mailbag—which is not quite the same—is the allegedly damaging effect on religious education of being excluded from the core curriculum. I believe those fears to be utterly groundless, but I hope that the Minister will be able to offer further reassurance.

The part of the Bill that worries me is the opt-out provision. I do not believe that that will do any serious damage to my part of Wales, or perhaps to anywhere in Wales, but we are putting just a little too much emphasis on the concept of parent power. Parents are concerned with schools only while their children are there. It cannot be right to give them a preponderant voice in the future of a school for many years after their children have left.

A particular problem arises for denominational schools. Catholic schools take in many non-Catholic children. Under the open enrolment system, they could be obliged by an unsympathetic local authority to take in very large numbers of non-Catholic children. As a result, under opt-out, the very character of a school could be brought into question. Once again, I welcome any reassurance from the Minister. In general, I welcome the Bill. I do not believe that it will ever acquire the magisterial status of the 1944 Act, but it is a useful step in the right direction for education.

The success of the Government's policies has been due to the stern, indeed harsh, stand which they took against inflation in the early years, and the new spirit of competition fuelled largely by the privatisation programme. The ultimate nonsense of nationalisation was Austin Rover, whose fruits are still sour.

The headlong retreat from nationalisation has brought some errors, but more benefits. It is generally admitted that the privatisation of gas and the telephones has been less than fully satisfactory, because in neither case did privatisation bring any real competition. That criticism is valid. There seems to be little advantage in replacing a public monopoly with a private monopoly. However, I am not sure that that it necessarily follows that it will always be right to break up major public utilities. In the case of British Steel, the Government seen to have chosen to keep the present structure largely intact, and to rely for the spur of competition on foreign imports. I am sure that they are right.

However, for electricity the Government have adopted a different and, I believe, a wrong approach. I do not propose to discuss the merits and demerits of the White Paper as they affect the electricity industry. The new structure might, at any rate in the short run, bring down electricity tariffs. I am concerned with the effect on the coal industry, in the context of Wales.

I can understand, and indeed I support, the Government's aim of reducing the nation's dependence for its power supplies on the coal industry, given the repeated attempts of Mr. Arthur Scargill to impose his will on the elected Government. However, it is one thing to reduce dependency on coal; it is another, dangerous, thing to unleash forces which could destroy the coal mining industry for ever and make us totally dependent on imported coal. The world market in coal is highly artificial. The total amount of coal traded in the world is only twice the annual consumption of the CEGB alone. If we close pits, we close them for ever. The pits flood, and new miners will not reopen them later on.

If, as proposed by the Secretary of State for Energy, we are to have two competing groups in energy generation, they will be under irresistible pressure to find the cheapest source of energy in the short term. That means a rush for the limited amounts of imported coal available. Had there been such a set-up from the start, would we ever have had the huge investment at Dinorwic, which plays so vital but so intermittent a role in keeping the lights burning and the wheels turning? Will we get from such an outfit the development of the Margam coalfield which is so essential to Wales?

Mr. Scargill will indeed have piled even heavier clods on the grave of his reputation if, by making difficulties for

the profitable operation of Margam, he has tilted the balance of the argument in favour of a scheme of electricity privatisation which now gravely threatens the prospects of Margam. Opposition Members can do something really useful for Wales by throwing all their influence, publicly and privately, on the side of those elements in the National Union of Mineworkers who want to negotiate seriously with the coal board over working conditions there. Here at last is something which the right hon. Member for Swansea, West could do to help.

7.10 pm

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): I suppose that we would have needed cloth ears if we had not expected to hear in the debate the rendition of the Hallelujah Chorus from the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) and other Government Members. We have become accustomed to hearing that Wales is on the upturn. True, there have been occasions when we have seen advances, and these we welcome; but let me remind the hon. Gentleman that people are still becoming unemployed in Wales today and that all the jobs on Baglan moor will not be sufficient to make up for the shortfall.

The hon. Gentleman will know that recently I had an Adjournment debate in which I raised the closure of Abernant colliery, announced by British Coal. I am aware of the decision of the work force to accept the closure, but it would be wrong for any of us to believe that this will be the end of the matter. The pit will close after only about 30 years' life. It is not an ancient pit. When it closes, problems will arise and we shall see the effects of the blow on the community which surrounds the colliery. With the closure of Wernos washery, which was announced at the same time as the closure of Abernant, some 800 men will be out of work and 800 job opportunities will be lost to an area which already has one of the highest levels of unemployment in the United Kingdom.

The people who live in that part of Wales want to hear from the Secretary of State that he and his Department are actively and purposefully pursuing a solution to the unemployment problem which will have such a serious effect. The product of Abernant is the highest quality anthracite in the world. Abernant is running into geological difficulty, but that is the nature of mining. Once that difficult period was past, if the pit were persisted with, there would be extensive, rich reserves of the best anthracite. That is what the area offers. It has always been claimed that there is a shortage of anthracite and it comes rather strangely that Abernant is to be closed when such reserves could be won if only British Coal had the will to do so.

Of course, we know that it is hoped to make up the shortfall of anthracite by importing anthracite at dumped prices from China and from opencast sites. It should be made clear to Ministers that neither of these means is acceptable. The dumping of Chinese coal will only destroy the Welsh anthracite industry. Also, Ministers should remember that there is great and growing hostility towards the extension of opencast sites. It is no good Ministers thinking that the hostility can be contained. It is growing, especially in my area, since the announcement of the closure of Abernant.

We look to the Secretary of State to make it clear to British Coal that it has lost the right to deferential treatment over applications for the extension of opencast activities. We look to the right hon. Gentleman to protect the lives and the environment of people who have had to suffer from opencast mining for more than 40 years. They deserve as much consideration as others have received in other places.

Another matter which we should ventilate in the debate was dealt with in Monday's edition of the *Western Mail* under the headline:

"Shelter condemn Welsh bedsit 'scandal'".

The report said:

"Almost half the bedsit homes in Wales lack proper fire escapes . . . nearly 6,000 homes in Wales used for bedsits do not have the proper fire escape facilities . . . despite Welsh Office calls for registration schemes, there is growing evidence that most of the 37 councils in Wales"—

thankfully, this does not apply to the local authority in my constituency—

"have no idea how many bedsit homes they have in their areas."

According to the report, there is growing evidence that local authorities are ignoring fire precautions.

I urge the Welsh Office to take a stronger line. We have had evidence of late of a spate of fires. Before the debate started, a ten-minute Bill was introduced which drew attention to the danger from materials which are used in furniture. We are well aware that lives have been lost because of dangerous material. Much of that material can be found in bedsits and in flats. It is vital that a satisfactory means of escape should be available from flats. I ask the right hon. Gentleman to tell the House what he proposes to do about the introduction of effective registration of properties which are in multiple occupation, so that they may be identified and we may ensure that adequate fire precautions are installed. Those are the positive steps that the Welsh Office can take. I urge it to take the initiative and ensure that those people's lives are protected.

No one can be unhappy to hear of improvements in the economy of Wales, but we are not satisfied with the pace at which those improvements are being made. We look to the Welsh Office to ensure that identifiable economic improvements are made to allow our people in Wales to live the kind of lives that we all believe they have a right to enjoy.

7.20 pm

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): It is 800 years since Geraldus Cambrensis—Gerald of Wales—commenced his tour of Wales in my constituency. It is 400 years since Bishop Morgan translated the Welsh Bible, which was a significant event. In two years, it will be 100 years since our great parliamentary predecessor, Lloyd George, entered the House. We should remember, too, that he disestablished the Church in Wales. We have wonderful traditions in Wales. We have a language that has survived against all the odds, although it has taken an almighty battering in the process. We are a nation of survivors.

It is a miracle that we have come thus far. Will we continue to survive? Without a shadow of a doubt, one of our greatest assets is our people. How will the Government treat our people in the future and how do we wish them to be treated? Wales can be said to be both a land of problems and a land of opportunities. There is truth in both statements.

At the heart of Wales lie its rural and industrial areas, and I want to address myself to both. We are beset by unemployment and low pay in some of those areas. For example, mid-Wales is the poorest region in Great Britain.

[Mr. Richard Livsey]

The level 2 region containing mid-Wales is the poorest in Wales. Mid-Wales has a population density one sixth of the European Community average. In mid-Wales, one job in four depends on agriculture. Mid-Wales is the most remote rural area of England and Wales. Those of us who represent the area must constantly remind the Secretary of State and his Ministers of those facts.

Agriculture is our staple industry and family farms are very much part of the fabric of our countryside. However, on many of those farms the management and investment income is about £6,000 — according to the farm management survey — and that sum has to be lived on as well as showing a return on capital investment. The bedrock of many family farms is the sheepmeat regime, and we believe that the present regime should be kept intact. We realise that the Secretary of State was one of the architects of the sheepmeat regime. We ask him to go to Brussels with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to help sort out the mess created by the stabilisers that have been put on the sheepmeat regime.

There is a crisis in Welsh agriculture. In one west Wales estate agents' office, 576 farms are up for sale. Clearly, that signifies great problems in the rural communities. Their culture and language, which are very fragile, are affected. Transport and education cost more and housing often costs more. We have witnessed the creamery closures at Felinfach and Llangefni and much of the rural economy is fading.

Efforts are being made through Mid-Wales Development and the Welsh Development Agency to put things right. Undoubtedly, some good things have been done but more must be done to bolster our rural economy. We have hidden unemployment and youth depopulation, and our population is being replaced with older people who put a strain on social services, general practitioner services and so on. We need a vigorous rural economy, not one which is fading away.

I was brought up in a Welsh village, and I can remember my mother telling me when I was about 20, "There is nothing here for you, my boy. You will have to go away to earn your living." I am sad to say that in many places that is still the case. The picture is uneven. Some areas — mainly those in the east of Wales — are doing reasonably well, whereas areas in the north and west are down on their uppers. If we are to develop our rural economy, we must do so evenly throughout Wales and not in a patchy fashion. There are National Health Service ancillary workers in my constituency on £50 a week, yet the European poverty level is £135 a week. The other day, I heard that one worker in my constituency earns £1.66 an hour. That is not good enough.

We need development in rural areas, and housing problems must be tackled. Like many hon. Members, I condemn the arson attacks on housing in Wales but hon. Members should realise that they are symptomatic of the problems in rural Wales, where local youngsters cannot afford to buy houses and there is no housing to rent. People feel very bitter. The Government should be prepared to listen to those with whom they get on well, such as the Country Landowners Association, which proposes a scheme whereby farmers sell land for housing for local people and whereby local people have priority for housing to rent as well. We welcome the new Welsh Housing Corporation and ask it to address the problems of housing not only in industrial but also in rural areas.

This afternoon, Sir Geraint Evans visited the House as part of a campaign to save Craig y Nos castle in my constituency for use as a Welsh music school and a centre of cultural excellence to which the public have access, and where they can listen to good music. It would also be used to train those with musical talent. We had a very successful meeting attended by Members of this House and of another place. It was decided to ask the Secretary of State whether we could meet him in the next 24 hours to discuss urgently the future of Craig y Nos castle. I should be grateful if the Minister would pass the message on to his right hon. Friend.

The sparsity factor in rural areas must also be addressed. I ask Ministers to let us know when the results of the integrated operations initiative in Brussels between Dyfed, Gwynedd and Powys will be announced. We urgently need assistance with our infrastructure.

In industrial Wales, we have watched the decline of the coal industry. The hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman) mentioned the closure of Abernant. Miners in my constituency work at Abernant. The pit has plenty of reserves of coal if only the necessary investment had been made in it. We fear that at some time in the future it may be used for opencast mining. We will have none of that blight in the south Wales coalfield. We have suffered enough already. Having been raped in the 19th century, we do not want to be raped again by opencast mining in the 20th century.

Electricity privatisation is a body blow for the south Wales coalfield. British Coal has been responsible for the butchery of jobs and electricity privatisation could be our death knell. It is an extremely unwise move, as the dependence on imported coal will undermine our industry.

There are not enough real jobs in Wales. There are 211,000 people in part-time jobs, 50,000 on part-time training schemes and 145,000 out of work. We need real jobs, especially for males, who have lost so many jobs in heavy industry. *[Interruption.]* I should make it clear to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) that I know that female employment is also extremely important, but we must provide balanced employment.

The valleys initiative is clearly to be welcomed. I ask the Secretary of State to extend it into the Swansea valley and especially to Ystradgynlais in my constituency which, although in Powys, is still an old mining community with miners living in it and opencast mining around it. It is very much part of the south Wales valleys, so I particularly request that that be done.

The future of Wales must lie with our young people, but do they have a future in Wales? Clearly, we welcome inward investment, but what is the Secretary of State doing to produce new Welsh entrepreneurs in Wales and employment in Wales for Welsh people? What is he doing about the teaching of management and the backing of indigenous business? It is often easier for people from outside Wales to obtain grants to come in than for those working there to obtain assistance to expand or set up businesses. We urge the provision of indigenous cash to provide jobs for Welsh people.

We must also produce more housing, which is a major problem, especially housing for rent, and we must bring back rural development grants, but enough has already been said about that.

Finally, the basis for the future must be new industry, new jobs, education and research. We must give confidence to a new generation of Welsh people. Let them be employed, let them earn a decent income, let them be housed properly and let them reach their own potential in their own country. Let them all feel as I do and be proud to be Welsh men and women.

7.33 pm

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): In the *Western Mail* yesterday, a report of Welsh Question Time by Mr. Jon Hibbs contained an allusion to St. Peter in Wales—perhaps a somewhat premature canonisation of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I am sure that there will be plenty of religious foundation for tomorrow's report. The Opposition speeches have shown that the darkest forces of Welsh non-conformity are alive and well and living in the Labour party. The prophets of doom, continually peddling gloom and despondency, are happy only when preaching despair.

For a moment the speech of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) was enlivened as he put on a little pantomime, playing to his own Benches—"Oh yes he did, children. And what did he do then, children? Oh, no, he didn't." It was wonderful stuff for the Opposition children. For Conservative Members it would have been funny if it had not been so sad.

This is our St. David's day debate. It began at 5.15 pm when it might reasonably have been expected to begin at 3.40 pm. As a result, we have a much shortened debate. The point of order raised by the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) plainly showed that Welsh Members on both sides were getting fed up with the points of order that were delaying the start of our debate. I, too, am sorry that the debate is not taking place on St. David's day itself. There are many good traditions in this place and I should like that one to be much more firmly maintained, although I disassociate myself from the spurious point of order raised by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell).

Yesterday, on St. David's day, the Post Office produced new stamps rightly commemorating the 400th anniversary of the translation of the Bible into Welsh, and Cardiff's official bid for the 1994 Commonwealth games was launched in London. Cardiff has made a magnificent stand and its bid was the first in the field. It is an immaculate application and deserves to be accepted throughout the Commonwealth. I am sick and tired of the stories dredged up by the British press to try to damn Cardiff's case, apparently fed by elements elsewhere in the Commonweath or its organisation. In this context, I applaud Mr. Hanif Bhamjee, secretary of the Welsh anti-apartheid movement, who came to London to take part in the launch of the official bid and to rubbish allegations that arguments about apartheid could be used in any way against the Cardiff bid. My neighbour the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) nods. All those who have been involved in the bid and all who support it are united in going forward on that front. We hope that by the time the Seoul Olympics take place the Cardiff application will have succeeded.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments about the anti-apartheid movement in Wales. One of the greatest problems seems to be that journalists in London have not yet realised that Wales is completely separate from England in the context of the Commonwealth games. The great confusion in the press yesterday seems to have been generated by failure to appreciate that one little fact. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be beneficial if there were greater knowledge about the aspects that he has mentioned and about the separate Welsh tradition in sport?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman has a point, although I believe that the matter goes deeper than that and is a more general issue. Welsh Members of Parliament often have to work hard to correct various erroneous perceptions that are peddled about Wales. I noticed that our national newspaper took the opportunity to send a copy of its St. David's day edition to every Member of Parliament. It should be read by all Members at least on St. David's day, if not more often. The only good thing about having our St. David's day debate on 2 March is that we have all had time to read the St. David's day edition of our national paper.

Reference has been made to employment and, inevitably, to unemployment in Wales. I join my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and other hon. Friends in referring to the proposed new development at Margam. We should all wish to see that development come about, and it would be a tragedy if the enemies of the coal industry succeeded in thwarting that investment. That is not what south Wales and its miners want to see. There was no mention of that important proposal by the right hon. Member for Swansea, West or, so far as I recall, by any other Opposition Member. It is such an important project that I can find no explanation for that omission, unless it be the perpetual comperison which can so fairly be made between the positive Conservative approach and the continually negative Labour approach.

I know that we had a debate about health recently in the Welsh Grand Committee, but this is our only assured opportunity of a debate on Welsh affairs on the Floor of the House, so I want to emphasise the importance of health in the Principality. My constituency has a great interest in health as it has probably more health provision than any other constituency, with the University hospital of Wales, the dental school, the radiotherapy hospital, Whitchurch hospital, which is one of the largest mental hospitals in the country, and the new BUPA hospital. They provide services not only to my constituency but over a much wider area.

The presence of so much health provision in my constituency provokes a good natured rivalry over who is the biggest employer in Cardiff, North. I fancy that it is the Health Service, but civil servants, particularly those at the Inland Revenue office at Llanishen, will not agree. I have the privilege to represent the Inland Revenue department that deals with the tax affairs of every hon. Member.

Health is of great importance. We can all make comments about wanting more money spent on the Health Service. That is a simple prescription, but it is far from being a complete answer. The answer is not simply to throw more money at the Health Service, though I want more money to be spent on the Health Service and I am pleased to see that more money is being spent. There has been a more than worthwhile increase in real terms in spending on the Health Service—39 per cent.—under this Government.

[Mr. Jones]

I hope that there will be appropriate references to the Health Service in the Budget on 15 March. I wonder whether this might not be the time to move to an innovation in funding for the Health Service by introducing a health stamp or health tax. It might be imagined that health and social security spending is derived from the national insurance stamp. However, spending on those matters is far greater than the revenue obtained from the national insurance stamp.

A health stamp or tax would achieve a better flow of funds as revenue from a percentage-based stamp or tax that increased over the years. There would be more certainty of cash flow for the Health Service. As tax raising proceeded, there would be an opportunity to decide by how much it should be raised by a health stamp or tax, allowing for expansion beyond natural growth. Further, it would be better appreciated how much is being spent on the Health Service. That would be no bad thing. The approach at present seems to be that the Government can spend more money on the Health Service and that they conjure money out of the air. There is no such thing as Government money; it comes from the pockets of taxpayers.

Mr. Raffan: My hon. Friend is putting forward some interesting ideas about possible ways of funding the Health Service. Did he notice that there was nothing in the speech of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) about the Labour party's policy for the National Health Service? He did not say how much more it would spend or where it would get the money from. Does my hon. Friend recollect the Labour party's appalling record on the Health Service when it was last in power, when it made 30 per cent. capital cuts in Wales?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend is right to remind me of those matters and he makes his points very well. I recollect that he intervened in the speech of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West and asked what level of waiting lists would be acceptable to the Labour party. The right hon. Gentleman fobbed him off and said that answers would come later. As so often with the right hon. Gentleman, no answers were forthcoming.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned the review of the Health Service. In that regard, my right hon. Friend has opportunities that are particular to Wales. In Wales we have no regional health authorities but regional services. In some ways, the Welsh Office could best be regarded as the regional health authority.

My right hon. Friend has talked about the Welsh Office's relationship with the health authorities in Wales. He said that that relationship was close, and that the Welsh Office was aware of the best and the not so good, the efficient and the not so efficient in the Health Service in Wales. I know that my right hon. Friend intends to present the Welsh point of view during the Cabinet's debate on the Health Service so that the Cabinet is fully acquainted with what is happening in Wales. We in Wales will learn and benefit from what happens at that Cabinet review.

The review will present unique and particular opportunities for my right hon. Friend. What is happening in the Health Service in Wales should not mirror what is happening in the Health Service in England. There are opportunities for different applications, and I should like to offer some suggestions.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend has seen early-day motion 690 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord), which has been signed by 88 hon. Members. It calls for the restoration of the post of matron. That is an eminently worthy suggestion. It is not nostalgic harking back to when the matron was the natural head of each hospital. The motion rightly refers to a person who could deal with consultants and who would understand the needs of nurses and patients. In the past, the matron was vital to the best running of the hospital.

It has been claimed many times that aspects of health funding are decided on the basis of who shouts loudest, without consideration being given to whether there is enough money to pay the maintenance contract on the latest and largest super-duper piece of equipment that has been purchased. In that regard, the role of matron could be significant.

General managers in hospitals should be promoted to the position of matron or, where appropriate, new appointments for matrons should be advertised. Despite what has been done to reinforce the management structure of the Health Service, it is not succeeding. I remember that about 18 months ago I had to make some urgent approaches on behalf of my constituents at the weekend. I tried to get in touch with the general manager of one of the largest hospitals in south Wales. The health authority did not answer its telephone because it was closed for the weekend. I rang the hospital and asked to speak to the general manager or whether there was any way that I could be put through to him. The response that I received was "None of the administrators work at the weekend." I said,"I want to speak to the general manager. He is supposed to be in charge of the hospital." The response was the same, "None of the administrators work at the weekend."

The membership of health authorities, general managers and the Welsh Office are involved in a three-way tug. The Welsh Office issues circulars laying down objectives to be achieved. General managers try to devise policies to achieve those objectives. In the middle there is a lay and part-professional health authority, which adjudicates and forms the third part of those pulls.

The reason for health authority memberships is that there should be democratic input into the Health Service. However, we already have the community health councils. What is their purpose if not to provide democratic input into the Health Service? I am coming to the conclusion that health authority memberships are superfluous to the achievement of the best priorities in the Health Service. They are frustrating the work of general managers. I shall give a recent example of that in Cardiff. I was horrified by the reactions that greeted the proposals from the health authority management for achieving more heart surgery in Cardiff. The Welsh Office has set South Glamorgan a target, in providing regional services of cardiac surgery, of doubling the number of operations. There is now an opportunity for BUPA and other similar hospitals to carry out those extra operations. I am horrified at the political opposition to that proposal. I cannot see a logical or soundly based reason for it.

I have heard health authority members utter such phrases as, "We are not recruiting sergeants for BUPA." To go to a BUPA or similar hospital is to achieve extra

facilities for the benefit of patients on NHS waiting lists. Those facilities are surely not standing idle, and we need them for temporary periods if we are to achieve the necessary improvements. Those who oppose such moves are politically motivated. I cannot believe that they are speaking with any concern for the patients on waiting lists who would benefit from the extra operations. They are speaking for the most crude political reasons.

The same applies to the lack of progress in tendering in the Health Service in Wales. In England, £100 million has been saved in tendering—money that is then used to achieve extra patient care. The same motivation underlies the reasons why Wales is not achieving anything like the savings achieved in England.

Mr. Win Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman has made an interesting statement. He said that, through services being put out to tender in England, a great deal of money had been saved, and had then been spent on providing better services. Can he give us any specific examples of a better service being provided?

Mr. Jones: I do not have every fact at my fingertips, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman about the miserable progress that has been made in Welsh health authorities. So far, the West Glamorgan health authority leads the list, having achieved savings of £378,000. The Pembroke authority has saved £340,000, and the Powys authority £207,000. Considering their relative sizes, representing more sparse rural areas, Pembroke and Powys perhaps ought to be most congratulated on what they are doing to achieve further improvements.

South and south-east Wales, where the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) and I have our constituencies, are doing the worst. The nearest to an achievement is the Gwent health authority, which has managed the magnificent extra efficiency saving of £5,000. No such saving has been made in South Glamorgan, East Dyfed or Clwyd. The Gwent figure may, perhaps, fairly be compared with the English achievement of £100 million.

Let me make another suggestion to my right hon. Friend. Developers are interested in building new hospitals at their own expense, and leasing them to the health authorities. I suggest that the Welsh Office has the opportunity to take that a stage further: indeed, I tried to make the suggestion in Welsh questions on Monday. I was both heartened and disappointed by the reply that I received from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State. He said that he would be very interested in such a proposal, but that he and his colleagues would need to consider it very carefully. I cannot quarrel with the words that he used, which were absolutely correct. That is the only way in which a Ministry could consider such a proposal. But, going beyond the words, I invite the Welsh Office to seize on the concept, and to promote it enthusiastically.

In south Glamorgan's draft proposals for a new health plan, there is the possibility of a new hospital on the waterfront in Cardiff. I should like that hospital to be called the Cardiff Free hospital, and for it to be provided in the same way as the new kidney dialysis units in Wales, which have been set up, equipped and run by specialist companies. By running them at cost to the Welsh service, those companies are providing a far better and more efficient service for kidney patients. That precedent has been achieved with the new units at Bangor and Carmarthen, and the same could be achieved at the new Cardiff Free hospital, or anywhere else in Wales.

So marked, indeed, has been the achievement of the new kidney dialysis units in Wales that in October 1986 my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) moved a 10-minute Bill, which received an unopposed First Reading. He suggested that if the bold new initiatives taken by the Welsh Office to improve kidney dialysis treatment were followed throughout England and Wales, all the shortfall in kidney dialysis treatment could be eliminated without any more equipment, and probably without any more staffing.

I note that we now have the best record in the whole United Kingdom for kidney dialysis treatment. We needed to attain that record, because in 1979 we had the worst record. I know that the Welsh Office is considering proposals for new units at Cardiff and Merthyr. I urge that that consideration should be completed as quickly as possible, so that we can look forward to the establishment of the two new units.

In the Welsh Grand Committee, the right hon. Member for Swansea, West produced some form of scare about kidney dialysis treatment. He referred to an article by Mr. Roger Dobson in the *Western Mail*, warning that kidney dialysis treatment at the University hospital in Wales could be in danger of being rationed. I am also a student of what Mr. Dobson writes in the *Western Mail*, and I was pleased to see his article after the visit of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to Cardiff to see the dialysis facilities on 19 February. My hon. Friend sought to rule out any possibility of rationing of dialysis treatment. He said—and I am disturbed about this — that proposals are awaited regarding the demands for dialysis treatment in Cardiff. My hon. Friend stressed his sympathy, and said that he was concerned that the proposals had not been forthcoming before. It was not for the want of asking, he said.

I should also like to mention required request treatment in connection with transplants. My right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend will be involved in consultations with the Department of Health and Social Security on implementing recommendations of the Hoffenberg report. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security was able to tell me on Friday that a draft circular was under consideration, and the Welsh Office will be involved in that consideration.

I urge the earliest possible action for Welsh hospitals on the recommendation that hospitals should be reimbursed for the cost of organ removal operations, and that an audit should be set up of brain stem deaths, transplants and the shortfall in transplants. Audits are already in place in some English hospitals. I suggest that the Welsh Office takes the opportunity to make early progress with the audit for Welsh hospitals.

Above all, I stress the need for training for doctors and nurses in that most difficult area of approaching relatives about their wishes regarding transplantation——

Mr. Ray Powell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that the debate started late, and an appeal was made by the previous occupant of the Chair for hon. Members to cut their speeches down, so that all hon. Members would have the opportunity to speak. I know your views on debates of this character. Indeed, I know

[Mr. Ray Powell]

your view that speeches should on occasion be limited to 10 minutes. Would you do your best, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to ensure that hon. Members——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I take the hon. Gentleman's point, and I was very much aware of what he wanted to say before he rose.

The Chair has no power to curb the length of hon. Members' speeches—regrettably, I must say—but I hope that hon. Members will have regard to the fact that a number of hon. Members still wish to take part in the debate. I am afraid that, unless the speeches are briefer, some of them will be disappointed.

Mr. Jones: I wish to be as brief as possible in moving to a conclusion. I regret the interruption, which served to waste time, as did the bogus point of order raised by the hon. Gentleman earlier.

The review of the Health Service has opportunities peculiar to my right hon. Friend — opportunities to bring back matrons in hospitals, to end health authority membership, to improve management and priorities within the Health Service, to build on the success of the kidney dialysis unit, and to move forward on the Hoffenberg report. We can take satisfaction from what has already been achieved in the Health Service in Wales, but that does not mean that we are entirely satisfied and do not want more progress. I should have thought that every hon. Member would join me in wanting even better health provision in Wales — in wanting a happier healthier Wales.

8 pm

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): I shall abide by what you said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and be as brief as I can. I am sorry that the Secretary of State is not in the Chamber now, but I am sure that the Under-Secretary will fully brief him on the subject to which I want to draw the House's attention.

I shall confine myself to one important topic — enterprise zones and the Government's view that they are an important part of their economic policy. I refer to a judgment in the House of Lords, and I want the Minister to decide what the Welsh Office will do about that judgment, because it affects people in my constituency and in the constituencies of hon. Members in whose areas enterprise zones are to be found, and because it has national implications for the United Kingdom.

I refer to the judgment of 11 February 1988 in the House of Lords by Lord Keith of Kinkel, in which a number of noble Lords concurred, in the case of Clement, who is the valuation officer and the respondent in the case —he is the district valuer in the Swansea area—versus Addis Ltd, the appellant. This is an important matter and urgency of response is crucial. Addis, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), is just under a mile south of Swansea enterprise zone.

Both parties in the appeal agreed that the appropriate rateable value of the appellant ratepayer's factory is £36,500 if the consequences of the enterprise zone are taken into account, and £45,000 if they are not. The House of Lords held that the consequences of the enterprise zone should be taken into account. It also held that, although the Lower Swansea Valley Enterprise Zone Designation Order 1981 did not come into effect until 11 June 1981, Addis was entitled to a reduction in rateable value backdated to 18 March 1981 — before the enterprise zone even existed. It was only a dream in a planner's eye then, yet its rateable value has been reduced in such a way that it will have a saving of £9,000 of its rateable value, multiplied by the rate in the pound, multiplied by the number of years backdated — currently seven. Roughly speaking and taking the rate in the pound as an average of about £2, Addis will save about £126,000 as a consequence of the decision.

The case grew out of a local valuation court decision on 2 March 1982, held at Penllergaer in my constituency. Four occupiers of premises on the Garngoch industrial estate were involved. The case proceeded to the Lands Tribunal in 1984, and to the Court of Appeal on 18 December 1986. Addis was the only company to appeal to the House of Lords against the decision of the Court of Appeal.

I shall briefly examine some of the implications of the decision, which will be horrendous unless the Government respond quickly to allay the fears of people facing it. The Minister will have to respond to my points, so that people's fears will be allayed. First, the successful appeal by the company opens the door to any commercial occupier outside an enterprise zone applying to the district valuer for a reduction in its rateable value. The Garngoch industrial estate lies about seven miles from the enterprise zone. Is the whole of Wales and of the United Kingdom outside enterprise zones now eligible for a reduction in rateable value? In the area that I represent, companies are now approaching me asking me whether it is worth their while to apply. I am sure that hon. Members' postbags will fill up with such queries and district valuers' offices throughout the country will be inundated with work as a result.

Secondly, there is an immediate and traumatic effect on local authorities in West Glamorgan. In his letter of 19 February 1988 to the permanent secretary at the Welsh Office, the chief executive of Swansea city council estimated that the decision of the House of Lords is likely to mean that his council will have to find about £275,000, and the county council about £1·4 million, in respect of the previous years that will not be compensated for under the block grant arrangements. I hope the Minister will give some specific answers on the immediate problems facing local authorities in whose areas the Addis operation is sited, and on the obvious knock-on effects throughout a much wider geographical area.

The Secretary of State should give this matter priority; it is a potential cause of tremendous hardship for the ratepayers of West Glamorgan, and could be one to the ratepayers of many other areas. The Government have made great play of enterprise zones being an important part of their policy. I am sure that they have some advantages, but other important implications must be borne in mind.

Mr. Anderson: Does my hon. Friend agree that this is a matter not only of priority but of urgency? As the Minister will know, Swansea, in common with other authorities, is now setting its rate. That rate has already been increased, largely as a result of Government action on housing benefit and because of preparing for the poll tax. So here is another impost that was unforeseen and unforeseeable. Surely it is reasonable for the Welsh Office

to respond immediately to ensure that the ratepayers of Swansea are not clobbered — as they will be unless something is done now as a matter of urgency.

Mr. Wardell: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments, and I am sure the Minister will take them on board.

The Lands Tribunal decision on this matter in 1984 clearly upheld the view of the four operators on the Garngoch industrial estate that their rates should be reduced because of the presence of the enterprise zone. That opinion was overturned only on appeal to the Court of Appeal, and thereafter only Addis pursued the case to the House of Lords.

The Lands Tribunal decision spelt out exactly what an enterprise zone is. I do not propose to read the entire summary—it was a good one—of that decision, but I shall read the opening sentence:

"The Government's purpose in setting up Enterprise Zones is to encourage industrial and commercial activity in run-down areas by the removal of certain tax burdens and by the relaxation or speeding up of the application of certain statutory and administrative controls."

As the implications of that for firms outside enterprise zones are now coming to fruition, I hope that the Government will not abandon such firms, saying that it is hard luck on the local authorities, which will be dramatically affected, because those firms can get their rateable value reductions. I hope that the Government will not duck that issue and simply say that it is a matter for the local authorities to sort out. As my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) has said, the judgment was unforeseen and unforeseeable. I hope that the Government will respond to the judgment, consider it and hopefully bring forward legislation in the near future to sort out the problem.

8.9 pm

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I shall not follow the detailed arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell). Traditionally, this debate moves between constituency concerns and more general discussion about the "future of Wales" — a phrase used by my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) when he spoke from the Opposition Front Bench. We inevitably consider these matters in what is always a broad-ranging annual event. We must consider the changing economic realities of life in Wales. We must also consider the way in which they are perceived, the way in which we perceive ourselves in Wales and the way in which we are perceived from the outside. I suppose one must add, these days, the perception from Clun and Worcester.

There are images of Wales that have often done us a disservice in the past. Of course, some current images do us a disservice, and hon. Members have referred to the appalling events in Chester at the weekend. The more I find out about the details of those events, the more appalled I am at the potential serious loss of life that may have occurred in the city which historically and traditionally has so much in common with the part of north Wales in which I live and work.

We must be concerned about our image in Wales. It is important for incoming investment. It is also important for the way in which we see ourselves and think of our future. Part of the disagreement and different emphasis in the debate stems from different images of Wales. Some of my colleagues hark back to a form of Welsh community life that no longer exists. Some people still believe that they live in a Nonconformist Wales. The Wales of today is very secular and very different from the Wales of St. David's time. If St. David were to come back and visit us he would probably recognise that his Celtic or Catholic church had reinvigorated itself and become rather more Welsh in many senses in recent years. However, he would recognise very little in the life of contemporary Wales. The St. David that we think of is really a 19th century creation. We have re-invented St. David, in the same way as we have re-invented Owain Glyndwr and other traditions. Such re-invention has happened in many nations and is not exclusive to the Welsh.

We are in the process of inventing a new Welsh tradition of a high-tech, booming Welsh society—or at least in parts of the Welsh society. I am not critical of that, as it is an attempt to modernise Wales. The reason why we have survived for so long is that we have modernised and adapted our traditions. We have changed our attitudes, but have maintained certain aspects of our identity, and, perhaps most important, a sense of community which has managed to survive the various changes of community life.

We can clearly see how important and crucial those issues are to an understanding of the social and economic life of Wales today from a publication that has appeared since we last debated these matters. I congratulate the board of Celtic studies of the University of Wales for at last joining the 20th century. I say that because my first real job was with the board as a researcher. I lasted only three weeks. I do not know whether it was me or the board, but we were incompatible.

The board has produced an excellent publication, called "Contemporary Wales." It is a well-designed and well set out document. In the editorial, which leads into the discussion, the joint editors—Graham Day and Gareth Rees — consider the whole issue of the changing and different images of Wales. They stress that there is a danger of stereotyping. We can stereotype in terms of our traditional mining industry, in terms of the new Japanese factory and in terms of the protests surrounding the restoration and maintenance of language and culture. There is also official stereotyping by the Welsh Office, the Welsh Development Agency, WINvest and others. There is another image of Wales produced by HTV, BBC Wales, Radio Wales and by Sianel Pedwar, the Welsh fourth channel. All those different images are in conflict with one another. Clearly, we need far more understanding, in cultural and economic terms, of the real changes that are taking place in Welsh life, and that is what "Contemporary Wales" offers us.

I shall pick one statistic to illustrate my point about the changes in Wales. I want to consider the broad occupational distribution of those employed in Wales in a 40-year span. In 1948—two years after I was born, not that that has any significance, but it gives me a nice time span — the number of people employed in agriculture and foresty was a little more than 4 per cent. of the total. That figure is now down to just over 2 per cent. in 1948, 16 per cent. of those in work were employed in mining, and that figure has been reduced to less than 4 per cent. In 1948, 28 per cent. of people were involved in manufacturing. That figure grew to 35 per cent. in the 1971 census, but has flattened back to about 23 per cent. In 1948, 19 per cent. of people worked in transport and construction, and that figure had been reduced to just over 10 per cent. in 1986.

[Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas]

The major growth has occurred in services. In 1948 only 32 per cent. were employed in services, yet that figure had risen to nearly 65 per cent. in 1986. That is the major change in the structure of the Welsh economy, and that is why we can say that tourism now accounts for four times the number of jobs in the traditional industries of coal, steel and agriculture. That is a very important change with which we have had to cope in cultural terms and in the way in which we think of and understand life in Wales.

Although services contribute 65 per cent. of total employment and 55 per cent. of GDP, there is still in Wales a low share of key professional, commercial, financial and entrepreneurial services, which are the leading edge of modern economies. I notice that my comrade from the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan), is nodding in agreement with me. No doubt he will want to develop this analysis later. Of course, I was joking when I referred to the hon. Gentleman as a comrade.

Levels of research and development expenditure are extremely low in Wales in both the private and public sectors. There is a shortage of highly skilled technical employment. That is reflected in the fact that, although much reference has been made today to overseas investment, the result of that is not a high-tech Wales, but an intermediate-tech Wales. Production involves a predominantly low-paid female work force. There is clearly a gender division as well as a division of skill in technology.

This is not the brave new Wales that we heard about in the propaganda. Rather, capitalism has been restructured in the way in which it operates on Wales. The form of investment often involves the replacement of the heavy end of the old industry with the intermediate to low-tech end of the modernised industries. The full story must be told. That is why we need to emphasise the need for research and development as a key growth area in the Welsh economy. I notice that the Minister is agreeing with me.

Mr. Raffan: Before the hon. Gentleman moves away from research and development, I want to remind him of the importance of financial and professional services in the Principality. He has covered that point before, and I have intervened on it before. However, it is important to emphasise the great drawback to Wales in that it does not have a financial centre like the Scottish centre in Edinburgh. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not simply pass over that point about research and development. I hope that he will make that point forcefully, because it needs to be made.

Dr. Thomas: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that most helpful intervention. I agree entirely with him. I hope that there will be an initiative involving the Welsh Development Agency. I know that the WDA is giving priority to venture capital as a key area of improvement. It has produced a detailed report, which we have debated. I hope that the Welsh Office and the WDA will give that development a key role and that there will be an effective partnership between the capitalist sector and the public sector in Wales in this as in all areas.

Research and development are good examples of collaboration. I should like to draw the Secretary of State's attention to the science debate on Monday, obviously to my own intervention, at columns 722-23, and to the statement of the Secretary of State for Education and Science at columns 725-26. The right hon. Gentleman referred to the report of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, in which university research centres are put forward as an example of inter-disciplinary work and as a way of forging links between higher education research and industry. As far as I am aware, four centres have been announced by the Science and Engineering Research Council, none of them in Wales. I believe that 18 centres are planned, none of them in Wales.

It is important that the University of Wales, the polytechnics, colleges of higher education, industry and the Welsh Office should get together to ensure that we have at least one of those university research centres. The Welsh Office should use its role in higher education in Wales to bring those elements together and to bring the University of Wales into the 21st century, where it should be.

I shall make one other point before sitting down and allowing my colleague the hon. Member for Delyn to make his speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a matter for the Chair, rather than for the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Thomas: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would not wish to usurp the difficult job of the Chair in this debate. That is why I shall be brief, unlike some Conservative Members. I accept your strictures.

Wales is changing economically, culturally and politically. I hope that it is also changing its own image of itself. I find it most distressing that there are still defensive images. I can understand why people feel defensive about their Welsh culture, language and tradition, because they have felt for a long time that the traditions are under attack. I now find that the Conservative party has decided to take over, lock, stock and barrel the Welsh traditions. The right hon. Member for the City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) made an important speech in his capacity as chairman of the Conservative party. I shall quote from an article in the *Western Mail*. It was written by Jon Hibbs, so it must be accurate. It said:

"The Tory party chairman . . . last night sought to portray the Government's achievements in the Principality as stemming from the roots of Welsh history, culture and tradition."

The article went on to say that the right hon. Gentleman "told party workers they should draw strength from the Welsh political tradition that was now reflected in the Government's own radical reforms in education, housing and local government finance."

I have news for the Tory party. It may decide that it wants to relate itself to Welsh traditions, but I should tell Conservative Members that we have all sorts of Welsh traditions, which are always changing. I do not think that the notions of independence, self-respect and pride in the community, which are apparently the new qualities that the Government are advocating, have anything to do with Thatcherism. They are to do with the positive aspects of one of the Welsh traditions — the emphasis on the relationship between the community and the individual, not on the division between the two, which unfortunately seems to be the attitude of the Government.

The community in Wales has always changed and adapted. Old traditions have changed and we are now creating new traditions for ourselves. The most important tradition will be that in which Wales sees itself playing a

much more active role in the international community. I agree with the views expressed about the Commonwealth games. In the Commonwealth games Wales is a separate nation.

As an autonomist, I would say that it is important to make the point that we have direct representation at international level. When we apply, as we are now doing, for the Commonwealth games to be held in Cardiff, we are doing that as the Welsh nation. It has nothing to do with the Government or the Prime Minister. It has nothing to do with the Foreign Secretary or Southern Africa. The Welsh nation, with its own Prime Minister in the role of the Secretary of State, is applying for the Commonwealth games to be held in Cardiff. It should be seen as that by people outside.

Increasingly Wales sees itself, not as part of a declining British state, but as part of a Western European integrated market. We look to 1992 and the growth of that integrated market. Our surrogate Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Wales, said earlier that there was a great opportunity for Wales within the integrated market. We can take advantage of that only if we have effective representation within the Community in our own right. I look forward to the day when the Welsh nation, as a historic European nation, has its role as a member of the European Community.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I repeat the earlier appeal from the Chair for brief speeches.

8.25 pm

Mr. Keith Raffan: The first half of the speech made by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) was remarkably redolent of the speech of my right hon. Friend Lord Crickhowell to the Cardiff chamber of commerce. I believe that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy once described it as one of the noble Lord's better speeches.

I am a little shocked that the hon. Gentleman is surprised by the point made by my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General, who is chairman of the Conservative party. The party has made a distinctive contribution to Wales, of which I know the hon. Gentleman is aware. It was a Conservative Government in 1951 who set up a separate Ministry within the Home Office to deal with Welsh affairs. It was a Conservative Government in 1957 who created the position of Minister of State, Welsh Office. It was a Conservative Government in 1960 who set up the Welsh Grand Committee and it was a Conservative Government in 1979 who set up the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North) *rose*——

Mr. Raffan: I am anxious to get on, but I am glad to give the hon. Gentleman an opportunity to contribute, however briefly.

Mr. Howells: I am listening with interest to the hon. Gentleman telling us what the Conservative party has given to Wales. After saying all that, is he in favour of giving us our own Parliament?

Mr. Raffan: The sort of devolution we have given in an administrative governmental sense is quite sufficient. The Welsh people made clear their verdict on parliamentary devolution in 1979. I know that the memory of the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) goes back that far, so I will not press that home too hard.

As the hon. Member for Meirionnyd Nant Conwy said, the Welsh debate is traditionally wide ranging. It is a mixture of what might be called "micro" and "macro" politics. Some hon. Members concentrate on constituency matters while others paint on a broader all-Wales canvas. I hope to do both.

Debates on Welsh affairs on the Floor of the House are rare. They are rarer than debates on Scotland or Northern Ireland because of Scotland's separate legal system and because of the tragic troubles that affect Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is all the more important that effective use be made of every opportunity—and any forum—to discuss and debate Government policy, administration and expenditure in relation to Wales.

In the Welsh Grand Committee there is a tendency to go round the same old tired circuit of subjects; variations on the same old themes. In fact, at times one might say that it is Enigma Variations in Welsh. I support the sensible suggestion made by the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman), the Chairman of the Welsh Grand Committee. I am sorry that he is not in his place as I would like him to hear this. I believe that he would nod vigorously in support, but he might be a little surprised. In a recent television interview he suggested that the Welsh Grand Committee should debate the reports of the Select Committee. That happened on only one occasion during the last Parliament when we debated the Select Committee report from the previous Parliament on "Water in Wales". Two Select Committee reports and Government responses from the last Parliament are, so to speak, in the queue and I believe that they are worthy of debate.

There is the major report on "Tourism in Wales" and the more recent report on "The Condition and Repair of Privately Owned Housing in Wales." I believe that the suggestion originally made by the hon. Member for Neath, which I support strongly, could bring about much improved co-ordination between, and greater integration of, the work of the Welsh Select and Welsh Grand Committees. I hope that it will have all-party support. It would be a way of making Welsh affairs more prominent in the House and, if I can be a little mischievous—I am sure that Opposition Members would agree—it would improve the Welsh Office's accountability.

I shall deal now with "micro" politics. A striking transformation is taking place within the Welsh economy and it is no more striking than in my constituency of Delyn. In the year to January the number of those out of work dropped by 25 per cent. In the two years to January the number dropped by one third and since the designation of the enterprise zone in 1983, unemployment has decreased by 42 per cent. In last year's debate on Welsh affairs my right hon. Friend Lord Crickhowell said:

> "Delyn is a particularly good example of what can be achieved if Government, local authorities and the public sector co-operate effectively together."—[*Official Report*, 2 March 1987; Vol. 111, c. 602.]

The Delyn enterprise zone, which the Government designated in the teeth of opposition from the Labour party, has played a significant part in bringing about that dramatic fall in unemployment. It has shown how effective an intensive, localised approach to unemployment can be.

[Mr. Raffan]

As "An Evaluation of the Enterprise Zone Experiment", a study commissioned by the Department of the Environment from PA Cambridge Economic Consultants, stated:

"The overall conclusion of the analysis is that real benefits are being provided to designated zones and their surrounding local economies."

Nowhere are those real benefits clearer than in Delyn: 1,267 new jobs in the zone, 91·4 per cent. of them full time and 86·4 per cent of them in manufacturing—which I know will be welcomed by the Labour party and which compares favourably with the average of 56 per cent. in all zones throughout the United Kingdom.

I have said before and I shall say again that more could have been achieved and more could still be achieved but for the tight physical constraints on the zone, its small size preventing it from realising its full contribution to the economic regeneration of north-east Wales.

I am aware that it is for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider proposals for new zones or extensions to existing ones in Wales. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has decided not to extend the enterprise zone experiment in England, but he has recognised that there may be exceptional circumstances when the creation of a new zone or the extension of an existing one might still be the best way of tackling a particular and localised problem.

In a written answer recently my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment revealed that this would depend on three factors. It would depend, first, on the nature and severity of the problem. In Delyn unemployment has been severe and highly localised. During the eight years from 1977 to 1985, a total of 6,700 jobs were lost in my constituency in the textile and steel industry, centring largely on the towns of Flint and Holywell.

The second factor is the likely cost-effectiveness of an enterprise zone in contributing to the solution of the unemployment problem. In Delyn, Government investment of £6·6 million has assisted in the creation of 1,267 jobs, which is a relatively good cost-per-job ratio.

The third criterion is the extent to which the authorities and agencies concerned can ensure that the zone is a success. Delyn borough council and the other agencies involved with it have already demonstrated that they can manage the zone successfully. Their achievement has been recognised in the accolade they received from the previous Secretary of State. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State will also be much impressed when he visits Delyn later this month. I hope that we can count on his support for Delyn's forthcoming application for the extension of its enterprise zone. I know that he will do battle with the Treasury on Delyn's behalf as effectively as he has already on Wales' behalf.

I should now like to paint on a broader all-Wales canvas. As the liaison Member of Parliament between the Wales Craft Council and Conservative Members I take a great interest in the craft industry. I welcome the "Welsh Craft Industry Study" commissioned from Mr. Tony Ball by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and mentioned by him in his opening speech. I accept and agree with its recommendations that the funding for the craft industry should be channelled through the Welsh Development Agency and Mid-Wales Development through a joint craft industry development service, while encouraging the WCC to operate as a trade association.

One section of the report particularly interested and excited me—"The Marketing Need for the Welsh Craft Industry—and for Wales". It made a powerful case for the co-ordination of the marketing approach of various agencies in Wales — the Welsh Development Agency, Mid-Wales Development, the Wales Craft Council and the Wales tourist board. I might also add the British Tourist Authority because of its role in promoting Wales abroad. At the moment all are involved separately and independently in marketing Wales and Welsh products within the United Kingdom and overseas.

There is no co-ordinated all-Wales marketing effort. What is the result? Across the whole spectrum, as the report demonstrated, there is inconsistency of approach, confusion of images and fragmentation of impact. In short, the total marketing potential of Wales and of the different agencies within it is undermined. Collectively, the agencies which I have mentioned in direct and indirect marketing have budgets of over £6 million. That money is currently spent individually and in a fragmented way on promoting Wales, its tourist attractions, business opportunities, culture, craft and other products.

There is an obvious and urgent need for a co-ordinated, integrated approach. Working together in promoting Wales and its tremendous potential in industry and in tourism could be to the great advantage of each agency without undermining the agencies' independence. The report puts forward imaginative proposals on how such a strong, integrated, corporate, national identity for marketing Wales could be created, at minimal cost but with enormous potential benefit.

Those recommendations make sound common sense. The members of the Select Committee involved in the inquiry into "Tourism in Wales" will recall one of the predominant themes — that Wales, unlike Scotland, lacked a clearly defined, "hard" image abroad. We recommended then that the Welsh Office should co-ordinate the relationships between, and the objectives of, the various bodies involved in tourism and issue policy guidelines on marketing.

We discovered, too, during that inquiry the considerable amounts of unco-ordinated promotional literature at local level, with inevitable duplication, and recommended that the WTB develop further joint marketing schemes to co-ordinate those local marketing efforts.

What is sensible for Welsh tourism is surely sensible for Wales as a whole. The *Western Mail*—the newspaper beloved of the Labour party — made that point succinctly and with great effect in yesterday's editorial. I shall quote from it only briefly because I know how it tends to raise Labour Members' blood pressure. They are all nice and quiet at the moment and I do not want to disturb them. The *Western Mail* said:

"Where Wales has failed in the past—from the earliest centuries of its history right up to our own—it has usually been because the common need has been sacrificed to local sectional rivalry."

A co-ordinated marketing effort would allow each agency to be promoted "as strongly and as independently as at present" but each could derive immeasurable benefit from being part of a stronger, corporate, national identity. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Welsh Office would obviously have to be the catalyst in bringing

that about, but I hope that the various agencies will also consider it seriously. If it is to be achieved, they need to give the necessary commitment and co-operation. I believe that promoting Wales in all its aspects in a co-ordinated way could result in "a powerful and sustained marketing initiative", as the report said, and help to accelerate our economic recovery.

Now surely is the time to carry out such an initiative, when a transformation is being wrought in the Principality. Like the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), I read *The Observer* a week ago on Sunday, although not perhaps the same article. The right hon. Gentleman was selective in his quotes. I shall be equally selective in mine. Under the heading "Brave New Wales" there is an article entitled, "Where there's a welcome for the World". It put Wales' dramatic economic success in a United Kingdom context. The article said:

"In 1987 Wales attracted more inward investment projects than any other region of Britain. Only 5 per cent. of the British populace lives in the Principality, yet it won 21 per cent. of overseas investment in Britain—3 per cent. more than the south of England's share and more than double the Scottish total."

If the Labour party does not want to take *The Observer*, although Labour Members have obviously been reading it quite a lot lately, let them take the *Financial Times* last Saturday which included a feature entitled "The Dragon Stirs". That highly objective article said:

"Wales is, in fact, undergoing enormous social and economic change . . . Unemployment has been falling faster than in the rest of Britain, investment rising faster, new work practices adopted . . . These developments and these changes have given Wales a vitality that it has not had for decades."

If Labour Members do not like the *Financial Times*, perhaps they could take *The Independent*, which they may think closer to them, and read yesterday's St. David's Day feature:

"After years of recession the Principality is taking off . . . the activity is welcomed by Mr. David Jenkins, General Secretary of the Wales TUC. Another union pragmatist, the controversial, yet respected Wyn Bevan of the electricians' union, says that a measure of the success of the Welsh economy"—

another trade unionist speaking about the success of the Welsh economy—

"is the increasing acute shortage of skilled labour".

If Labour Members do not like *The Observer*, the *Financial Times* or *The Independent*, they could have gone along, although it would have been an unusual environment for them, to the conference last week of the Institute of Directors and heard the Japanese ambassador speak glowingly about the economic success of Wales.

The article in *The Independent* I quoted went on to refer to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. It said:

"It is clearly to the Principality's advantage to have a cabinet Minister with clout . . . He has been so successful that a number of Welsh Labour Members—albeit privately—acknowledge that he is doing the best job of any Welsh Secretary, of any party, for many years."

It is not only Welsh Labour Members who acknowledge the excellent job that my right hon. Friend is doing. It is also Scottish Labour Members. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, with that perspicacity which is his trade mark, toddled along to the Library and asked for an independent analysis of public expenditure figures for Wales and Scotland. What did that analysis show? Up to the next general election, Wales will enjoy a 36·7 per cent. increase, compared with a 23·3 per cent. increase in Scotland.

We are reliably told that the hon. Member for Garscadden has been using that information as a stick with which to beat the Secretary of State for Scotland for failing to fight his corner in Cabinet as well as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. We are also told that that tactic is causing great embarrassment to Labour Members in Wales.

Mr. Alan Williams: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Raffan: I shall not give way in view of the right hon. Gentleman's "vindictive and vituperative speech," as my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) rightly described it.

We heard nothing from the right hon. Gentleman about what Labour would do for Wales. At least one member of the Labour party has made a realistic and revealing appraisal of the party's current position. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), an amiable fellow who is always frank, recently wrote of the Labour party, saying:

"We are relegated to the peripheries of British life. We represent a world that is going. Our structure, attitudes and policies are products of the past. Today they fit uneasily into a new world in which we are half strangers."

They fit no more uneasily than into the new world which is Wales.

8.42 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): On this, my first contribution to an annual debate on Welsh affairs, I have chosen a semi-nationalist topic — the Welsh language and the effects of some Government policies in the past few years on the language, particularly in my constituency.

The Welsh language has been in decline throughout the century. Scarcely 20 per cent. of the people of Wales are Welsh-speaking, but in Carmarthen and in Dyfed and Gwynedd that proportion is about 60 per cent. Nevertheless, the language is in decline and facing a battle for survival.

I have in mind one of my predecessors who was the first Nationalist Member of Parliament, Mr. Gwynfor Evans, who, 20 years ago, won Carmarthen in that famous by-election. Although those were my formative years politically, I have never been attracted to the cause of nationalism, despite feeling very strongly for the language. By definition, nationalism is about eventual separation. It is divisive. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry that the president of Plaid Cymru finds that hard to stomach.

Dr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman does not understand that the programme of national parties from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is not separatist. It is a programme for recognition of our nations in the European Community.

Mr. Williams: There is a great deal of revisionism in the nationalist movement. The message from Nationalist parties is strong and clear. Their activities are divisive, poisonous and obnoxious and I want no part of them.

In Wales, there are forces of division within the Nationalist movement and in the Welsh Language Society, which carries out many illegal activities, which do no good for the language cause and alienate public sympathy. I am glad that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) joined in the condemnation of last weekend's events, which have damaged the image of Wales in the rest of the country.

[Mr. Williams]

The Welsh language is extremely important. Both sides of the House should address the cause seriously. I wish to address three aspects of the prejudicial influence of Government policies on the future of the Welsh language — education, agriculture and unemployment. The Education Reform Bill is before the House and we are not clear what place the Welsh language will have in the schools curriculum in Wales.

I am clear in my mind that the place for language should not be dictated from London or from the Welsh Office. It should be dictated by local education authorities. Every county in Wales is very different in terms of its linguistic mix. Indeed, every town, and even village, is different. The ultimate decision about the right balance and how Welsh should be taught should begin at that level. Those decisions will mean that there is maximum devolution right down to individual schools and head teachers. I abhor the idea of centralisation or trying to move decisions away from local schools.

My constituents and I are concerned about the pressures caused by the closure of small rural schools. I should like to quote one sentence from the Government's White Paper on public expenditure on education in Wales. According to that document:

"the plans assume that local authorities will accelerate the removal of surplus school stock over the period and make further improvement in efficiency, including those recommended by the Audit Commission."

That will mean the closure of dozens of rural primary schools throughout my constituency and in Dyfed and Gwynedd.

A few weeks ago, the Audit Commission brought out a report on education in Dyfed, particularly primary education. It stated that our authority was spending £5·8 million more than comparable local authorities. The report made no mention of the linguistic implications in my area. It suggested that if the authority abandoned the policy of allowing the under-fives to go to school, it would save £3 million — and another £2·8 million through a more stringent programme involving the closure of rural primary schools.

The demography of rural Wales is such that the smaller the primary school or village, the higher the proportion of Welsh speakers. So closing or amalgamating small schools puts pressure on the language. One recent example is Llanddeusant primary school which has 13 Welsh-speaking children and one teacher. A few months ago it was reprieved, but I do not know for how long. It is proposed that it should become part of Llangadog primary school which is five miles away. In other words, it will be amalgamated with a primary school where about one quarter of the children are not Welsh speaking, so the language of the school playground will be English. That is the insidious way in which the policy affects the Welsh language.

I am pleased that in 1979 the Government did their W-turn and eventually decided on a Welsh language television channel. It costs about £30 million a year. A further several million pounds is to be put into various projects, such as the Eisteddfod, literary periodicals and various projects to do with the language. They are all important and helpful to the language, but £2·8 million spent on rural primary schools is much better value for money than anything else that the Government can do to help the language survive. Children learn and will sustain their Welsh, and the ages of three, five, seven, nine and 11 are the make or break years for the Welsh language. Therefore, the policy on rural school closures carries with it all sorts of threats.

I grew up in rural Carmarthenshire and for 40 years I have lived with the pressures of the small farmer. They lead to rural depopulation. The main causes of the destruction of the language in my constituency since the war have been rural depopulation, and the amalgamation of small farms. When will that stop?

When we joined the Common Market one of the main features of the common agricultural policy was supposed to be the protection of small farms. Yet in the nine founding countries of the EC the number of people employed in agriculture has decreased from 17 million to 7 million since 1960. The loss of people from agriculture in Wales means the loss of Welsh speakers.

The pressures on small farmers despite the CAP are just as great as they have always been. In 1983 when milk quotas were introduced they were applied across the board. Large farms and rich farmers could diversify and take the blow, but small farmers with relatively much higher overheads are continually driven to the wall. We must remember small farmers in the reform of the CAP. It is vital that we defend them.

We have a problem in rural areas with creameries. In the past few months we have seen two further creamery closures in Llangefni and in Felinfach. Last year we lost 300 jobs in Carmarthen when the creamery closed and in 1983, when a creamery in Newcastle Emlyn closed, a further 250 jobs were lost. By definition, creameries are sited in rural areas and a large proportion of their work force is Welsh speaking. They live in areas where there is no alternative employment. Felinfach is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells), but it also affects my constituency. The unemployment rate in the Lampeter travel-to-work area is 18·1 per cent. and in the Cardigan travel-to-work area it is 24·3 per cent. These closures are taking place when the unemployment rate is already 20 per cent.

There is no question in my mind but that the biggest threat to the Welsh language in 1988 is mass unemployment. The Teifi valley has 20 per cent. unemployment and the worse black spot in my constituency is the upper Amman valley—Brynamman, Glanamman and Garnant. A recent report gives the unemployment rate there as 30 per cent. and youth unemployment is 36 per cent. A month ago that area received a crunching blow with the announcement of the closure of Abernant colliery and the Wernos washery. Some 800 jobs were lost. The colliery is in the Neath constituency, but 300 of the job losses are in my constituency.

The Amman valley, the Gwendraeth valley and the Tawe valley are strong Welsh-speaking communities; more than half the people speak Welsh. Of all the colliery closures in south Wales—unfortunately we have had to learn to live with them in the past three years—this will have the most devastating effect on the language. Moreover, it is in an area where unemployment is already 30 per cent.

There is no economic justification for the closure of Abernant. It has massive anthracite reserves, it is a modern pit, being only 30 years old, its losses are marginal and it

has been reaching about 90 per cent. of its targets. If that pit were in France, Germany or anywhere else in mainland Europe there would be no question of its closure. When one considers the devastating social consequences of closure in an area of high unmployment, it is appalling that the Government are sitting on their hands and allowing it to happen. That will severely affect the prospects of young people and the language. The average age of the work force in Abernant is 32 and the closure will affect those workers and their families.

I understand that the valleys initiative is being developed actively. Will the Secretary of State make sure that the Amman valley as well as the Tawe and Gwendraeth valleys are included in that initiative? With the knock that is coming their way, they badly need any extra help that is going.

I regret that the Secretary of State is not here, because he has been a member of a Government who have savaged the Welsh economy. We hear a lot now about the few jobs being created by inward investment. We welcome them, but they must be set against the 100,000 job losses that have occurred while the right hon. Gentleman has been a member of this Government. His debt to Wales is great, partly as a result of his record as Secretary of State for Energy. Since the end of the coal strike, 18 pits have closed, and 12,000 jobs have been destroyed. If we add the knock-on effect, we are talking about the loss of between 20,000 and 30,000 jobs. The Secretary of State has done an enormous amount of damage to Wales. It is his job to put some of that damage to rights.

8.59 pm

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): I hope that the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams), who is my next door neighbour, will forgive me if I do not follow him in what he said. As this is also my first opportunity to speak in a St. David's day debate, I shall concentrate on constituency issues. I am especially glad to speak in this debate because St. David was born in Pembrokeshire, and the smallest city in the United Kingdom, St. David's, is in my constituency.

Unemployment in Wales, as we heard from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, has fallen for 20 consecutive months, and that is good news for all of us. It has been falling in my constituency as well. In January 1987 there were 7,381 people out of work, and in January this year that had gone down to 6,232, a fall of 1,149. It is still a matter of grave concern to me that my constituency has the largest number of people out of work of any constituency in Wales and that the South Pembrokeshire travel-to-work area has the largest proportion of unemployed at 25·1 per cent. It is still obstinately high.

There are a number of reasons why that should be the case. In Pembrokeshire we have the oil industry, and in recent years a number of refineries have closed as the industry has contracted. Secondly, we have the problem of milk quotas in the dairy industry, which especially affects my constituency, which is the premier farming constituency in west Wales. Thirdly—and this is a problem shared with the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) and constituencies in Powys and Gwynedd — we are geographically fairly remote from the major centres of population, and that creates problems. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister will take account of the special problems faced by west Wales.

A number of things can be done to help my constituency. First, to deal with unemployment, I welcome the training programmes that the Government have brought forward and the schemes that have been advanced to help in particular the long-term unemployed. I would ask that there be a change in the rules to allow the unemployed who are not on supplementary benefit to take part in the community programme. Many of my constituents find it puzzling that they are excluded because they do not receive supplementary benefit.

Secondly, we should continue to provide more small business units. This is the sector in which new jobs will be created in my constituency, because we do not have the large manufacturing industry that other parts of Wales have.

Thirdly, we must continue with the improvement in the road programme. It is a tribute to my predecessor as Member of Parliament, my noble Friend Lord Crickhowell, that the A40 and the M4 are known as the Edwards motorway and main road, because the improvements in the road system in west Wales meant that he was able to get to his constituency considerably faster at the end of his term of office than he was when he was first elected. Until fairly recently it took seven hours to get from Pembrokeshire to London, and one can now do it in four hours. One can do it even quicker if one is prepared to go with Mark Phillips in the driving seat.

Fourthly, we need far more inward investment in this part of Wales. I told my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the Welsh Grand Committee last week that Gwynedd, Powys and Dyfed together had less inward investment in terms of money and jobs than any other Welsh county. Therefore, we must take special note of the problems in west Wales. We must follow up the initiative of Dyfed county council and local businesses, local newspapers and district councils, which visited Spain and Portugal some two years ago, because we see that as a growth area with which we can improve trade links. In the first instance it would be in the packaging, processing and distribution sectors, but there is a potential growth in trade between that part of the EC and west Wales.

It would be helpful if the Government could ensure that when they are considering the transfer of Government offices they do not leave out west Wales. One can see from the beneficial effects of the transfer of the Driver Vehicle Licensing Centre to Swansea some 20 years ago what having a large Government Ministry or office can do to help an area with high unemployment.

With new technology, there is no reason why we continue to have so many offices based in the London region. The transfer of the Patent Office to Newport is especially welcome as a sign that the Government listen to what is being said. We should continue to disperse the Civil Service and other Government agencies round the country. I only hope that public utilities and those that are about to be denationalised will listen too. There is a worrying concentration of the public utilities in Dyfed, in the town of Carmarthen, rather than in other parts of the county.

As one can see from the unemployment figures for Carmarthen, the hon. Member for Carmarthen is fortunate that unemployment in the Carmarthen travel-to-work area is the lowest, at 9·4 per cent., of any in Wales,

[Mr. Nicholas Bennett]

yet in my own constituency just down the road we have 25·1 per cent. in south Pembrokeshire and 17 per cent. in Preseli. It is important for the public utilities to be aware of their social duty not to concentrate all their offices in one place. The same goes for the county council, which in recent years has tended to concentrate its offices in Carmarthen.

The point that perhaps most irks my constituents is that this concentration of public offices in Carmarthen has been at the expense of jobs in Pembrokeshire. It is especially irksome when one looks at the breakdown of rate income to the county council from the three former Welsh counties that make up Dyfed. Pembrokeshire contributes 45 per cent., Carmarthen 33 per cent. and the old Cardiganshire 22 per cent. There is concern that although we pay the most in rate income, the offices and jobs have been moved out of the county. That is one reason why the vast majority of people feel that the area was better off under the old Pembrokeshire county council and support the Pembrokeshire campaign to re-establish an authority with control over local government activities in Pembrokeshire. I believe that we can do that by uniting the two district councils into one unitary authority.

My constituency is also largely rural in nature. On Monday of this week, during Welsh questions, I put to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State our concern about the present disparity in the green pound. I hope that the Government will take great care in the next price review to ensure that the present disparities in the different sectors, which run from 9 to 17 per cent., are, as far as possible, eliminated, so that farmers get a real return on the work that they do and are compensated for the bad fall in farm incomes in Wales in the past few years.

I am conscious that other hon. Members want to speak, so I have no time to mention every area of life in my constituency, but I would like to mention tourism and the town of Milford Haven as two special areas on which we need to concentrate.

In tourism, I am glad to see that there are new attitudes to the way in which we market Wales and its different areas. In my constituency there has been a welcome change of attitude in the past few years as we face the competition from countries such as Spain and Portugal for holidays. I was especially delighted when recently the Oakwood adventure park in Pembrokeshire was presented with the Red Dragon award for one of the most exciting tourism projects. That is the way that we must go if we are to ensure that tourism, which is now, I believe, the number one industry in Wales, attracts people to the Principality for their holidays, rather than their wanting always to go abroad.

The town of Milford Haven is a microcosm of some of the more intractable social and economic problems in my constituency and those of my colleagues who represent other parts of west Wales. I start by making the point that I made to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in a recent question. It is important that we remember that the problems of inner-city areas are also to be found in rural towns throughout Wales. I have the same social and economic problems in parts of Milford Haven as are experienced in the inner-city areas of London, Manchester and Glasgow. I hope that the solutions found to inner-city problems there will be used in the other areas.

In Milford Haven there is considerable concern that the royal naval armaments depot, which employs 300 people and is now being reviewed, will be closed, together with the Trecwn depot in the constituency of Ceredigion and Pembroke, North, many of whose 500 employees live in my constituency. There is grave concern about the future of both these depots.

I recognise that any decision must be made on defence grounds, but I hope that my right hon. Friend will ensure that the Ministry of Defence is made aware of the importance of the jobs and the income that they generate to the economy of Milford Haven and Pembrokeshire. Before any decision is taken, it is vital that the Welsh Office is involved in the review, and any action that needs to be taken in the light of the review should be taken on a co-ordinated basis.

Milford docks have been a great, under-used—some would say misused—asset in the last few years. I and the people of Pembrokeshire will be watching with close interest to ensure that the promises made by Seacon Ltd., which took over control of the docks last July, are carried out.

Finally, there are two other decisions that the Government could take that would benefit the town. The first is to end the tolls on the Cladeau bridge, as they are a barrier to trade between the two parts of Pembrokeshire. I know that I have support from the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), who takes the same attitude towards the Severn bridge. Secondly, assisted area status should be given to Milford Haven. The enterprise zone in Pembroke docks has created 420 jobs, but it does not extend into Milford Haven. It is essential, given the high level of unemployment, that assisted area status for which the district council has asked should be granted.

I conclude by pointing out in the last minute of my speech the assets of Pembrokeshire, which I hope business men throughout the United Kingdom and abroad will look to when they wish to site new industries in our county. We are only 250 miles from London—the same distance as Blackpool or Teesside. We have a good labour force, low wage costs, low rentals and land costs, low house prices, a beautiful countryside and a deep water port at Milford Haven. There are good road connections and three railway lines, and I hope that we can develop the Withybush airfield to encourage far more business to come to my constituency.

9.11 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): I should like briefly to draw the House's attention to the picture that the Secretary of State has drawn this evening, and in his interview in the *Western Mail* which has been much mentioned in the debate, about his proposals for the valleys of south Wales. I should like briefly to quote two points from his interview in the *Western Mail*. He said that the valleys are now facing a future of "a fabulous 12 years" and that the scene in Wales will be transformed. He went on to say that that transformation will be so great that newspaper readers throughout Wales will be asked for their views as to what should happen to the people in the valleys of south Wales and how their lives could be improved.

The right hon. Gentleman need not do that. He need only to listen to the hon. Members who represent the valleys of south Wales. Perhaps the Secretary of State should go there more often and talk to the local

authorities. He would realise that of course we welcome the initiatives in the valleys, in Ebbw Vale and elsewhere. It is our duty, as we represent constituencies in those south Wales valleys, to expose the fraud that the Secretary of State is perpetrating in interviews and elsewhere, in daring to suggest that the future is bright and rosy, and telling us to rejoice when the Health Service in our valleys is such as we have never seen before, and giving us a litany of figures from the Welsh Office.

It is nonsense for the Secretary of State to employ a host of historians to tell us about the previous Labour Governments. He should come to the valleys of south Wales and listen to the people, see the waiting lists getting longer, the beds being closed down and expenditure being removed from the hospitals. He would then see the reality in the valleys of south Wales. He would also see that all the nonsense about improving housing in Wales is a complete fraud for those who have to live in publicly owned housing. In future, house building in Wales, which has come to a virtual standstill, will be cut, as will the capital repairs of all those older, badly repaired houses in the valleys of south Wales.

The Secretary of State did not tell the House and the people of Wales in the interview in the *Western Mail* about the impact of the poll tax in our valleys. By 1990, when people begin to realise the impact, they will see that the gearing effect of the revenue support grant and the unified business rate in Wales will mean that for every 1 per cent. increase in expenditure which Welsh councils will rightly have to levy there will be a 7 per cent. increase in the poll tax in the valleys of south Wales. In the Rhondda, in Merthyr, in Cynon valley and in my own valley, many households will find that their local taxation has doubled overnight because of this unfair and unequal tax.

That has to be set beside the changes in social security and income support which will be imposed on the people in only four weeks. With the revolutionary change to the poll tax and the cuts in health and housing services, who dare tell us in the valleys of south Wales that we have a future to rejoice in? It is nonsense and a fraud, and the people of Wales will recognise it as such.

9.15 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), with his customary generosity, has been particularly brief, although I know that he had much more to say. In the same way, I shall be brief, although there is a great deal that I could say.

I represent an area with one of the greatest problems of deprivation not just in Wales but in the whole of Britain. We have the worst housing, the highest male unemployment in Wales and some of the worst health problems. The Secretary of State has not flown over my constituency, but he has been through it on foot. He has seen for himself the problems in some of the villages like Penrhiwceibr where the pit was shut while he was Secretary of State for Energy. He has seen people living in the basements of three-storey dwellings where the toilet is at the bottom of the garden. He has been down streets where people have no indoor toilets, no bathrooms and no running water. That was in 1987. The council has carried out a survey in my constituency and has discovered that almost half the private houses are unfit for human habitation and that, unless resources are increased, it will take 50 years to modernise those houses.

It is an area of high unemployment, which has been exacerbated by the closure of two collieries in the Cynon valley, the Lady Windsor and Ynysybwl. That has pushed unemployment up to 34 per cent., with the spin-off effect of the loss of those jobs leading to the loss of an additional 1,000 jobs in the area.

It appears that there is no solution, because the resources and the attention of the Government have been focused on the inner cities. Of course, there are cynical reasons for the Government focusing attention on the inner cities. One is that they hope to change the political complexion of the inner cities by devoting resources to them. They have no such hopes in the valleys of south Wales. That is one reason why we have blueprint after blueprint, yet there is no cash to carry out the ideas which are always talked about in these master plans for the valleys of south Wales.

The gratuitous suggestion of the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) is that the answer to the problems of the NHS is not money but more hospital matrons. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should look to his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, because I believe that she shows some of the tendencies which were so prevalent in the older matrons in the hospital service.

I was a member of the Royal Commission on the National Health Service. We studied the service in depth for three years. We did not sit with our friends in the Carlton club and cobble up a blueprint for the National Health Service based on prejudice rather than fact. We called together a committee of experts and came up with proper recommendations on the Health Service.

If the Goverment had not been so partisan, they would have implemented our recommendations, because they made sense. Most important of all, our recommendations said that money for the Health Service should come from central taxation. We examined all the other silly ideas that the Government are considering at the moment and rejected every one of them. We reiterated—we shall do so again — that the only proper way to fund the National Health Service is from central taxation; no other source will do. Like my hon. Friends who represent other valley areas, I want the National Health Service to be properly funded because those in Cynon Valley depend heavily upon it. We need proper resources, and not just one more blueprint from the Government.

9.20 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): We all realise that this debate should have been held yesterday—the day when we honour our patron saint Dewi Sant. As in so many other ways, the Government missed the bus,.

Mr. Peter Walker: As the hon. Gentleman has made that accusation——

Mr. Hughes: The Secretary of State is getting too excitable. I have not started yet. I shall have a few more remarks to make and he will be able to make a comprehensive reply.

Many hon. Members have illustrated the fact that unemployment remains their biggest worry. We are experiencing the worst crisis for 50 years and the Secretary of State is posing as a latter-day Merlin who can wish it all away. I thought that his thin veneer was thoroughly demolished by my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams).

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman started his speech with an accusation about the date of this debate. As I obviously cannot divulge what happened through the usual channels, I hope that he will be willing to divulge the representations made by his usual channels about the date of the debate.

Mr. Hughes: I understand from my Welsh Whip that the strongest possible representations were made.

We want to be fair to the Secretary of State. There have been improvements recently and we say "Croeso" to that. But one or two swallows do not make a summer—even the TSB does not. To make major inroads into our unemployment problem in Wales, we could do with one TSB a week for the next 12 months.

As I have said many times before, we have watched the doctrine of statistics in action. I noted that in yesterday's edition of *The Times*, the columnist Craig Brown, reporting on Monday's Welsh questions, said that the word "statistics" sounded like the word "sadistics". The lad is on to something, because sadism is about cruelty, and unemployment is cruel. People are rotting their lives away instead of doing something in and for their community.

The Secretary of State seems to believe that, if he blows the trumpet loud enough, unemployment will simply go away, but that is not so. According to Department of Employment statistics, 148,477 people are now registered as unemployed in Wales. That figure includes 3,749 school leavers under the age of 18; what a start in life this enterprise Government are giving our youngsters.

Even if we accept that the jobless trend is downwards, when not seasonally adjusted, the unemployment rates are up. The number out of work has increased in every Welsh county. Gwynedd has the highest rate, and Mid Glamorgan the largest number. In Clwyd, unemployment rose by 237 to 19,354 or 14·1 per cent. In Dyfed, it rose by 235 to 17,813 or 16·3 per cent. In Gwynedd it rose by 114 to 13,647 or 17·7 per cent. And so it goes on. The number out of work in our capital city of Cardiff increased by 403 to 23,844 or 12·2 per cent. In Swansea, our second largest city, it rose by 241 to 14,388 or 15·1 per cent. In Newport, it rose by 232 to 10,435 or 13 per cent.

Are those the kind of unemployment statistics of which the Secretary of State and the Government can be proud? There are now six travel-to-work areas in which more than one in five people are out of work. In south Pembrokeshire, unemployment is 25·1 per cent.; in Cardigan, it is 24·3 per cent.; in Pwllheli 24·2 per cent.; in Holyhead 21·7 per cent.; in Aberdare 21·2 per cent.; and in Fishguard 20·7 per cent.

The Secretary of State boasted about vacancies, but in the past three months the number of vacancies, seasonally adjusted, has fallen by an average of 400 per month. Those are the real unemployment figures. That is the true situation that Wales faces. Those figures cannot be glossed over. What an indictment they are of the Government's nine years in office. It is not as though Welsh workers are overpaid — we are just about bottom of the earnings league.

We are told to concentrate on bringing in new enterprises, perhaps from overseas. There is nothing wrong with that, but at the same time the Government are dealing sledgehammer blows to traditional industries such as steel and coal. Last week we had the Second Reading of the British Steel Bill to prepare that vital, basic industry for privatisation. Public money brought about the rescue operation, but the City hopes to reap the profits. Prospective new managers are already showing their patriotism by saying that they intend to cut exports when they get that industry back into the private sector. The steel industry is being dragged back into the uncertainties and inefficiencies of the past and the steel communities will suffer again—mark my words.

Last week, too, there was the announcement about privatisation of the electricity supply industry, splitting Central Electricity Generating Board operations into three parts. Allied with this, there is to be certain preferential treatment for the nuclear industry. Those proposals will deal a devastating blow to the British coal industry and may well bring about the closure of the south Wales coalfield. Last Sunday, in the *Sunday Telegraph*, the Secretary of State was quoted as being opposed to the proposals. The headline read,

"Walker puts his job on the line."

He has been very coy about that ever since. There must now be a big question mark about the future of the mining industry in south Wales.

Another crisis sector is that of housing.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *rose*—

Mr. Hughes: Wales has a higher proportion of older housing than any other part of the United Kingdom. The difficulty is that the Government are not building the houses that people need. Their record on the building of new houses is the worst for 40 years, and a massive housing crisis is developing in Wales.

In Newport, homelessness is rife. The *South Wales Argus* recently spotlighted the problems in Newport. There have been widespread reports of abuses in the so-called bedsitter land. Threats of violence and intimidation are commonplace. There have been rip-offs with rents, and death-trap accommodation is the norm. The Government's policies are bringing about the return of Rachmanism, with all its attendant evils *[Interruption.]* It is not amusing for the people who have to live in such accommodation.

It has been said that the future is with the young. We all have a vested interest in the education of our children. The Government's proposals in the Education Reform Bill are ridden with dogma and controversy. The teachers' unions are up in arms about their negotiating rights being taken away, and they lobbied us about that yesterday. Every day there are reports of neglect in our schools, of an inadequate supply of books and equipment and of neglected buildings with leaking roofs and peeling paint. The Government's proposals for schools to be able to opt out are causing concern. They could lead to central Government closing a school at the stroke of a pen, from which communities would suffer.

Church authorities are concerned about the future of their schools. They could lose control of the unique education that they provide. The strongest possible representations have been made to me in Newport about the matter, particularly by the Catholic authorities.

Perhaps the greatest scandal of all is the rundown of the National Health Service. I certainly go along with the contention that the health of the people is the highest law. Within the service, there have been protests all over the country about surgery waiting lists, ward closures, staff shortages and so on. Nurses, ancillary workers and the major trade unions, such as the National Union of Public

Employees and the Confederation of Health Service Employees, are protesting. The three presidents of the royal medical colleges told us quite clearly that, despite the efforts of doctors, nurses and other hospital staff, patient care is deteriorating and acute hospital services have reached breakdown. What is the Government's answer to those three eminent gentlemen? As yet, we have not had a satisfactory answer.

It is the wearer who knows where the shoe pinches. The attitude of the general public is most significant. Every survey has shown the public to be fully in support of a properly funded National Health Service in preference to tax cuts. The public do not believe in cuts and charges for the National Health Service. For me, their attitude is typified by a letter that I have received in the last few days from a young girl in Gibbs road, Newport, who wrote:

"I ask that the Government think again about limiting the freely available eye examination, because of the health care dangers of deterring people from a regular eye check on cost grounds."

She has asked me, as her Member of Parliament, to make a representation to the Government on her behalf, and this I readily do.

I have also received a huge petition from Miss Sue Brookes, honorary secretary of the local branch of the Royal College of Midwives. The members of the college are calling for positive action to ensure safe standards of care for mothers and babies. They call on the Government to face the facts, and to provide increased public funding for their vital services.

I fully support early-day motion 762, headed by my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond), and I am glad to be one of its sponsors.

In recent weeks, we have heard harrowing tales of young children dying because of delays in hospital services that they needed urgently. On Monday of this week, the Government gave their answer to all those protests: they announced an increase in prescription and dental charges. It was as if they were holding up two fingers to the nation.

As late as this afternoon, the position was crystallised by none other than Lord Young, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Apparently, he clearly stated that the welfare state had made people soft. The noble Lord, I feel, should be sentenced to a five-year stint in one of our low faces in the south Wales mines. He might not last five years, of course, but I should like to see him sentenced nevertheless.

In line with Lord Young's thinking, there is to be a further erosion of the welfare state. The Social Services Act 1986 comes into force next month. Among other things, weekly additions for heating and special diets will be abolished. Single payments for clothing and cookers will be replaced by the social fund—a sort of modern-day workhouse system. Housing benefit has been cut yet again, and pensioners and others with savings of over £6,000 will no longer be eligible at all.

Wales has heavy unemployment, inadequate housing and a high incidence of ill health, partly owing to its historic industrial structure. It will certainly fare badly under the new social security regulations. Where was our Secretary of State, the knight in shining armour in the Cabinet, when the proposals were mooted? Did he go to sleep? He knows the position in Wales, or at least he should.

There have been persistent leaks from the Chancellor's Office that the Treasury is awash with money. It has had the benefit of North sea oil, large revenues from privatisation, and selling off the family silver, as the late Lord Stockton described it. But, in the process, Wales has been robbed of nearly £1,000 million in regional aid and £750 million in rate support grant.

Mr. Michael: And worse is to come.

Mr. Hughes: Indeed it is.

The Chancellor's surplus funds are a direct result of the neglect of our basic public services—health, education, housing and so on. The people of Wales are thoroughly dissatisfied with these policies. They said so clearly at the last general election, when we won four seats and the majority of almost every sitting hon. Member increased. I suggest that the same will be said again whenever the opportunity arises.

9.40 pm

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Mr. Wyn Roberts): Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides have expressed a wide variety of concerns and reflected the great diversity of Wales. The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) referred to Wales as a land of problems. I remember an old friend of mine countering that with the question, "Where would Wales be without its problems?" The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) added to our problems today by trying to distribute narcissi instead of daffodils among Opposition Members. I am glad to say that they had the wisdom to reject them.

In spite of everything and anything that the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) may say, any fair and impartial survey of Wales today would show that we are making rapid progress and are on course to achieve greater and better things. Wales is in an upbeat mood, as my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) illustrated by reference to his constituency. The lamentations of the Jeremiahs on the Opposition Benches—hyping up poverty and deprivation—are out of tune with the feelings of most people in Wales. More than that, they do enormous harm to Wales.

Critical as the Opposition may be, no Opposition Member has claimed that they could have done better than the Government. Indeed, the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman) urged the Government to speed up progress. He should be grateful that the Opposition are not in office, because not a single positive or constructive suggestion has emerged from them today.

I thought that the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) was scraping the bottom of the barrel when he tried to belittle the reduction in unemployment. It is a fact that unemployment in Wales has fallen for 20 successive months—with the largest percentage fall of any region of the United Kingdom. We normally deal with seasonally adjusted figures and they show that for the past 20 months Wales has been top of the league, with the west midlands, with a reduction of 2·9 percentage points——

Mr. Morgan *rose*——

Mr. Roberts: There is no quibbling about these figures. There is occasional quibbling when Opposition Members do not want to deal with seasonally adjusted figures and prefer to deal with unadjusted figures. Very well. On the unadjusted figures for the past 12 months, Wales again comes out on top with a reduction of 2·8 percentage points. Over a period of 20 months, Wales comes second on the unadjusted figures——

Mr. Morgan *rose*——

Mr. Roberts: In the House and in Committee we do not deal with figures that are neither seasonally adjusted nor unadjusted.

It is a fact that the WDA has let a record 2·5 million sq ft of factory space in 1987-88. It is a fact that Wales continues to attract inward investment and there are 250 foreign firms——

Mr. Morgan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is unseemly to gesticulate.

Mr. Roberts: Wales continues to attract inward investment and 250 foreign firms now provide more than 46,000 jobs in Wales. I am delighted to say that the Dow Corning and ECCO developments announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State were welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Ray Powell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You were not in the Chair at the start of the debate when my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) illustrated graphically and conclusively to the House certain facts about the figures to which the Minister has just referred. My point of order is a matter for the Chair. It is a fact that some of the figures that have been mentioned from the Government Benches have been opposed by the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not see how I can possibly adjudicate on figures.

Mr. Roberts: The Welsh economy is more diversified than it was 10 years ago and better placed to compete in world markets. With the Government's firm commitment to an effective and vigorous regional policy and the additional resources that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has secured to pursue such a policy, we can justify our confidence and be optimistic about our prospects.

The remedy prescribed by the Opposition for all our problems is more public expenditure. They do not seem to realise that we are increasing public expenditure every year. If the White Paper shows anything, it shows that. I recommend that right hon. and hon. Members look at page 17 of the White Paper. We can increase expenditure because of our prudent management of the economy. I do not propose to itemise our spending by comparison with that of the previous Labour Government, but it is worth noting that our actual spend on housing renovation has been three times as high as it was under the previous Labour Government and that spending on the NHS in Wales has risen by only 0·5 per cent. short of twice as much a year, on average, under this Government as it did under our Labour predecessors.

Mr. Rogers: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Rogers: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It is not a point of order for me, if the Minister will not give way. There must be something for me to answer.

Mr. Rogers: This is a point of order addressed to you, Mr. Speaker. As long as I have been a Member of the House, the convention has been that an hon. Member can rise and ask another hon. Member to give way. I am quite prepared to accept the Minister saying that he will not give way. However, I do not believe that it is your function as Speaker to prevent me from rising to ask the Minister to give way.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that we cannot have two hon. Members on their feet at the same time. If the Minister will not give way, the hon. Gentleman must resume his seat.

Mr. Rogers: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) slightly barracked the Minister a few moments ago. The Secretary of State for Wales has been sitting on the Government Front Bench barracking continually from a sedentary position. You did not admonish the Secretary of State. As soon as my hon. Friend barracked, he was admonished. As soon as I stood up, you told me to sit down. I honestly do not believe that you are being fair in this debate.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must abide by the rules of the House. He is a Front-Bench spokesman. He must be aware that he would be in the same position if he was speaking from the Front Bench. If an hon. Member does not give way, the hon. Member seeking to interrupt him must resume his seat.

Mr. Morgan: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As a new Member, am I right in thinking that it is the convention of the House that hon. Members are allowed to intervene to ask Ministers questions? Surely it is the convention of the House that Ministers from time to time, at least once during a speech, consent to an intervention.

Mr. Speaker: There is no convention that Ministers must give way at least once. A Minister gives way if he so wishes. Many Ministers do; some Ministers do not.

Mr. Roberts: Many hon. Members have referred to the National Health Service.

Mr. Rogers *rose*——

Mr. Roberts: I am trying to answer the many hon. Members who referred to the Health Service. They included the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones). This year's spending on the NHS in Wales will be £1,103 million, compared with £398 million in 1978-79. That was the winter of discontent when waiting lists were driven up higher than they have ever been. Our recently announced plans——

Mr. Alan Williams *rose*——

Mr. Roberts: I do not have the time to answer more than a handful of the points that have been raised during the debate.

Our recently announced plans for further increases in expenditure next year will take NHS spending in Wales to £1,173 million. That represents an increase of nearly 39 per cent. since 1978-79, after allowing for general inflation.

The cash increases that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced for health authority spending next year, together with the resources available to authorities from cost improvements and income generation, should be sufficient to meet the current forecast of pay and price inflation next year and provide

for further service development. There have been substantial improvements in services during our time in office.

Mr. Rowlands: The Minister is saying that all the money is available. Is he able to tell me that we will be able to reopen St. Tydfil's dependency unit, which was closed only a few weeks ago? It was opened only six months previously by the Queen Mother. Can the Minister give me that assurance?

Mr. Roberts: I can tell the hon. Gentleman only what he knows already. All authorities have considerable scope for generating cost improvements and additional income. The matter that the hon. Gentleman raised is for the health authority to decide.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred to recent pit closures. We all know from experience that maintaining uneconomic operations is no answer to the long-term future of the south Wales coalfield. British Coal has acknowledged its responsibility towards mining communities by the setting up of British Coal Enterprise, which to date has offered assistance totalling almost £10 million to small business projects in Wales. Those projects are expected to result in the creation or safeguarding of almost 6,500 jobs.

I should tell the hon. Member for Neath that the future of the coalfield as a whole continues to depend on its commercial viability. That is the end which must be pursued. Coal will continue to be a source of fuel for electricity generation for many years to come. After the privatisation of electricity, contractual arrangements will continue to be a matter for the two industries.

British Coal made it clear from the start that the Margam project would not proceed without flexible six-day production, and that remains the case. What we should like to know from Opposition Members is whether they would support flexible working to allow the Margam project to go ahead. I shall give way to any Opposition Front Bench spokesman who is prepared to answer that question. It appears that no one is prepared to give an answer, and we note that fact.

The hon. Member for Pontypridd raised the spectre of the move of the Royal Mint. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that there is no truth in that rumour.

Mr. Rogers: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Roberts: The hon. Gentleman has not been here throughout the debate. I am trying to answer hon. Members who have been here and have spoken.

The valleys initiative has intrigued many Opposition Members. Indeed, they have been sniffing at it rather like mice sniffing at cheese in a trap. The programme will involve new and expanded initiatives specifically directed at the valleys, but, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, all this is for later. It is not a matter for today, but I have noted the many appeals from Opposition Members for the inclusion of their particular areas in the valleys initiative. We are aware of the difficulties in other parts of Wales. The Welsh Office and the various agencies will continue to give the needs of those areas full consideration in the allocation of resources.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) referred to education. I can reassure him that the place of religious education in schools is not changed under the Education Reform Bill. It is, of course, provided for in the Education Act 1944. The only change that the Bill makes is to give schools more flexibility in the timing of the act of worship. I can assure my hon. Friend that a school that opts out and becomes grant maintained cannot change its character without reference to my right hon. Friend, and that point is amply covered by the Bill.

I assure the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) that the Welsh language has a secure place in the curriculum in Wales under the Education Reform Bill and that the views of local authorities, school governors and teaching staff will be as important as ever. Since 1979 the Government have supported the Welsh language to the tune of almost £20 million. In addition, we have supported Welsh language broadcasting, in particular, the Welsh fourth channel.

The people of Wales are enjoying a new-found confidence, which the Government share. We base it on what we have achieved in the past and on our plans and prospects for the future. We have successfully tackled the massive hidden unemployment that we inherited from the Labour party in 1979. The memory of it still haunts me — all that massive unemployment in the steel and coal industries. Yes, we remember the loss-making pits and the heavily subsidised overmanned steel industry in those days. What a betrayal they represented of the trust that the people had placed in that Labour Government to safeguard their best interests. I do not think that the people of Wales have ever understood the enormity of that betrayal and I doubt whether they ever will, especially now that Labour Members are busy rewriting the history of that period.

We had to reduce the work forces in the coal and steel industries to secure their viability and to safeguard the jobs that remained. It had to be done against short-sighted trade union and Labour party opposition, but it was the right thing to do by the people of south Wales.

We have achieved a great deal more than that. We have provided thousands of new jobs, and there are more in the pipeline, by reaching out for inward investment on a scale never previously seen in Wales and by pushing ahead with the development of existing industries, large and small. The political philosophy in Wales is changing fast, too, and that is why the Opposition are worried. That is why their faces fall every time a new fall in unemployment is announced.

We know that very shortly we shall be facing the problems of success—skill shortages and so on. That is why there is a new emphasis on education and training at all levels. We must have the adaptable skilled work force that we need to meet future demands.

I agree with the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) that to secure the future of our highly diversified economy in Wales we must have more research and development taking place locally. I agree with the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor that we are working hard in this area, too.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Coal Industry (Restructuring Grants)

10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Michael Spicer): I beg to move,

That the draft Coal Industry (Restructuring Grants) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 8th February, be approved.

I understand that the Opposition wish to take this order and the draft Coal Industry (Limit on Deficit Grants) Order 1988 separately.

This is the second annual order under section 3 of the Coal Industry Act 1987. It has three purposes. First, it specifies those kinds of restructuring expenditure for which grant may be paid in respect of costs incurred in 1988-89. The types of expenditure are set out in the schedule; they are identical to those specified in last year's order.

Secondly, it establishes the proportion of next year's restructuring costs which will be met by grant. With the exception of grant under head 4, which is subject to a separate cash limit, the proposed rate of grant for 1988-89 is 72·5 per cent. This reduction on 1987-88 continues the process of transferring new restructuring costs to British Coal at a rate consistent with the corporation's efforts to move towards commercial viability. The Government will continue to meet costs arising from past restructuring. In particular, weekly payments to beneficiaries under the redundant mineworkers payments scheme, which closed to new applicants in March 1987, are not affected by the draft order.

The third purpose of the order is to raise the statutory limit on restructuring grant from its present level of £300 million to a higher level of £500 million in order to provide adequate headroom for the payment of restructuring grant up to March 1989.

The restructuring grants order has to be seen in the context of the deficit grant order which I shall be moving later tonight.

When I spoke in the debate on the coalfield communities last November, I said that the immediate future for British Coal was likely to be difficult. I mentioned that a revised external financing limit would be necessary and that an order increasing the level of deficit grant payable might be needed.

World markets for coal have indeed continued to be highly competitive. British Coal cannot be insulated from the influence of the international market or the competition from other fuels——

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): What about nuclear?

Mr. Spicer: I shall deal with the difference between nuclear and coal in a moment, if the hon. Gentleman will bear with me.

It is true, of course, that the taxpayer continues to contribute massively towards the coal industry, as he has done for the last nine years, at an average rate of £1 billion every year. The total commitment of £9·2 billion over the past nine years can be compared with a figure of £1·7 billion of public funding for the nuclear industry.

Mr. Morgan: The proposed structure for the privatisation of the electricity industry means that the British coal industry will have to compete with the world coal industry. The British nuclear industry will not have to compete with either the world or the British coal industry, and the British coal industry will not be allowed to compete with the British nuclear industry for fuel supplies. Is that fair or competitive?

Mr. Spicer: I understand precisely the hon. Gentleman's point in the context of the privatisation proposals. My answer is that, in competing with other forms of fuel, British Coal continues to get backing from British taxpayers of about £1 billion. If that is not an element of support to the coal industry, I do not know what is. It compares favourably with any support for research in the nuclear industry.

The post-privatisation figure in the nuclear industry is about 20 per cent. Coal is, and no doubt will remain, a much larger proportion of the fuel for the electricity industry than the nuclear industry will ever be. So there is no question of there being any disparity or unfairness against the coal industry, as it is receiving this massive public support.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does not the privatisation legislation mean that the coal industry will compete with other fuels for the attention of electricity generators, whereas nuclear energy is intended to have a guaranteed share of the production of energy?

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman is right, but the point behind the order is that, in competing with other fuels at home and abroad, the coal industry has enormous advantages, one of which is that it is receiving money from the taxpayer at the rate of about £1 billion every year. If that is not giving it a bit of a head start against other forms of fuel, I do not know what is.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): The Minister has not answered the question on competition and he knows it full well. He is bandying about figures for what taxpayers are investing in the industry. How can our mines compete against countries such as South Africa, where they use cheap slave labour to mine coal? We cannot compete against their price. There is no doubt that, with the privatisation of the electricity industry, it will be encouraged to buy coal from South Africa. What about selling Britain here tonight?

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman knows a great deal about this industry and will perhaps accept that British Coal competes extremely well. To say that it cannot compete when South African coal accounts for about 200,000 tonnes in the electricity industry and British Coal is producing 80 million tonnes is a little more defeatist than the hon. Gentleman means to be. Not only can British Coal compete if it puts its house in order, but it is receiving enormous support from taxpayers to enable it to compete.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Not as much as the farmers.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman has just come into the Chamber. I am delighted to see him and I thought that he would probably come in, as he usually does. But every time he comes in he shouts about farmers.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Minister confirm that in the past 12 months farmers have received subsidies from the CAP of £2,000 million and that his beloved *Daily Telegraph* the other week concluded that every family in Britain was contributing £11 a week to sustain the CAP? If the mines of Britain had had that sort of subsidy, there would have been no closures in the past five years.

Mr. Spicer: If the hon. Gentleman had been present at the beginning of the debate, he would have heard me say that the coal industry has received £9 billion of taxpayers' money during the period of this Government.

Mr. Skinner: What about the farmers?

Mr. Spicer: This is precisely the same point as the hon. Gentleman is making about farmers. With his great mathematical knowledge, he can no doubt work out precisely what that means for every family in terms of subsidy.

Mr. Skinner: The man's an idiot.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman has called me an idiot. If he for one moment considered that he personally was responsible for encouraging British miners to frustrate the modernisation of British pits, if he could answer why he did that and what the effect has been on the coal industry, perhaps some of us would be prepared to listen to him occasionally. He is personally responsible for the frustrations of the pits and for preventing the modernisation of coal. If there are losses, it will be due to the hon. Member for Bolsover and his friends and the encouragement that they have given to opposition to the modernisation of pits. We do not need to hear much more from him about idiocy.

British Coal has responded to the challenge of greater compensation by raising productivity and cutting costs. So far this year, operating costs have been cut in real terms by over 3·5 per cent. and productivity, despite the efforts of the hon. Member for Bolsover, is 12 per cent. up on last year, making a total of over 50 per cent. since the strike which the hon. Member for Bolsover encouraged. Much of this higher productivity has been achieved through investment in new heavy-duty equipment and the spread of new mining techniques.

It has also been necessary to continue with the closure of high-cost pits. It is expected that, during 1987-88, the number of pits will have been reduced by 16, with 12 closures and four mergers. This restructuring is expected to lead this year to large additional depreciation charges of over £150 million. Manpower is expected to have fallen by between 18,000 and 19,000 between March 1987 and March 1988. The cost of the extra redundancies, each of which has been voluntary and the supplementary redundancy lump sum of £5,000 per man have sharply increased the requirement for restructuring grant.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Does the Minister appreciate that, despite all the millions of pounds being put into the mining industry, over the past four years in my constituency, thousands of miners have lost their jobs? Since 1983-84, 82,000 men have lost their jobs. Does he also appreciate that the average age in the mining industry is 34 and that the men losing their jobs now have no weekly protection of earnings?

Mr. Spicer: I do understand, and that is precisely the point that I was making. Many people in the industry have lost their jobs. The industry is now in a better position to compete and do everything that Labour Members want. However, more needs to be done before the industry is fully able, as I am sure that it will be, to compete with the rest of the world.

Mr. Morgan: I am not quite sure that the Minister understood the importance of the age point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse). In other words, where restructuring, or shrinkage, took place two years ago, there was a reservoir of people aged 50 or 55 who were happy to leave the industry. The shrinkage or restructuring that takes place now will put people out of work. They may go voluntarily because the golden handshake may be big enough to persuade them to go, but for men aged 30 or 34 that will have severe social consequences, particularly in the light of Lord Young's statement today about dependency making people go soft. Nothing will make people go soft more easily than being put out of work with a golden handshake of £25,000 or £30,000 at the age of 34, which is the average age in the industry.

Mr. Spicer: Not only has all the redundancy been voluntary, but, as a result, anyone who wanted to continue to work in the industry has been able to do so. Whether that will continue in the future is unclear. British Coal has announced that it hopes that in the year ahead there will not be many redundancies or closures.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Does the Minister realise that people are leaving the mining industry not because of voluntary redundancy but because they are offered jobs that are not comparable with the work they are doing and that they do not want to do? In other words, it is semi-voluntary.

Mr. Spicer: If the jobs that they were offered were unattractive, they had the option of staying in the industry. That is one of the options that has remained open to them.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): On voluntary redundancy, is the Minister aware that high British Coal officials have taken redundancy on a Friday, gone down the road with £100,000 of the taxpayers' money, only to come up the same pit lane on the Monday as the director of a new private mining company and go down the pit to negotiate contracts with managers in the pit that they have just left?

This is happening in Nottinghamshire. Production managers and colliery managers are now setting up as private mining engineers. This is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart). Can the Minister address himself to that problem as well?

We in the miners' parliamentary group had a meeting today with British Coal. For years now, British Coal officials and Ministers have pushed the view that the problems in the industry have all been caused by Scargill, Scargill, Scargill. This year the nurses have been on strike, but hon. Members cannot blame Scargill for that. The deputies have been on strike. The National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers has been on strike. This was caused not by Scargill but by the Fascist-type management of British Coal, supported by the Government.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman has made his own speech and no doubt the House listened with interest, particularly to the point about Fascist management. May I now continue with what I was saying?

Restructuring grant is expected to total £232 million in cash terms in 1987-88, compared with the original budget of £129 million in restructuring grant. Payment is, of course, subject to approval of a Supplementary Estimate presently before the House. Apart from tough market conditions and the need to respond to them, British Coal has had to face industrial action by both the National

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Union of Mineworkers and NACODS, which has led to a loss of output and a damaging decline in customer confidence.

All these factors have combined to increase the corporation's cash requirements and its deficit for the year. So, as foreshadowed in the November debate, I announced in early December an increase in British Coal's external financing limit to £842 million, and I announced a further increase to £920 million earlier this year to reflect the extra redundancy costs that had become necessary.

The corporation's financial position is extremely fragile. Under the statutory rules governing lending from the National Loans Fund, it has not been possible for some months to allow British Coal access to medium and long-term funds. British Coal will therefore be increasingly reliant on short-term borrowings. To reflect this, we have agreed to increase the corporation's temporary borrowing limit from £900 million to £1,000 million this year, and a further substantial increase is likely to be required next year. We shall continue to keep the financing of British Coal under review, in the light of market and all other relevant factors.

The Government have invested an enormous £9·2 billion in the coal industry. In addition, since 1979, they have supported capital investment of £6·2 billion.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I appreciate the Minister giving way, because this is relevant to the point that he is making about capital investment in the industry. He referred to the expenditure on redundancies, which gives great concern to those of us who represent mining constituencies.

But there is a further issue which is also relevant to what the Minister was saying about capital investment. Is he aware that mining machinery manufactured in this country is being overlooked and set aside in favour of mining machinery bought from Europe and America for use in our pits? The industry is declining, yet mining machinery is being purchased from abroad, thereby creating employment problems in areas, such as my constituency, where mining machinery is manufactured. Will the Minister examine the situation of the mining supply industry which is faced with problems of redundancy because British Coal is buying machinery from abroad?

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to mention mining equipment. Only this afternoon, some representatives from that industry were in my office. There are 50,000 people employed in that industry and it currently exports 35 per cent., or about £140 million-worth, of equipment. We are market leaders, beating Germany in many markets, including that of the United States. We have nothing to be ashamed or concerned about in the mining equipment industry. It is a superb industry and I understand that it absolutely dominates the British market.

The hon. Gentleman was absolutely right to mention that important industry in this context, as it is often forgotten when we are talking about those directly employed in the coal industry. The mining equipment industry is very healthy and is now exporting at a remarkable rate.

The Government recognise the strategic importance of a strong and competitive coal industry supplying the core of the country's energy requirements. That is precisely why we are investing heavily in the industry. In spite of the extra losses which I have described tonight, we still expect capital expenditure to continue unchanged at £650 million next year. I emphasise also that we do not propose to change the external financing limit of £670 million for next year.

We are in fact now beginning to see the prospect of a return on the taxpayer's investment. The cost reductions which British Coal has achieved offer the chance of break-even next year, for the first time in 10 years. I do not underestimate the nature of this task, but I believe that break-even remains a realistic, though difficult, target for next year. Within this, some limited restructuring will continue to be necessary, and next year the Government will provide grant to meet 72·5 per cent. of that cost. This will lift the cumulative expenditure on restructuring grant since March 1987 to more than £300 million by the end of next financial year; and it is in recognition of that that the restructuring grants order before the House seeks an increase in the limit on expenditure to £500 million.

I continue to be impressed by British Coal's determination to eliminate its losses. It is therefore all the more disappointing that certain union leaders seem prepared to jeopardise the prospects of the industry and the jobs of their members by their refusal to consider modern methods of flexible working which are now widespread in other countries and industries, and by encouraging senseless industrial action.

I have to tell them through hon. Members that the Government's financial support is not inexhaustible. The taxpayer cannot be expected to continue to put high rates of capital investment into the industry beyond next year unless fuller use is made of the plant and machinery that has already been installed. In future, more of the money for further investment will have to be generated from within the industry itself.

If union leaders fritter away the industry's great opportunities, the inevitable effect will be lost investment, fewer jobs and closed pits. Of course, that will be especially true as a soon-to-be-privatised electricity supply industry begins to shop around in the best markets for coal in the interests of its consumers.

In short, this draft order is necessary for the continuing process of putting the coal industry in a strong position, from which it can exploit the opportunities which lie before it. I have no doubt that British Coal has the capability, the capacity and the resources to compete against foreign producers of coal. Whether it does so will depend upon those who work in the industry. The Government tonight show they are willing once again to stand behind the British coal industry. They are backing the industry with funds as no Government have ever done before. The question is whether those investments will be allowed to be put to good use. I commend the draft order to the House.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is an important debate on the coal industry and you will probably have received a number of applications from hon. Members on both sides of the House who wish to participate in the debate. As approximately 46 Opposition Members have coal mining interests, and only a third of them are present, would it be

in order to adjourn the debate for about 10 minutes so that the remainder who are not here can be found in the bars and coffee houses of this place?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): There are enough hon. Members in the House to keep this important debate going.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Would you care to inform the House how many Conservative Members were queueing to speak before 6 o'clock this evening? For your information, the answer was none.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am in a position to answer that: I am not in the numbers game.

10.24 pm

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): Having listened to the Minister, I wondered whether he was introducing an order or a threat. His closing remarks were unfortunate. The orders have been delayed in coming to the House. We have been threatened with them for some time. Under article 5 of the restructuring grants order, the aggregate for grants is increased from £300 million to £500 million. The accompanying schedule deals with the expenditure under such heads as redundancy and early retirement, changes of work and place of employment, concessionary coal, retraining and new employment.

Because money is required under all those headings we have the opportunity to comment on the industry in its entirety. The Minister also gave us the opportunity because he talked about next year's restructuring. Some of us wonder what will happen then. I gathered that the Minister's speech was written before the privatisation of electricity was proposed, and even before the negotiations took place. He has also told us, in conformity with what we were told before, that there will be a transfer of costs to British Coal.

What happened in the coal industry in 1987 made it inevitable that the Minister should have to come to Parliament with new proposals in 1988. I read what we were told by the then Minister when a similar order was debated in 1987, and it bears no relation to the climate in which the coal industry is operating. I hope that the Minister will concede that. Nor indeed does it bear any relation to what the Government saw for the coal industry or for miners at that time. If the Minister is in any doubt about that, I can refer him to the debate, because I have a copy of it here.

In the many years in which I have taken part in coal debates, I can never recall a time when such a cloud hung over the industry. As we discuss the orders, the very existence of the coal industry in part of the country hangs in the balance. Whatever is said in the debate, that is the backcloth. We cannot ignore what has taken place. I was a miner for 30 years before I came to the House, and I have never known a time when morale in the coal industry was at such a low ebb. I indict the Government as the main architect of the crisis in morale.

The Secretary of State for Energy has said that British coal will have to compete in the market, but nuclear power is not to be treated in the same way. If it were it would wither, because the market could not stand up to the commitment and the expense. To sell the privatisation of electricity, the Secretary of State for Energy has given the green light to coal imports. Foreign coal miners have jobs; British coal miners are threatened with the dole. No one who has kept abreast of the situation in the coal industry can fail to be aware that 1987 was marked by the emergence of international coal as a major competitor. I concede that the Minister referred to that in his opening remarks.

What has been done to deal with the problem? I shall deal with the question of restructuring and of redundancies. At a very heavy cost, British Coal's prices have undergone a sharp drop. Under the joint understanding with the Central Electricity Generating Board, to which I have referred in previous debates, price concessions were made in 1986 to the tune of £400 million, but the decline in the value of the dollar against sterling during 1987 has exacerbated matters by increasing the gap between the prices of British and foreign coal by 25 per cent., or £6 per tonne, without any action being taken by British Coal or its competitors. The overall loss of revenue from sales amounts to more than £500 million.

It has been said that the work of British miners should be put on record. The Minister referred to that, but not to the financial burdens that British Coal has had to bear because of the slump in the dollar and its effect on the competitive prices of coal. I would put the case rather differently from the Minister. The output per man shift has passed the 4-tonne barrier. Productivity has increased by 60 per cent. since the miners' strike in 1984 as a result of so-called restructuring.

The coal communities have paid a very high price for that. At the end of the strike there were 169 pits. We are now left with 102, and before March 1988 ends the figure is likely to fall to 96. The number of coal faces has fallen from 520 to 260. Total manpower has fallen from 220,000 to 127,000—an overall reduction of 93,000, 78,000 of whom were mineworkers. That contraction of manpower is without parallel elsewhere in industry in recent times.

I am informed that British Coal's sales are running at about 105 million tonnes. The industry has reduced its costs by 23 per cent., but, with all the price pressures on industry in real terms, British Coal's average proceeds are down 15 per cent. since the miners' strike. British Coal is running hard even to stand still.

Having outlined those circumstances, I want to put it on record that British Coal recorded a profit of £306 million in 1986-87—a greater profit than British Steel achieved. Unlike British Steel, which paid £20 million in interest on its capital in 1986-87, British Coal is paying nearly £400 million at an interest rate of 11 per cent.

Much of the public discussion—it is fuelled and encouraged—is based on the view that the electricity generating industry could import much of its coal requirements and that the present low price to international coal can continue indefinitely. The reasoning behind the oft-quoted savings of £750 million for the CEGB and £10·5 million to £20·5 million for the South of Scotland Electricity Board is a myth. At current Rotterdam spot prices those figures are not sustainable. The prices do not cover the exporters' operating costs. Already 10 Australian mines have been closed, and even South Africa has cut exports by 8 million tonnes. Present prices do not form a basis for new capital investment. To do so, they would have to be 50 per cent. higher.

I am told that only some 4 per cent. of steam coal is traded internationally. Imports to the whole of western Europe are only 70 million tonnes. The CEGB alone consumes at least 80 million tonnes. Any large-scale

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attempt by the CEGB or the SSEB to buy coal on international markets would sharply increase import prices. As for the claim that those higher prices would still be lower, I am reminded that British Coal already sells 12 million tonnes at international prices.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument with interest. Last year just over 9 million tonnes of coal were imported into this country, more than 7 million tonnes of it by the British Steel Corporation. If we had flexible working arrangements in south Wales, much of that coal could come from this country. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that would be a step forward?

Mr. Eadie: The hon. Gentleman's figures are correct, but he is introducing an Aunt Sally into the debate. I am trying to defend the present position of British Coal. If the hon. Gentleman has views about flexible working, he may manage to catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker, and make his own contribution.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): The hon. Gentleman speaks with moderation and sincerity, but he has been speaking for some time. Before he sits down, will he not utter even one word of criticism on behalf of the Labour party of the blinkered and destructive leadership of Mr. Arthur Scargill, who has served the interests of the miners so badly? Does he realise that the patience of Conservative Members and of the public at large is running out?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The order before the House does not concern any individual personality.

Mr. Eadie: I apologise for giving way to the hon. Gentleman, Madam Deputy Speaker. I should have known better. The hon. Gentleman may not like it, but I have not finished yet.

There is little doubt that the SSEB coal row has grabbed the headlines, and so it should, because if the SSEB gets its way it will mean the extinction of the coal industry.

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Eadie: I am sorry, but I must carry on for the moment. In this crisis, the Government appear to be involved in some skulduggery. The *Financial Times* international report for February substantiates that assertion. It says:

"There seems to be little likelihood that the British government will intervene to stop the import move. It is understood that before last month's price enquiry the Secretary of State for Scotland, Malcolm Rifkind, had given his assent to the move. It is likely that the SSEB chairman, Don Miller, would have once again sought clearance from the Scottish office before leaping.

Nor is British Coal likely to get any support from energy secretary Cecil Parkinson who last week told the Coal Industry Society that the shortly-to-be privatised British electricity supply industry will be entitled to buy its coal from whichever source it chooses. Clearly Miller has been told that he need not wait for privatisation".

That is why I said that there had been some skulduggery in this matter.

I asked the Library to research the terms of reference of the Central Electricity Generating Board and the South of Scotland Electricity Board. I know that the Secretary of State's hands must be very sore from sitting on them with regard to this industry. He has sometimes said,

"It was nae me; there was nothing else that we could do."

The Act says:

"The powers of the Secretary of State for Scotland in relation to electricity supply are contained in Part II (sections 32-38) . . . to give directions to either Scottish board where this appears to be necessary in the national interest".

The other board that is referred to there is the Scottish hydro board.

The Government are not entirely guiltless in this matter. This week, Campbell Christie, who is the general secretary of Scottish Trades Union Congress, was reported as saying that someone was lying. He was referring to Donald Miller's vice-chairman, Iain Preston, and to whether the SSEB had obtained a tender from British Coal. The press release from British Coal says:

"Responding to comments . . . made by SSEB Vice-Chairman . . . Malcolm Edwards said: 'We offered the SSEB on Monday before the closing date for tenders, a unique 12-year coal supply and price package which reduces the prices from British Coal from April 1 in money terms by 6 per cent. or £9 million. In real terms, corrected for inflation, the saving would be nearer 10 per cent., or £15 million.'"

Mr. Campbell Christie is entitled to a reply to the question that he has posed. Who is lying about this crisis in Scotland?

These orders earmark the provision of finance associated with the coal industry. Large-scale contraction arising from cheap imports will be irreversible and permanent.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West) *rose*——

Mr. Eadie: Unlike factories, coal mines cannot be mothballed. Once they are closed, they stay closed. Do we want electricity supplies—the House must be apprised of this possibility — to be in the hands of South Africans, Poles, Russians or the Colombians, with all the trauma and uncertainty that that would entail? We have an abundance of coal reserves in this country, and it is in our strategic interest to mine them.

Why should we rely on the short-term vagaries of the spot market? The Government should have a clear policy for the mining of indigenous British coal. They certainly have a clear policy for nuclear energy. I hope that my hon. Friends will highlight the blatant prejudice for nuclear energy that the Government are showing in their policies, and how biased they are becoming in relation to the coal industry.

10.44 pm

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): I shall try to be brief, as many of my hon. Friends wish to participate in the debate.

I should like to expand on some of the remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) about the dispute between South of Scotland electricity board and British Coal. My hon. Friend referred to comments made by Campbell Christie of the STUC. I met Mr. Miller, chairman of the board, last Friday, and we talked about the vexatious problem of the restructuring of the Scottish industry.

I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) is present. In our area, we know some of the consequences of restructuring, particularly in Fife. My mind goes back to a meeting some months ago in Oakley, where the issue of the closure of

Comrie colliery was discussed. One point made then was that if the colliery closed, the resources would probably be available for investment in Seafield, Castlebridge and other parts of the Longannet complex.

The men made a brave decision: they voted for the closure of their own colliery. That colliery was sunk in the 1940s, and Herbert Morrison, when he went along there, called it the cat's pyjamas. It was kept in existence by the efforts and tenacity of the men. It is rather insulting that, according to one of my hon. Friends, someone called Lord Young has said that we live in a soft society. Some people may be living in a soft society—I may be looking at some of them on the Conservative Benches—but very few miners in my constituency do so.

I have worked hard in my time. I left school at 14—I am probably one of the few hon. Members on either side of the House to have done so—and I have worked damned hard. But never have I seen men work as the men in that and other collieries have worked. Nevertheless, those men voted for the closure of their colliery and the restructuring of part of their industry.

We now have not an old but a young labour force. At a meeting that I attended on Sunday in Fishcross were some very young men. I do not consider myself an old man yet, but I was old enough to be their father. They were in their 20s and 30s, and they were concerned about the future of the Longannet complex.

What is at stake is an analysis of competition. The Coal Board says that it is making an arm's-length offer to the SSEB. The SSEB is constrained by an Act of Parliament to get the best deal that it can. Mr. Miller says that there is a dispute. If there is a dispute between two public boards, it does not behove any sensible Minister to sit back and say, "I am having nothing to do with it." The dispute is about the offer that British Coal is making, and its interpretation by the SSEB.

I have written to the Prime Minister on the subject. I hope that I am not misinterpreting Mr. Miller. He suggested to me that if British Coal was willing to subject its offer to independent scrutiny, he would be similarly engaged. Given that, any Government worth their salt would bring them together, perhaps not at ministerial level but certainly at civil servant level. I shall mention a civil servant by name: I cannot believe that if a Labour Government were in office the Gavin McCrones of this world in the Scottish Office would not be asked or told—indeed, they would not need to be asked or told—to get some idea of what the hell the two boards were up to.

We are not talking about market economics. We are talking about upwards of 4,000 jobs and about the salvation of deep mining for coal in Scotland. The Minister is putting a lot of money into it—he told us how much. What happens to Castlebridge and the Longannet complex if the SSEB walks away from them? They are not pieces of putty. They are a fixed asset with a specific function that is tied to the power station.

I shall digress and mention the stupid statement made today by the cockeyed, phoney-baloney Secretary of State. He said that we shall have competition in the electricity industry. But we are not dealing with England or Wales. He spoke of setting up two companies, one for the north of Scotland and one for the south. The two of them will come together to run the nuclear side of things. And what will the nuclear side count for in Scotland? It will account for between 25 and 30 per cent. of capacity and output. Off the top of my head, that is about 50 per cent. of baseload. Where in God's name is the competition there? It is a pantomime horse called duopoly, its head in a plutonium trough. Who is kidding whom about competition?

We are asking about men's lives and the future of communities. We are asking for fairness and we intend to keep up the campaign in Scotland. I hope that the rest of the country realises what is happening there. The Minister cannot or will not take the responsibility for resolving the issue of what is involved in the contractual relationship. Deep mining in Scotland is in deep jeopardy.

I accept that there have been many difficulties in industrial relations in the past, but now the industry has been pruned down, and there is little spare flesh or muscle left to trim off. We are down to the bare bones of capacity and output. I plead with the Minister or the Secretary of State not to stand back and accept the position but to obtain a proper analysis of what is going on. I remember 1964 and further back, when the great future for fuel and power supplies was in cheap oil, but we know what happened in the 1970s. That could happen again. It would be a brave man who anticipated the demand for and supply and price of oil over the next 10 years.

We are in a transitional stage. If we give up deep-mined coal in Scotland, we shall destroy a valuable and irreplaceable asset. Much money has gone into the industry. We cannot write off the £80 million that has gone into my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan. No Government in their senses could do that. But perhaps I plead in vain—I see little sense in Ministers these days.

10.53 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The restructuring of the mining industry has had its effect in Northumberland, where the number of mining jobs fell from 34,000 in 1960 to 4,500 in 1985, and is probably significantly lower than that now. Most of the remaining jobs are in my constituency. Despite this massive change, into which considerable amounts of Government finance have gone, we are still not receiving the help that we need to deal with the consequences of change for the community.

The lack of assisted area status and the feared decline in regional aid under the recently announced new arrangements means that the Government, having helped to finance restructuring from public funds, are leaving the communities to finance the consequences of restructuring, which are a heavy burden. They are doing so in a framework in which local authorities have little power to spend money even if they could raise it, so they are severely restricted in what they can do to deal with the consequences of this massive change. Their access to European funds to help to deal with the changes is blocked by the lack of assisted area status in many of the affected areas, including the one that I represent.

The House has discussed that subject often and I will not repeat what I have said. However, the problem has not gone away; it remains as serious as ever. On top of that, there are worries produced by the proposed privatisation of the electricity industry and the particular form that that is intended to take. It has raised fears that the position that has already arisen in Scotland over the South of Scotland electricity board contract might also arise extensively in England.

Morale in Scotland is worrying. The SSEB is the electricity provider for a significant part of my

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

constituency and its activities have caused us some concern over the years as it has launched a massive nuclear programme which gave it a colossal over-capacity; some really extraordinary investment decisions were taken, the consequences of which we are beginning to see as the board puzzles over what to do with the Torness plant and the problems that it presents.

If the Government get their way, the SSEB and other boards will be committed to deliberate market distortion to secure a future for the nuclear industry at a level that the private sector would not provide of its own free choice. There can be no other explanation for the Government's desire to include a requirement in their privatisation provisions for the nuclear industry, disguised in the proposals as a requirement for non-fossil fuels. I do not believe that that is what it is all about. Obviously it is an attempt to secure a place for the nuclear industry which purely market decisions would not provide. That is a sign of the kind of pressures that will be brought to bear on the coal industry.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that we desperately need to balance energy resources in this country so that we are not reliant on any one sector of energy? What has changed since the National Coal Board's report of 1966-67, which stated:

"The task now facing the board is to secure the largest possible output of coal at prices that are competitive with rival fuels. Competition from oil, natural gas and nuclear power will be a formidable and continuing challenge to the coal industry"?

That was perceived quite some time ago.

Mr. Beith: Since then it has become clear that the potential of nuclear power in any straight commercial circumstances does not seem to be anywhere near as dangerous to the prospects of the coal industry as the coal industry once thought. The provisions would not be in the Government's privatisation proposals if they did not fear that, given a free choice, the private sector simply would not invest in nuclear power.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) advances the interesting argument that we should forget the market and devise an appropriate balance of different kinds of energy production. That is not the Government's policy. At least, it is not the philosophy that the Government espouse. If it is Government policy, it means that in relation to the coal industry we should take a much longer-term view of the implications of coal prices for what the electricity industry buys and which pits we keep in production. If the objective is to keep a balance, we should take a little less notice of the current spot price for coal and look to longer-term considerations and how to keep the coal industry in being. The Government must solve that inconsistency in their approach.

One of the ways in which the coal industry has tried to alter the balance of costs has been through the expansion of opencast production. The restructuring towards opencast is almost as significant as that being carried out in other areas. That restructuring has had a particular impact in my constituency and the pressures have now built up in my constituency to a frightening degree. The local community has been confronted by a number of major site proposals. These have affected the villages of Linton and Ulgham. The proposal for Ulgham is for a very large site intended to replace the Butterwell site in due course.

Areas in which people had not expected a major expansion of opencast operation have become subject to it. Whereas opencast was initially developed in my constituency in areas that had been severly ravaged and in which the restorative work of the Opencast Executive could bring at least some benefit at the end of the day, the development is now entering areas where that will not happen and where the prospect is simply many years of misery for the people living on the doorsteps of the opencast. Restoration will not equal the quality of the countryside that existed before the opencast development.

The most recent case—it is causing a great deal of anxiety in my constituency—is an application for a private licence opencast scheme in an area of wild Northumberland moorland where nobody really expected that sort of development to take place. The area is called Wandylaw. It is an area of prehistoric sites, cup and ring markings, cairn cemeteries, beautiful natural moorland and all sorts of features that were thought to be sacrosanct. The area is now the subject of an opencast application, which the county council has approved in principle, thereby preventing any public inquiry, public meeting or other methods by which the local community can express its concern.

The community in Northumberland was initially fairly willing to accept the move into opencast production and was pleased about the small number of valuable jobs that it would create. However, there is now increasing hostility towards the scale of opencast development. The local people are increasingly concerned now that the Secretary of State for the Environment has overturned his own inspector's reports in some recent cases. That will lead the local authorities to feel that it is not worth turning down applications because they will only be overturned on appeal and they may be wasting their time in refusing the application in the first place.

This has created an unfortunate climate of much greater hostility towards opencast coal operations. It calls for a little more caution in the pace at which the applications go ahead and a more determined attempt to enable the local community to express a view when opencast applications come forward.

The coal industry is distinctive in the scale of disruption that its restructuring causes its communities. That is partly because of the great dependence of some of those communities on the industry and partly because of the physical changes that come about as a result of opencast mining. The Government have to recognise the importance of stability in the industry now that it has been pared down to such a small prorportion of its former size. They have to recognise the concern of local communities and their need for practical help in dealing with the problems of restructuring.

11.2 pm

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): I am moved to make a short contribution by the sincere speech of the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) for whom, as he knows, I have the greatest respect, and by the speeches of the hon. Members for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). The House is nobly served by the contributions of the hon. Member for Midlothian and there is no more sincere and

passionate advocate for the mining industry than he. As a lawyer, I have had the pleasure and honour over the years of representing members of the mining industry.

The hon. Member for Midlothian said one thing that was not strictly accurate. He said that the proposals of the Scottish electricity industry—I am careful because there is presently a case that is sub judice and has been taken to avizandum between British Coal and the South of Scotland electricity board—would spell the death knell of the mining industry in Scotland. That is not so. More than 50 per cent. of the production in Scotland is not deep mined. It would certainly have consequences for the deep mining industry in Scotland if the SSEB were to obtain its fossil fuels from sources that were not deep mined in Scotland; of that there is no question.

As I understand it, one nationalised, or denationalised, industry is not supposed to be in business to keep another at work. The function of the electricity industry is to provide for the customer — coal miner, retired coal miner, coal miner's widow or whoever—electricity at its lowest possible cost.

Probably the most resented and most difficult to meet bill that comes into any household in Scotland is the blue, the red and then the white cards of the electricity industry. That bill is directly related to the cost of the fuel that the industry requires to provide electricity.

Let us be under no illusion. There is no duty on any industry to keep another going at the expense of the public whom it is intended to serve. That was the issue this afternoon and that is the issue which is echoed tonight.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Balderdash.

Mr. Fairbairn: Is it balderdash that the electricity industry is intended to serve the community — pensioners, hospitals and industry—with fuel that they can afford, or is the electricity industry meant to keep in business traditional industries which are more expensive, whatever the cost in unemployment and the cost to the pensioner, the family and those who cannot afford to heat their homes?

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): My hon. and learned Friend, like me, probably has in his constituency a number of miners and a number of other people who work in other industries, such as dyeing, pottery and brickmaking, all of which are highly energy-intensive industries. Does he agree that the jobs of those people in energy-intensive industries would be at risk if the Opposition's policies were ever implemented?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have to remind the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn) that we are discussing restructuring grants in the mining industry. I hope that he will relate his remarks to the order.

Mr. Fairbairn: I am obliged to you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed referred to the anxieties about opencast mining, but the anxieties about deep mining are just as great. The dangers of deep mining are infinitely greater, so of course the anxieties are great. Until the hon. Gentleman spoke, I had never heard anyone refer to the moors in Northumberland as places whose beauty people were anxious to preserve.

My point is simple. It is our duty to restructure, as so many mining communities have done. They have a particular and remarkable social consciousness and moral value as communities, but that is not any reason for the rest of the people to be held to ransom on the basis that, whatever the cost of the fuel that it uses, the electricity industry has in some way a duty to the mining industry but no duty to the public whom it is serving by the energy that is produced.

11.8 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I should like to follow the comments of the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn) on production in Scotland. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) that the death knell will sound for the coal industry in Scotland if the problem of the Scottish power industry is not solved. I learnt only this week that the outcropping, or opencast mining, in the constituency of East Lothian has not just been held up, but has ceased. Almost 150 people will be made redundant. The colliery involved will not open again until it can be guaranteed a market for its product. Much of what is produced in Scotland by opencasting goes across to Ireland.

It should sound a warning when opencasting, which is supposed to produce the cheapest coal, ceases to work because it cannot be guaranteed a market. The Minister looks puzzled. In my talks today with the deputy chairman of British Coal and the managing director of the Opencast Executive, Mr. Proctor, they admitted that there was a problem. It is a warning of what is happening to the coal industry in my area.

Perhaps I should declare a lack of interest in the debate. When I came to the House in 1978, there were eight collieries in my constituency, and two more in an adjacent constituency. There are now no collieries in either my constituency or the adjacent one. Ten collieries where my constituents used to work have therefore closed. They have been restructured since 1978. Restructuring is all about colliery closures. When we consider an order that increases the amount of money available for the restructuring programme, we look at it suspiciously, because it indicates that further closures are imminent.

The Government have recently taken away British Coal's guarantee regarding its collieries and have physically and knowingly transferred it to the nuclear industry. That is what they did the other day, when they announced that British Coal was breaking even.

There was something sinister in the closing remarks of the Minister—I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) about this—when he said that the taxpayer will go only so far. How does the Minister know that the taxpayer will go only so far? He said that the Government believe that the taxpayer will go only so far, but they are wrong. The Government will leave the coal industry wide open, under the guise of market forces operating in relation to a privatised electricity industry. They have sold the coal industry down the river. The coal industry will be run down to a managed proportion which will be ideal, in the not-too-distant future, for a Bill to come before the House to privatise what is left of the coal industry.

The hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross referred to balance. The balancing effect has now changed. It used to be argued that we could sustain a large viable coal industry and that what it could not produce for the electricity industry would be topped up by nuclear fuel. All

[Mr. Allen McKay]

that has now changed, because the balance has swung in the opposite direction. Evidently, the future trend is towards nuclear, topped up by coal, so we are working towards the long-term demise of the coal industry. That is what the Department of Energy means when it says that the coal industry must compete against foreign imports.

The only thing that is stopping imports from pouring into this country is the fact that we do not have the facilities for them. Opposition Members put blocking motions on Bills to try to ensure that the coal industry has a fair crack of the whip. The Government talk about making facilities available for more coal imports as part of their long-term plan. That accounts for the so-called restructuring programme.

The last colliery to close in my constituency was Redbrook colliery. Some £29·5 million was spent on the colliery, thereby making a new colliery. On the day that the closure was announced the contractors were still there completing the restructuring. The output of that colliery was twice the national average. There was no investment or output reason for its closure. In restructuring, what is the money being spent on? Does spending £29·5 million on a colliery only to close it come under restructuring?

I agree with the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). Most areas are coming under pressure from the opencast executive to extend opencast mining. It has been said that the coal is needed for blending, and in some cases this is true. In other cases, it has been said that it is done to keep the deep mines open, but that is not true. The cash flow from opencast mining appears on the bottom line, so it reduces only the total cost of British Coal. It does not keep down mines open, or Redbrook in my constituency would not have closed. British Coal is seeking to produce low-cost coal that will be able to compete against imports, but opencast mining in Scotland is not succeeding. All that we can see is the demise of the coal industry, as a deliberate policy of the Government.

What is happening to liquefaction and gasification? What has happened to the Waldilove report? It has been held up until privatisation becomes imminent. No private owner will take on board the costs of subsidence. These are questions which we should all ask, and which the Minister should be able to answer. He should be honest with the House, with British Coal, and with the people who work in the industry, because they have a right to know what is behind the restructuring programme. Are we correct in our assumption that there will be an increase in colliery closures and that if the industry does not break even next year it will go under? If so, that is pure market economics.

The coal industry was nationalised because private enterprise could not sustain it. Public money made it possible to bring the coal industry to the level that it has achieved. I am proud of having worked for the coal industry from when it was not mechanised through to its electronic era, and I had a hand in introducing that. However, I am afraid that all that expertise will be thrown to the wall and the coal industry will be destroyed, or at least severely diminished, because of the programme that the Government have planned for it.

11.18 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): I listened intently to the Minister, and his speech reminded me of the sinking of the Titanic. It did not fill me with confidence for the industry, particularly given the amount of money that he is granting it. The order is about restructuring. Has the Minister had any detailed discussions with British Coal on how that money will be spent against the block headings? I worked in the industry for many years and I know that there have been many restructurings, many reorganisations and much rationalisation.

I will give the Government an example of why I say that they should have detailed discussions with British Coal on how the money is to be spent. The workshops where I worked, together with stores and transport, had a considerable amount of money spent on them, only to be closed immediately after the strike. I can recollect talking to the workshops director about rationalisation of workloads at the various workshops. He had come with plans to rationalise Carcroft for electrification. We put some counter-arguments to him about why that was not in the interest of the workshops. He agreed to take them away and give us a reply. That was at least 12 years ago and we are still waiting for an answer. So the Government really must be told what the money is to be spent on.

We have said that we are not impressed by the restructuring plans of British Coal. I do not think that British Coal and the Goverment have any intention of making sure that we have a viable industry which will work in the long-term interests of this country. The Government are sacrificing the long-term interests of the industry and the country on the altar of market forces.

Yorkshire Main, a pit in my constituency, has £10 million spent on modernising the head gear. Then Yorkshire Main, of course, was closed and the £10 million was thrown down the drain. The pit had a life of 15 or 20 years, but British Coal closed it through its vindictive attitude to the lads in Edlington village. That is the point that I am making. It is no good shoving money across to British Coal and talking in terms of restructuring. The Government really ought to get off their backsides and find out just how British Coal intends to spend the money.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): My hon. Friend has touched on a very important point. In my experience of the mining industry in my area, considerable sums of money were spent from 1947 onwards but it was wasted by what I contend was mismanagement. Decisions made by management have proved to be totally wrong, and millions, if not thousands of millions, of pounds have been lost. Yet there has been no inquiry into the management of the mining industry at that period. Such an inquiry is absolutely necessary. Would not my hon. Friend agree?

Mr. Redmond: I absolutely agree with what my hon. Friend has said. Certainly the old Coal Board was found guilty on many occasions. If the Minister is not concerned about British Coal wasting taxpayers' money, he ought to be.

Bentley pit in the Doncaster area was to close under the old ABC hit list. Through the good offices of the Doncaster National Union of Mineworkers' panel, the director was persuaded, under the threat of a strike action, to retain the pit. Of course, many years later, the director was holding Bentley pit up as an example. This is what I am saying: the future of the industry needs long-term planning, and restructuring is about long-term planning. And we shall not get long-term planning if we have this "market forces" routine in operation.

Coal imports have been mentioned. Obviously, the two proposed ports at Humberside will import several million

tonnes of coal. That will have a devastating effect on Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire and will cost the industry many jobs.

No other country can compete with the amount of planned dumping in Britain. The Minister must agree with the dumping of coal and with the slave labour that it produces in such countries as Colombia where women and children are employed. Obviously the Minister agrees that women and children should work in the coal industry or he would not allow the importation of coal from those countries.

In addition to the problems caused by the importation and dumping of coal, the gas industry intends to import gas. Of course that will have an impact on the balance of payments. The Chancellor obviously is not concerned about that, given the recent figures.

The Minister talks about the movement of men and the benefits that they get from restructuring. The industry and those who work in it have always welcomed the introduction of technological changes to improve efficiency. They welcomed those changes and worked with the Coal Board. However, the miners do not want to become industrial gipsies skipping from pit to pit in a downward spiral.

I question whether it does any good to give the Coal Board money for restructuring, when it seems to be operating a policy of confrontation. There is a saying that silent pain provokes no response. When the lads at the pits complain about the jackboot tactics of the Coal Board, they are shouted down, sacked and sent down the road for standing up for their democratic rights, as people living in a so-called democratic country. When we talk about peace, prosperity and restructuring, we must not forget that at Rossington pit, which has produced a great deal of good coal during the past few years, a number of miners have been sacked. No matter what restructuring takes place, it will not cure the industrial relations problems that prevent the industrial peace that the board seeks.

The Minister attacked the union officials and accused them of being Luddites. I have never met a more moderate set of union leaders in the industry than those who now hold office. Moderation is the watchword and the key word by which they operate.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Does my hon. Friend agree that his comment that the men are moderate was confirmed this week when the NACODS union, on the wish of a judge, returned to work normally and have suspended the strike? At Kellingley, the major pit in the country, there has been deliberate provocation in that the deputies' duties have been extended——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Regrettably, this is not part of the order. The order concerns the restructuring and the level of financial support provided by the Government to the coal industry.

Mr. Redmond: It is no good restructuring the industry without restructuring certain elements within the industry. Industrial relations are an important part of the industry. The provocation that the Minister seeks to use against certain NUM and NACODS officials simply will not wash. The keyword of the NUM is moderation.

The Minister ought to acquaint himself with a major problem at Rossington. Those who worked in the coal industry at Rossington before nationalisation are deeply concerned about what is happening to their concessionary fuel.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted Business).*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Coal Industry (Restructuring Grants) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 8th February, be approved.

Coal Industry (Deficit Grants)

11.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Michael Spicer): I beg to move,

That the draft Coal Industry (Limit on Deficit Grants) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 8th February, be approved.

I hope, Madam Deputy Speaker, that during this debate you will allow me to deal with a few of the questions that were asked in the debate on the previous motion.

The purpose of this order is to lift the limit on deficit grant available, in respect of this year, from £100 million to the full £200 million allowed under section 2 of the Coal Industry Act 1987.

The tough market conditions and the damaging effects of industrial action have led to a significant reduction in the number of pits during the year, which has resulted in additional depreciation charges of over £150 million. British Coal's deficit for the year has risen from a planned level of just under £100 million to a deficit well in excess of £300 million.

The 1987 Act enabled the Government to contribute up to £100 million deficit grant towards this and made provision for an additional £100 million to be paid, subject to the approval of this deficit grants order. It is our intention to pay out the full £200 million available towards meeting the deficit this year. Payment of the additional £100 million is subject to the approval of a Supplementary Estimate presently before the House.

The draft order is necessary for the continuing process of putting the coal industry in a strong position from which it can exploit the opportunities that lie before it. Whether the opportunities are taken is up to the industry, its management and the men who work in it. The Government are willing to stand behind British Coal, but it is up to it to put the taxpayers' money to good use in order to fight off the undoubted competitive pressures that lie ahead.

I commend the draft order to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Before I put the Question, I remind the House that we had a wide-ranging debate on the first order. That debate would have been much more appropriate to the two orders being taken together. This order is much narrower and the debate should be confined to the desirability or otherwise of increasing the aggregate limit on deficit grants.

11.33 pm

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): My contribution to this debate will be to make a request of the Minister, but before I do so, I want to say yet again how much I welcome this Government's total commitment to the coal industry. An investment of £2 million a day is to be admired. I see this investment at first hand when I visit collieries in my constituency.

The Nottinghamshire miners are meeting the feared challenge from abroad head-on by increasing production by over 60 per cent. They are sending coal to the Trent valley power stations at a price delivered, in real terms, 22 per cent. lower than it was before the industrial dispute of 1984. These miners produce 14 per cent. of the nation's coal requirements. In the last half-year, 50 per cent. of British Coal's operating profit of £100 million was met from the Nottinghamshire coalfield. That example could be followed by the country's other coalfields.

When my hon. Friend next meets the chairman of British Coal, he should ask him to consider further the request of Nottinghamshire miners to be paid for the days they were sent home through no fault of theirs when industrial action was taking place three weeks ago. Loyalty is two-sided. I should like my hon. Friend to ask the chairman of British Coal to consider paying those miners for their lost time.

11.35 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Collieries in my constituency have received a great deal of assistance and investment over the last 10 years. One of the first things I did as a prospective parliamentary candidate was to visit the Castlebridge sinking when my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie), as the Minister, cut the first sod at the development stage.

In my constituency we have one of the biggest single investments in the British coal industry. The tragedy is that, within a short time, some £70 million of the investment programme of British Coal over the last 10 years may be thrown away because of the Government's headlong rush into the privatisation of electricity generation. I am conscious that I have to be careful about the range of debate, but we are talking to a Minister who has dual responsibility in his Department for the privatisation of electricity and for the safeguarding of the taxpayer's interest in the money which has been spent on our behalf by him and by British Coal on the development of Longannet, which was mentioned in the previous debate.

That investment involves not only money but the commitment of 2,000 people directly as employees of the coal industry, people whose livelihood would be gravely endangered if, as we are led to believe, the South of Scotland electricity board sought to import coal from abroad and if the order, with its limit on deficit grants of £100 million, was to be applied. In the central belt of Scotland, we cannot switch off and switch on the capability of the mining industry.

We have a work force of some 2,000 people in that area of the Clackmannan and Stirlingshire coalfields. The men come from Fife, Clackmannan and Stirlingshire. In the last four or five years, they have become little better than industrial gipsies. We are in the predicament that this is the last fight of the Scottish coal industry. The gipsies have to circle the wagons and to fight for what they believe to be their industrial right to jobs in the Longannet complex because they are capable of producing steam coal which can be converted into electricity at prices which compare with power stations anywhere in the country or in western Europe.

The Minister is responsible not just for coal but for the privatisation of electricity. I know that the Secretary of State for Scotland has a special responsibility for the generation of electricity within Scotland, but the nature of the privatisation proposals which were introduced to the House last Thursday and today show that there is now a United Kingdom perspective on electricity generation which goes far beyond the responsibility of St. Andrew's house and the Scottish Office.

If the limit of grant is laid down as £100 million, it will be insufficient to meet the problems that may arise in the

short term—and we believe that the problems are only short-term problems. We believe that in the long term the Hirst seam, which extends throughout my constituency into Stirlingshire and beyond, is perhaps the richest directly available source of coal in the United Kingdom. We know that coalfields in Yorkshire have been expanded and are in the process of being exploited, with tremendous publicity. In some respects, the Longannet complex is the unsung development project of the British coalfield. Slowly and quietly that complex has been expanded and developed.

We now have an understanding between the Coal Board and the miners' union; we are talking about flexible working without precedent in the Scottish coalfield—with the unanimous acceptance of the men. We have a prospect for the use of the skills of the men in the coalfield that would never have been considered possible four or five years ago.

That possibility is now available to the Coal Board and the Department of Energy, and the Government ignore it at their peril. They may jump at the prospect of getting a couple of years' cheap coal on the spot market. The simplest economic understanding suggests that if one takes the spot market price and increases the demand, the price will rise because the spot market price reflects demand at a particular time. Before very long, the coal industry in this country will be able to produce coal at prices far better than anything that the spot market can offer, and will provide the continuity of supply that lies at the heart of the energy debate.

Let me back up my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas): we are not talking about an under-capitalised industry with low productivity or an industry that has a poor product and is far away from its customers. We are talking about a coal industry that is directly below its customers and is tailored to their needs. It has a work force that is flexible and understanding but not subservient. I would not wish to represent industrial slaves or make a virtue out of their subservience. The men have made reasoned judgments about their prospects, and they understand what they have to do to keep themselves in employment and to serve the country and the industry to which they have given their working lives.

The men look to the Government for the backing that is required of those responsible for a major strategic industry. If the Government choose—in the interests of privatisation and tax cuts—to throw away the unique opportunity being offered by the people of my constituency and the constituencies around it, they do so at their peril. They will find that it is to their cost not just in the short term at the ballot box but throughout the Scottish economy and outside it.

We are circling the wagons; we are fighting the last fight for the coal industry. We ask the Minister responsible for the defence of that industry to get off his backside and back us with all the power at his disposal. This matter is in his hands. Overall strategic responsibility for the coal industry and for energy generation lies not with the Minister's surrogate at the Scottish Office but with the Department of Energy. A deficit grant of £100 million is chickenfeed compared to the costs that the country will have to bear in the decades ahead if we do not take the opportunities offered to us tonight.

11.44 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): In view of all that has already been said, I intend to be brief. Looking at the order, I wonder how the fairy godmother is suddenly able to find an extra £100 million for the coal industry when the Government are incapable of finding funds for other sections of society.

The Minister intends to toss in £200 million to make up the Coal Board's deficit. Has he asked the board why it needs the money? If not, I suggest that he should do so, because it is an important question. Sir Robert Haslam will say that industrial action by militants has lost the board x million tonnes production and he needs the deficit grant to balance the books.

If the Coal Board and the Government ran the industry as it should be run and talked to the unions that operate within it, there would be no bad industrial relations and the deficit grant would not be required. The Government may regard £100 million as chickenfeed—perhaps the Minister will confirm that—but I wonder whether there is an ulterior motive behind the increase. Perhaps the Government want perpetual conflict in the industry, in order to run it down and put it at a disadvantage when privatisation of the CEGB takes place. The Minister should spend more than a mere two minutes at the Dispatch Box and give us a better explanation of his motives.

I hope that the Minister will involve himself a little more deeply in the industry and stop the Luddite approach by management, which is causing so much internal conflict and losing millions of pounds of taxpayers' money. The Conservatives are always talking about the need to protect taxpayers' money. I want to give the taxpayer value for money. Blindly tossing another £100 million to the Coal Board does the country and the industry no good whatever. If we are to save not just the additional amount but the original sum that was budgeted for, the Minister should get off his backside and find out why the industrial conflict is going on day after day, week after week and year after year. Indeed, if the Government and the Coal Board have their way it is likely to go on for decades yet.

I sincerely ask the Minister to get involved and to find out what is happening in the industry—there are two sides to every argument—and whether the Coal Board is deliberately provoking the work force.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Coal Board would not need so much deficit grant if the management did not create industrial disputes as it has done at Kellingley colliery, where for the past five weeks the men have mined 55,000 tonnes per week and the management has deliberately created a strike by doubling the work of the deputies?

Mr. Redmond: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. I lost a bet on whether the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers would go on strike, because I said that it would not. Obviously it did so because British Coal—one assumes with the connivance of the Government—deliberately provoked a conflict with the union, which has now led to further trouble, further losses of coal and to this order to make up a deficit.

If the Government and British Coal had sat down with the people from the other side of the industry, we would

[Mr. Redmond]

be talking not about increasing the deficit grant by £100 million, but about reducing it and giving that money back to the taxpayers. We are all taxpayers. Unfortunately, as a single man, I pay more than most people, but that is the penalty that I pay for my freedom.

The Minister should consider what is happening within the industry. The previous order only tossed more money at the industry, with no thought being given to its direction. In this order we are doubling the grant—not increasing it by one third or 50 per cent. I would be content with half that amount.

The Minister, if he is to save the taxpayers' money, must find out what is wrong with the industry. I hope that he will say that he intends to involve himself a little bit more in the future than he has in the past.

11.51 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): As we are talking about deficits, it is appropriate to ask why there is such a deficit in the turnout of Labour Members. I understand that 46 Labour Members have coal mines in their constituencies, yet not even 50 per cent. of them are present. Even Arthur Scargill had a 50 per cent. turnout, although it is questionable whether that turnout was given some encouragement by the more physically well built of his supporters.

The poor attendance of Labour Members proves that the Opposition do not support the coal industry, and that it is dependent on its one main supporter — the Goverment. The Government have put over £4·6 billion into the coal industry. Investment is at record levels, and by the next general election virtually all the plant and machinery in use in the British coal industry will have been bought by money given by the Goverment. I hope that as miners go to work in 1991 they will appreciate that it is the Government who have provided them with the tools to do their work.

I am concerned about productivity at the Betteshanger coal mine in my constituency. It is a pity that it produces only 1·8 tonnes per man shift, compared with the national average of 4 tonnes. I know that the coal is of good quality, and I believe that most, if not all, of the miners want to keep the pit open. I know that many of them will work hard to keep it open.

What we do not want is the disruption that has caused deficits in the past. That disruption and those deficits were caused by the attitude of the last Labour Government. It is worth noting the problems facing that Government, and the way in which they tackled them, in relation to deficits at that time. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) once said:

"I have never found the NUM in any way unreasonable where closures are necessary because of exhaustion or because pits are out of line in economic terms."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1978; Vol. 959, c. 1015-16.]

The NUM certainly was not unreasonable to him because, as Secretary of State for Energy, he closed 32 pits, and two Labour Governments closed 295 pits between them. The present Government have increased deficit grants, because the present Government have shown a commitment to right the wrong of previous Governments. They have shown a commitment to the coal industry and the coal miner. I hope that the message is now clear: that the miners should show a commitment to the Government.

11.54 pm

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): I appreciate the point that you made earlier, Madam Deputy Speaker, about sticking to the brief. I shall therefore restrict my remarks to the question of how the extra money is being spent.

May I touch on a point that I made earlier in an intervention, about the management of the industry at all levels? I am not super-critical of the management at colliery level. Having worked in the industry for 39 years. I have come across good management and extremely bad management. The problem is that extremely bad management is also extremely costly. Perhaps I can cite some of my experiences.

Lynemouth colliery was not in my constituency, but in that of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). It did, however, employ a considerable number of my constituents. The system of working in that colliery —as the working was under the North sea—was called the "board and pillar" system. When the coal was extracted, a pillar of coal 31 yards square was left in the workings to support the sea bed.

Back in the 1960s, the management decided to change the method to long wall extraction, which meant taking all of the coal out. The management felt that there was promotion in production, a consideration which is probably still relevant today. The production manager in those days was a man called Mr. Lang, and it was he who decided to change to the long wall system of extraction.

As a consequence of the new system, a considerable amount of coal had to be left in what was called the "goab" — for the benefit of those who do not understand mining terms, that is the area from which the coal has just been extracted—and the roof collapsed. The coal caught fire. As a result, half that pit—a pit that Lord Robens, when he was chairman of the board, described as having 80 more years of life—had to be flooded, and only half was left.

It is no use saying, "Take what is left." The mine closed three years ago, simply because no coal worth working remained. The man who made the decision, Mr. Lang, was promoted, and was awarded a decoration in the Queen's honours list. That is what has happened in the mining industry.

Here is a personal experience of mine. Before I came to the House, I was an engineer at Ellington colliery. A drift was driven into what is now the main area of working —a very profitable seam of coal. That drift was driven on the instructions of senior management, at an angle that everyone in the mine knew to be impossible. Everyone knew that it would not carry coal over the conveyor system. Nevertheless, the drift was driven.

Ordinary miners — not mining engineers with qualifications—recognised the problem; they had lived with such problems for countless years. But the drift was driven. When the coal seam was opened they could not get the coal out of the pit. They still cannot get it out. I would hesitate to say how many millions of pounds were spent on that exercise.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): My hon. Friend has cited an instance in his area. The point must be made, however, that that example could be repeated in almost every part of the British coalfields. In my area, in a place called Woolley West, two pits were closed at Pilsley, many years ago. It was decided to drift into Woolley West, a farming area where the seams basseted out. When they got

in, they did some more calculations on the oil influx into this country, and were not altogether sure that they needed the coal from Woolley West. The management—not the miners—decided that they could close up the pit and said that it had a high sulphur content. So the word went around: Woolley West would not be exploited because it had a high sulphur content. That was a load of nonsense. They were just making sure that they did not provide the additional coal.

In almost every single year in which closures have taken place—my hon. Friend knows the industry well and will know this—that sort of sabotage has happened on a grand scale. Conservative Members should be responsible for some of the deficit grants; they are not very different from the Minister, who ran a computer system that went bankrupt.

Mr. Thompson: That was a useful intervention. *[Interruption.]* I am being serious. It endorsed the point that I am about to make.

What happened in Northumberland is another example of what my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has described. Just after the miners' dispute, there was a proposal to close Bates's colliery. It was recognised that 29 million tonnes of reserves were left in the area. The proposal went to the new independent inquiry, which came out in favour of keeping the colliery open. But the Coal Board—now British Coal—would not accept that, and it had to close. So there are 29 million tonnes of coal under the North sea that cannot be recovered unless we spend thousands of millions of pounds to do so.

This year, Ashington colliery in my constituency is to close on 25 March because its reserves are exhausted. The miners accept that they are. Would it not have been logical to keep open Bates's colliery, with its 29 million tonnes of reserves, and to close Ashington colliery, redeploying the Ashington men in Bates's to extract the coal? But that coal is now written off. Countless millions of tonnes of coal are being written off in this country—yet coal is one of our most valuable assets.

I suggest that the Minister consider other elements of what British Coal does, rather than condemning the mining unions and the miners for their activities. If the Minister has not yet visited a mine, I suggest that when he does, he spends more than the usual two hours underground to get the feel of mining. Perhaps he should try 12 months; that would give him a better understanding of the industry.

12.3 am

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): It is always useful to scrutinise affirmative orders when they involve expenditure, especially in view of Opposition suspicions that many of them pave the way for privatisation.

The order covers an increase in deficit grant from £100 million to £200 million. It will be interesting to learn from the Minister why the Government's policy of many years of supporting the coal industry by loans has changed. It is welcome that it has. It is an extremely useful development to have grant rather than loan aid, but loan aid poses the problem, when it comes to privatisation, of the accumulated loans of the enterprise, organisation or whatever the Government decide to call it.

I do not want to use the word "enterprise" too much, because I do not particularly endorse the enterprise culture. It is a rat race: it is every man or woman for himself or herself, and the devil take the hindmost. I do not accept the philosophy of greed and cheating that is behind the Tory enterprise culture, and that is why we query the idea of grants as opposed to loans.

I welcome grant assistance, but what is at the back of the Minister's mind? Will privatisation take place once the Government have closed enough pits, usually those which were prominent in the strike and which are well organised? That is the basis on which the closures are taking place. Closure decisions have nothing to do with coal reserves running out.

As has been said, pits were closed under a Labour Government. The miners have always recognised that a strong case can be made for closure where the reserves have diminished and the workings are uneconomic. In those circumstances the miners will accept the closure, but when they know that the seams have not been worked out and that there is no economic case for closure—this happens time after time—they reasonably resist management decisions for closure because they have seen the investment of hundreds of millions of pounds. That is why we are discussing the deficit grant order tonight.

Management has invested in the industry, yet the workers in the industry were not consulted about that investment. The workers' skill and ability are not brought into play in the running of the industry. Management must manage is the kind of echo that we hear in the industry. I can hear Conservative Back Benchers saying in their dulcet, posh tones, "Hear, hear."

Surely people have the right to contribute the ability and knowledge that they may acquire from spending all their working lives in an industry. It is wrong for some tinpot manager to make decisions without consulting the men. We must not forget that that is why we are considering the order about deficit grant-aid. Some of the managers' decisions have not been in the best interests of the industry, of the workers in the industry or of the communities in the industry.

What was the miners' strike about? It was not about pay, it was about jobs. It was about trying to keep jobs and communities going so that everyone could work together to maintain pits and produce coal to generate electricity and soprovide energy for the nation.

Mr. Lofthouse: Does my hon. Friend agree that during a Labour Government's pit closure programme the deficit grant was used to provide new housing estates, establish new communities and find employment for miners? In the present circumstances, young men in the mining industry will never work again.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend is quite right. When the Labour Government considered closures, there was relatively high employment when compared with the present position. Alternative jobs were available and, as my hon. Friend said, the Labour Government tried to plan facilities for an area and ensured that alternative jobs were available.

It is all very well for Conservative Members to talk about competition. All industry receives a massive subsidy from the dole queue. That is just a transfer payment. Instead of supporting industry with grant aid of one sort or another, the Government withdraw the grant aid and it is transferred to the Department of Employment in unemployment benefit payments. There is also a loss of tax revenue because people are not working. That is why we are considering the order tonight.

[Mr. Cryer]

I should be grateful if the Minister could tell us what is behind the order and the assistance that is being provided. Has there been some pressure for privatisation from hon. Members in the Tory ranks? After all, over the past few months we have witnessed a Cabinet Member resigning from the Cabinet and popping neatly on to the board of a recently privatised company. Rich pickings indeed. Now we have learnt that the electricity industry is to be privatised and that the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit)——

Mr. Skinner: The skinhead.

Mr. Cryer: Yes, the skinhead. We have learnt that the right hon. Member for Chingford is to become an adviser to the chairman of British Aerospace. He is to be an honorary adviser, but it is a paid office. That is a peculiar position. British Aerospace is being given exclusive rights to negotiate for the purchase of the Rover Group. I have suggested——

Mr. David Shaw: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) is a director of a company that has handed over the largest cheque to the taxpayer and the Exchequer in the history of the country relevant to the debate?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It would be a good idea, for the good order of the debate, if we returned to the order before us.

Mr. Cryer: I was just about to do that. I do not think that that was a point of order, and I am shocked that Conservative Members should abuse the procedures of the House to raise spurious points of order so that they can interrupt my speech. I want to return to the order before us.

We are talking about the deficit grant helping to provide a competitive position for the British coal industry. I want to receive the assurance of the Minister that the money is not being given so that the coal industry can compete against South African miners. If the Minister is talking about that sort of competition, he is talking about coal that has been produced by the blood of black miners who are exploited in South Africa.

I wonder whether the deficit grant is contributing in some way to the massive amount of money that we pay out as part of our membership of the Common Market. When we joined the Common Market we were told that there would be a large market for coal. The reality is that we sell tiny amounts of coal to the Common Market, but the Common Market imports coal from South Africa. I ask the Minister whether that is fair competition? I also ask the Minister whether the increase of £100 million to £200 million in deficit grant will be accompanied by a clear declaration from the Government that they will intervene in imports from the Common Market of South African or other cheap source coal, which is imported to the Common Market and then brought across to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Andy Stewart *rose*——

Mr. Cryer: I shall give way to the farmer on the Tory Back Benches.

Mr. Stewart: I have been listening to the hon. Gentleman's argument. He was talking about importing South African coal. Can he tell us exactly how many tonnes of South African coal were imported into the United Kingdom in the past 12 months, and at what price it was delivered at the docks?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That might be a most interesting question, but it does not relate to the debate.

Mr. Cryer: I am willing to engage in such arguments, but I am prepared to take your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. I accept your strictures because I am not willing to go outside the rules of the Chair. The Chair has provided useful and helpful guidance so far tonight.

The deficit grant is an important means of keeping the Coal Board buoyant. However, because of the hierarchical structure of the coal industry, the responsibility for that is currently in the hands of the management. The management has not been working very well recently, because it has lurched from confrontation to confrontation, which it has engineered at the behest of the Government. I want an assurance from the Government that none of this money will be used to give preferential treatment to the Union of Democratic Mineworkers and that the National Union of Mineworkers will not be discriminated against, as has been the NCB's policy over many months. That policy has been followed often at considerable cost, and part of it is reflected in the money announced in the order.

Mr. Redmond: On the point about the treatment of the NUM versus the UDM, does my hon. Friend agree that, because the NUM membership was deliberately provoked into taking industrial action, which provocation must obviously have been condoned by the Government, the NCB has had to come back for a doubling of the original £100 million?

Mr. Cryer: There is much substance in my hon. Friend's comments. This extra £100 million goes, not to the miners, but to the management for use in its decisions. Some managers who have been in the industry a long time, who cherish it and do not want it damaged or destroyed, will want to resist the Government's pressures. The Government are trying to destroy the NUM. They have failed and they will continue to fail, but they spent a great deal of money — £6 billion — in their last attempt at confrontation with the NUM. Since their failure they have been trying by every means within their power to erode the NUM's negotiatiing rights and position. I want an assurance that this money is not earmarked in any way for further damage to industrial relations.

The mining industry is a dangerous industry in which it is hard to work. It has overcome its many difficulties with a minimal loss of working hours through strike action. I would wager that more days have been lost through industrial injury than through strike action. Can the Minister assure me that part of this extra money will be used to maintain high safety standards of the kind that have impressed Labour Members? Many of my hon. Friends, a number of whom are here, have worked in the mining industry in those safe conditions which are expected as a right. This can be compared with the situation in other countries; for example, in South Africa, where working standards are frequently appalling and certainly well below those that prevail in the United Kingdom mining industry.

I hope that the Minister can assure me that the Coal Board will spend this money positively, in maintaining

standards of health and safety at work, and that the Department of Employment will not seek to lower standards by the use of codes of practice instead of absolute statutory provisions as laid down in the Mines and Quarries Act 1954.

Mr. Jack Thompson: Does my hon. Friend recognise that the pit deputies' role with regard to safety is important? The idea that has been floated to remove that responsibility from the deputies is dangerous.

Mr. Cryer: I was going to mention that, because the Union of Democratic Mineworkers has attempted to erode safety standards in the pits by the offer virtually to take over from the deputies. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friends support my claim, which has been clearly reported. I am merely seeking an assurance from the Minister that the money involved in the order will be used to maintain existing safety standards. Deputies are responsible for operating safety standards and carrying out safety work, but safety is everyone's responsibility.

If the management behaves well towards the employees and takes them into its confidence, and if there are proper negotiations at every level throughout the mining industry, that breeds confidence and improves the level of safety work. Conflict is diminished and, therefore, the number of accidents that take place because people are drawn aside is reduced. The workers' safety watch may be diminished because of the pressure for negotiations. If those are kept to a minimum, safety can become a priority watchword, as it has been for many years in the industry. There has been an attempt to undermine the established safety position and the position of the deputies by a so-called union, which is in fact a company union, very much like the Spencer union during the inter-war years. *[Interruption.]*

Despite the interruptions by Conservative Members who are trying to undermine the constitution of this place and wreck the scheme of parliamentary discussion, I am still prepared to say that Opposition Members cherish the system of safety in the coal industry. We want to ensure that the money is used for that purpose and to build up the industry, not to damage industrial relations.

We cannot hope for real developments and security for the mining industry until we have a Labour Government reasserting decent industrial relations. *[Interruption.]* We recognise the value and importance of the contribution of working men and women.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): If the hon. Gentleman believes that a Labour Government would be so helpful and beneficial to the coal mining communities, why does he think that at the last general election so many coal mining communities voted Conservative?

Mr. Cryer: Not many mining communities voted Conservative. I often wish that the constituencies of Keighley and Bradford, South had a few drift mines open. They would be very handy.

If miners and their families had come to the House to listen to the debate, they would have seen the sorts of interjections made by Conservative Members. Not many miners go out in a dinner suit to the club to relax. That typifies the snobby, lofty attitude of the Tories towards this basic and important industry.

I would have concluded my remarks by now had it not been for the continuous interruptions. If I continue to be interrupted, I may have to start all over again to make sure that my remarks are on the record, as *Hansard* will have had a great number of difficulties.

We need a Labour Government to ensure that we have a decent coal mining industry linked to a publicly owned and controlled electricity generating industry. When we have a Labour Government, the spivvery that is selling off the CEGB and the SSEB will be brought to an end. We shall take those industries back into public ownership, working with a coal industry that is under workers' control, with a decent future for both the workers and the communities around them.

12.24 am

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) referred to the UDM and NACODS. However, he did not mention that the UDM members have threatened to take on the jobs of the deputies when the same bosses' union said, during the strike, that its members were departing from the NUM and going through the picket lines because there had not been a ballot. NACODS had a ballot, and the same people still scabbed. No doubt my hon. Friend would have dealt with that point had he had more time to speak.

So far, there has not been much reference to the 250-odd sacked miners. I want to know whether any of this additional money will be used to give them a fair crack of the whip. It is now almost three years since the end of the strike and those 250 remain without a job. The Secretary of State got his job back, and it is high time that he had the decency and the morality to start negotiations in every coalfield, using some of this money if necessary, to make sure that every one of those miners gets his job back.

The Government keep saying that nobody has been forced out compulsorily, but some people have. If the Government mean what they say, why do they not use some of this money to give those people their jobs back this year?

Mr. Redmond: My hon. Friend is making an important point. There is no doubt that the vast majority of these people were sacked simply because someone said, "He hit me," or, "They shouted out a nasty word." They have lost their livelihoods, and if we are to get back to good industrial relations, to avoid the problem of coming back here this late at night and asking for additional taxpayers' money, should not the coal board go to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service to learn about industrial relations?

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend, who is well versed in these matters, and has been, along with his colleagues in the miners' parliamentary group, doing a sterling job in making representations at all levels to ensure that these matters are dealt with properly, is right to say that in front of the Minister. Ministers have influence, although it might be marginal in some cases, and could use it. They are always on about flexible working for miners. All the miners who have been sacked would like a chance to get back to work to ensure that productivity is increased.

We hear that there has been a 60 per cent. increase in productivity. How much of the extra £100 million will go in the form of extra wages? If the miners have increased productivity by 60 per cent., why are the NUM men not

[Mr. Skinner]

even allowed the 4·2 per cent. increase that has been allocated to the UDM? How much of this money should be allocated?

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Is it not a fact, and does my hon. Friend not agree with me, that miners are probably the only people in the country to be charged in a court, found to be innocent and then have the court pass judgment on them even though they had been found innocent?

Mr. Skinner: Yes. Would it not be a tidy state of affairs if hon. Members or people from the other place were treated in that fashion? There would be an outcry if it happened to somebody, let us say, from the City of London, who got his finger in the pie, like some of those in the Guinness affair. If Mr. Saunders, one of these leading Tories, or one of the others got off in court, would there not be an outcry if someone tried to suggest that they should be victims of double jeopardy, that they should be dealt with twice over?

Mr. Richard Ryder (Mid-Norfolk): What about Kagan?

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman keeps referring to Lord Kagan. I do not know whether he wants to say that outside or not, but I will tell him this: I hold no brief for Lord Kagan. As far as I am concerned, if people are accountable to to others—not that he is, because he has never been elected—if they are in a position of trust and if they do something wrong and get their money mixed up —as some Tories have in their time—they must take the rap. That rule applies to anybody.

It also applies in respect of these grants. If there are some people in the Common Market who are fiddling, as we shall hear in the next debate—to which I will not refer—to the extent of £2 million—worth of fraud, they should be surcharged. Why should it only be the Lambeth and the Liverpool and the Clay Cross councillors? So if the hon. Gentleman wants justice for Lord Kagan, why does he not deal it out to those of his friends among the Tories who are lining their pockets right, left and centre?

Mr. Ryder: Name them.

Mr. Skinner: Does the hon. Gentleman want me to name them? That will not be a big job.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder) has anything to say, will he speak in an intervention, so that we can have it recorded in the *Official Report*? Mr. Skinner.

Mr. Skinner: There was one called Maudling. Does the hon. Gentleman want me to go any further? There is a whole gang of them.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I must refer the hon. Gentleman to the order that is before us. Perhaps he will not deal with personalities but with the principle of the order.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I draw your attention to the fact that the Whip on the Conservative Benches, who is supposed to help conduct the place by example, has been bellowing out all the time that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has been trying to conduct a serious debate about a serious issue?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Mr. Skinner.

Mr. Skinner: Somebody referred, when my hon. Friend was speaking, to the question of closed pits, something which I opposed no matter which Government were in power — it is all there on record. There was some reference to the fact that grants and loans used to be made at such times to try to find alternative employment. I remember being involved at the time of the Labour Government, before I became a Member of Parliament, in getting intermediate area status for the area of north Derbyshire which I now represent. In order to try to combat the losses of work in the mining areas, we set up the intermediate area status. This Government, who are always talking about jobs and what the Labour Government did, got rid of the intermediate status. It was one of the first things that they did. So not only are they concerned about shutting pits, with all the grants and all this, that and the other; they also get rid of any opportunities there might be for other jobs as well.

Mr. Redmond: Would my hon. Friend agree with me that there would be no need for the Government to be here tonight, seeking to double the deficit grant, if British Coal set its own house in order? British Coal says that, as a result of the overtime ban, it has made extra tonnage and extra profits. Bearing in mind that an overtime ban tends to reduce the overheads of the industry, ought not British Coal to be thanking the union for introducing an overtime ban, which is, in effect, helping to reduce the deficit grant that it is seeking? If that is the case, would my hon. Friend agree that, because of all this help that British Coal is getting from the National Union of Mineworkers, it really ought to pay the wages that are outstanding?

Mr. Skinner: It is one of the scandals of the past few years since the strike. The NUM has by far the greatest membership and is represented by my hon. Friend and many of us who have mining constituencies — [HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they?"]. Many of them are here tonight. Throughout the debate more than 20 representatives from mining areas have been present. Let us place it on record that during the debate there have sometimes been only two or three hon. Members on the Tory Benches.

Mr. David Shaw: The hon. Gentleman was not here.

Mr. Skinner: I am not taking any lectures from the bald eagle. I can manage without that. We are talking about the deficit grant. It is my job to keep in order. I know that it is important to stick to the order, never mind what the hon. Gentleman has to say.

At the beginning of the first debate the Minister talked about £9,000 million. He did not say that some of that consisted of loans. Compare that to what the farmers receive. None of that is loans. That is all dead money. That is the distinction we have to make when the Minister talks about money.

I was referring to alternative employment. *[Interruption.]* You do not have to be Pythagoras to work out that some of the £9,000 million to which the Minister referred includes loans. Not all of it is dead money, stretching over the period since 1979. However, the money that goes to farmers through the agricultural policy, whether in Britain, in West Germany or anywhere else, is all dead money. It is taxpayers' money and it is a straightforward subsidy. Some of that £9,000 million

consists of loans that hang like an albatross around the neck of the coal mining industry. That distinction must always be made.

The Government now have another cock-eyed scheme. They do not need deficit grants. They have introduced a set-aside scheme which will allow land to lie fallow, and farmers will be paid £150 an acre for not using it. Imagine what would happen if we had a deficit grant system in which we said that we would not work a coal seam under the sea and that we would let it lie fallow and pay the miners £150 a week for doing nothing. There would be such an outcry if we had fallow coal seams similar to the schemes that are proposed by the Common Market. All the Tory press would be talking about the coal seams that were not producing coal, yet the Government can find all sorts of cock-eyed systems to provide subsidies for the people they support.

We want to make sure that the deficit grants will go to those who create wealth in the industry, who produce the coal on the pit top and elsewhere.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I shall put the hon. Gentleman right and tell him that every penny of that £9·5 billion is a grant. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman's logic is as bad as his facts.

Mr. Skinner: The Minister is not well known for getting his facts right. He introduced a system for all the Tory constituency parties to link up with a computer. The Minister's figures were so bad that the company went bankrupt and all the Tory constituency parties ran out of floppy disks. The most incredible thing arising out of all that mess is that somehow or other the Minister managed to escape from underneath and the Prime Minister gave him the tinpot job to wreck the coal industry, and now we know why.

My final point, Madam Deputy Speaker, will touch your heart. There are a few thousand widows in the coal mining communities who are still waiting for concessionary coal. They are the pre-1968 widows. A few retired miners are also waiting for concessionary coal. Before 1968, those people did not get concessionary coal and they did not receive money in lieu. For a few hundred people in the Lancashire coalfield and in the north-east and for a considerable number of people in my constituency and in other areas in Derbyshire there was no proper redundancy agreement and no concessionary coal agreement. Some of those people are over 80.

Why are the Government unable to devise a scheme that would provide them with about 5 tonnes of coal a year to compensate them for the many years when wages were extremely low? In some cases, their husbands worked for 50 years but never had the benefit of a cob of coal. Some of these management people pick up £100,000 when they are made redundant and then start a drift mine somewhere else. They pick up £100,000 of taxpayers' money from the deficit grants that were made in years gone by and then make a small fortune on the side.

My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) has been to Hobart house today to make representations on behalf of miners. They get concessionary coal, yet these few hundred people——

Mr. Redmond: I hope that the Minister will not say that elderly people cannot receive a concession from this Government or from the Coal Board. It appears that there is no compassion in the coal board. It says that the agreements are sacrosanct. It shows no compassion for this small group of people.

The Minister ought to ensure that these people are taken care of. He ought to issue a directive to the Coal Board that would ensure that widows and pensioners in their twilight years are provided with comfort and warmth.

Mr. Skinner: I do not know whether you heard all that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because you have just come to the Chair. I shall not repeat what my hon. Friend has just said, but if this Government had any decency, they would resolve the matter.

The Coal Board has a get-tough policy on subsidence. It refuses to pay subsidence compensation for all the houses that are tumbling down. It is a scandal. My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) has some of those houses in his constituency and he has introduced two Bills on the subject. Additional deficit grant money ought to be made available so that the people who live in those houses can be given proper subsidence payments.

Mr. Lofthouse: Does my hon. Friend agree that there are other categories of aged people, miners' widows in their 80s and older, who are unable to leave their three-bedroomed council houses to go into local authority sheltered schemes because they would lose their cash in lieu of fuel allowances? Does not he think that some of this money should be used to protect those people?

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend is right. He has referred to that before in these debates. It is important to keep bringing it to the attention of the Government. At a time when they intend to hammer those at the bottom of the scale through social fund payments — we will have a campaign about that tomorrow — they also intend to attack people in coalfield areas by preventing them from getting what is due to them. The same is true of the subsidence payments. It is a scandal that the Government have stopped making the payments——

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield) *rose*——

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend wants to get in——

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to give way to another hon. Member who has been absent from the debate for 2 hours 45 minutes when other hon. Members have been waiting to make a contribution? The debate had been going on for 2 hours 45 minutes before the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) came into the Chamber.

Mr. Redmond: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Unlike you, I have been in the Chamber throughout the debate on the two orders. Is it in order for an hon. Member to make a point of order about hon. Members seeking to speak when the hon. Member in question—the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin)—has not sought once to catch your eye? May I ask you whether that is in order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): There is less than a quarter of an hour to go in the debate and the House has not yet had a response from the Minister. I therefore think it would be better if hon. Members got on with the debate.

Mr. Skinner: I have been trying to make haste. I have been trying to get through a compendium of points about the order. My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield, who

[Mr. Skinner]

has been trying to introduce two Bills to bring relief to people who have had to put up with all the miseries of subsidence, wants to intervene to make a small point.

Mr. Meale: I thank my hon. Friend. The Minister is aware that I have two Bills listed for debate in the House. Is he aware that thousands of properties in the north Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire areas are affected and that there has been no action by the Coal Board to try to relieve the problem? Is he aware that the common system used to try to avoid handling the cases is to send letters to Members of Parliament saying that the matter is sub judice because it is in the hands of the agents? Is he aware that the Coal Board says that it cannot handle the cases even though they have not entered court? Is it not a disgrace and is it not time the Coal Board put the matter right?

Mr. Skinner: These debates provide a wonderful opportunity for hon. Members to make these points.

I want to deal with another very important matter before I conclude. It has had some publicity and I think that it needs more. I am worried that some of the additional £100 million grant may finish up with British Coal Enterprise Ltd. which is a bogus laundering organisation. It is a front organisation for a few people who are conning their way around the coalfield areas by saying that they will provide jobs.

We decided to investigate the matter. We heard the Prime Minister say in the House that British Coal Enterprise Ltd. which was set up during the strike with £30 million of taxpayers' money, a straightforward subsidy, had provided 18,000 job opportunities. She did not say jobs but job opportunities. We wondered where they were.

I asked my hon. Friends the Members for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) and Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay); I asked others of my hon. Friends from Wales, the north-east and Nottinghamshire. None of us could find the jobs that were supposed to have been provided. We could not find 18, never mind 18,000.

Being a little curious and cynical and sceptical, I put two and two together and decided to invite the director of British Coal Enterprise Ltd, to the House. He hot-footed it over here in a crack. I invited him in my capacity as the chairman of the east midlands group of Members. He thought to himself, "Hello. Here's another gravy train I can jump on. I bet the east midlands group will want to invite me up to the east midlands so that I can con all the local authorities in the area about how I am spending this £30 million on jobs." Little did he know that I was the chairman. When he arrived we asked him to enumerate the jobs provided in each constituency.

Dr. Michael Clark *rose*——

Mr. Skinner: There is a penguin on his feet.

Dr. Clark: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has asked the Minister a number of questions, which he hopes the Minister will answer. I wonder whether you, Sir, can advise us how the Minister can answer all the questions that have been asked if he does not have time to say a few words at the end of the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All that I can do is remind the House that the debate must end in 10 minutes' time.

Mr. Cryer: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) to raise a point of order about ordinary working men and women and their families when he is wearing a dinner suit? It offends every standard of decency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that we had better get on with the debate.

Mr. Skinner: Some people might say that it was kinky dress. It is different; there is no doubt about that. [HON. MEMBERS: "At least he's got more than one suit."] He may have more money, but that does not make him any better.

We were discussing a very important point about backhanders — people using taxpayers' money, on the face of it to provide jobs, but in reality only to con people. We asked for a list of jobs in every constituency in the mining areas of Britain. Mr. Merrik Spanton, ex-Nottinghamshire coal board, refused to give those figures. One of my hon. Friends said, "I've got four," and others of my hon. Friends knew of two or three. But we could not find the jobs. When we asked the director to put the figures in the Library, he refused. We are talking about handing out public money. Will any of the money find its way to Merrik Spanton's British Coal Enterprise?

Mr. Jack Thompson: Is my hon. Friend aware that following his confrontation with representatives of British Coal Enterprise, they have now refused to meet the northern group of Members?

Mr. Skinner: Once bitten, twice shy. He probably thinks, "If I go to the northern group I shall be asked the same very awkward questions that I was asked at the east midlands group." What he did not realise was that I had imported some Yorkshire group members into the east midlands group meeting. He said that the jobs were not in the east midlands but in Yorkshire. Then my Yorkshire colleagues pounced. That is why he did not go to the northern group. He was running out of territory. He now says, "Well, most of them are in Scotland and Wales," but my hon. Friends from Scotland and Wales do not know where they are.

This is a serious matter. We are talking about £30 million. The Prime Minister often talks about taxpayers' money. "Remember, the taxpayer is your next-door neighbour," she says, but £30 million of taxpayers' money has been spent and we can find no more than a handful of jobs created.

We tested British Coal Enterprise further. My colleagues and I concluded that it was laying claim to jobs that were being created by the Scottish Development Agency and the Welsh Development Agency. We were told, "We had an input."

That £30 million is one long gravy train stretching right across the coalfields of Britain, touting its way from one area to another, masquerading as a provider of jobs for people who have been thrown out of work in the coalfields when the jobs that have been created — there are certainly not enough of them — have actually been created by local authorities, by the Scottish and Welsh Development Agencies and by other development bodies.

I hope that no more money will be going to Mr. Merrik Spanton and his merry men.

Mr. Andy Stewart: And ladies.

Mr. Skinner: We did not meet any, but there may well be some. It is a very sinister operation.

We told Mr. Merrik Spanton that if £30 million had been used in that way by a Labour local authority there would have been surcharges, Tory Members of Parliament would have been asking questions every day and the Tory press would have been running horror stories about it, but, because these people are friends of the Government and the Prime Minister, nothing is done about it. In a few minutes' time we shall be talking about fraud on a massive scale in the Common Market. Here we have something akin to that in British Coal Enterprise Limited and it is time that it was sussed out. It is conceivable that it will be investigated by a Committee of this House.

Plenty of things could be done with £100 million, but I return to my original point about the 250 sacked miners who have been waiting three years to get their jobs back. It is time the Minister got together with people in the coalfields and gave those people a chance to work again. It is time he showed a little humanity for a change. Instead of always concerning themselves with their own people, the Government should be doing something about those 250 miners. If some of the extra money is used to find those people jobs in Scotland, in Yorkshire, in the north-east and everywhere else, this debate will have been useful.

12.57 am

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have been left three minutes to sum up three hours of debate and questioning. Needless to say, I cannot possibly answer all the questions that have been raised.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) seem to see the deficit grant as some great capitalist plot against the coal industry. His hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) went perhaps not further but down a slightly different track. He was suspicious and sceptical about the amount of money being spent. It is reasonable for any Member of Parliament to be worried when the Government ask for more money, so the hon. Gentleman has taken a very honourable position. I assure him that the intention is that the coal industry should break even next year, so this will be the last occasion on which we shall have to make this kind of request on its behalf.

One of the reasons why we are confident that the industry is capable of standing on its own feet——

Mr. Redmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I cannot give way.

The hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) discussed the question of imports very thoroughly and many other hon. Members mentioned the assumed contract currently under dispute between British Coal and the South of Scotland electricity board.

I agree with the hon Member for Midlothian that the cards are by no means stacked against the British coal industry. Long-term contracts will be hard to establish, and there are no facilities for large-scale imports, but—this is fundamental to what we have been saying tonight—the industry has a great future, or we would not be putting the amounts of money behind it that we are. We have confidence in the industry, but every Labour Member seemed to imply that it was not capable of standing on its own feet. We are the friends of the industry. We are putting more money behind it than ever before.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted Business).*

Question agreed to

Resolved,

That the draft Coal Industry (Limit on Deficit Grants) Order 1988, which was laid before this House on 8th February, be approved.

European Court of Auditors

[Relevant documents: European Community documents Nos. 9392/87 on the fight against fraud affecting the Community budget, 9130/87, Court of Auditors' special report No. 2/87 on the quota/additional levy system in the milk sector and the unnumbered explanatory memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 4 December 1987 concerning Court of Auditors' special report No. 4/87 on Community wine distillation schemes.]

1 am

The Paymaster General (Mr. Peter Brooke): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the Annual Report of the European Court of Auditors on the financial year 1986, together with the replies of the Institutions; and approves the Government's continued efforts to press for effective Budget discipline and proper financial control of Community expenditure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I must inform the House that Mr. Speaker has not selected the amendment tabled in the name of the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland), but it is in order to canvass it during the debate.

Mr. Brooke: The annual report of the Court of Auditors provides an invaluable opportunity for the House, and the Community more generally, to consider the effectiveness with which the Community manages and controls the very substantial resources at its disposal.

Our debate this year takes place in the light of the wide-ranging agreement on the future financing of the Community that was reached at the Brussels European Council. I am sure that the House will bear that in mind in its scrutiny of the report, which concerns the implementation of the budget in 1986.

A great deal has changed since 1986. What has not changed, however, is the important contribution to our deliberations on all Community matters that is made by the Select Committee on European Legislation. I pay tribute to its work, which is exemplified by its lucid and helpful report on the Court of Auditors' report.

The court's role is to examine the legality and regularity of Community receipts and expenditure, and to assess the management and effectiveness of the Community budget. The annual report is the basis on which the European Parliament decides whether to grant a discharge to the commission for its implementation of the Community budget, as described in the explanatory memorandum that I submitted to the House on 25 January.

The European Parliament takes account of, but is not bound by, the discharge recommendation of the Council of Ministers. The Council, in turn, bases its recommendation on the report of its budget committee, which is prepared after thorough discussions throughout January and February each year. The Economic and Finance Council will be discussing the court's report next Monday, 7 March. Tonight's debate will help to determine the Government's position for that Council, where I shall represent the United Kingdom.

I will have the benefit at the Council of the insights gained from an instructive and valuable visit that I paid to the European Court of Auditors a month ago. In the course of that visit, I expressed my strong support for the court's increasing efforts to tackle fraud. I emphasised the contribution that the court can make on the subject of value for money in the Community budget. I was struck by the range and complexity of the court's task, but I came away with a clear impression of the court's strong sense of independence and determination to execute its role.

As to the contents of the 1986 report, I propose to concentrate on a number of the most important issues identified by the court. They are the imbalance between expenditure and revenue, the excessive growth of agricultural expenditure, the burden of the past, budget management, and fraud. I shall also touch on spending on aid from the European development fund and the Community's food aid programme.

First, the court says that in 1986, for the third year running, there was an imbalance between expenditure and revenue. On the court's analysis, that imbalance, which it believes lies at the heart of the Community's financial difficulties, had two causes: first, the failure of the 1984 budget discipline conclusions to control expenditure — above all, agricultural expenditure — and, secondly, a revenue ceiling which, the court believes, was artificial and which took insufficient account of the Community's financing needs.

The Government fully share the court's concern about the control of expenditure, but we believe there may be an inconsistency in its attitude to the ceiling on resources. It would not have solved the Community's problems to have simply increased the own resources ceiling to accommodate accelerating expenditure. That would have led to the Community's finances running completely out of control. It is why, in the recent negotiations on future financing, the Government insisted that, before there could be any agreement to increase Community resources, there had to be a new, binding system of budget discipline combined with effective policy instruments. It was only because we are able to secure the necessary reforms that we felt it right to agree to an increase in the Community's resources.

The court says that, because of almost unlimited and automatic support for prices, the growth of agricultural spending outstripped Community resources. The court fears that this will continue to be the case, particularly in view of the mountains of surplus produce waiting to be depreciated or disposed of. The court appeals to the budgetary authority to start providing for depreciation in the 1988 budget.

Those strictures about agricultural expenditure were, of course, absolutely appropriate in the context of the 1986 budget, and the same criticisms could be made about the situation in 1987. But we now have the machinery to ensure that, from this year onward, things will begin to change. That machinery has four main components: first, a legally binding guideline on agricultural guarantee expenditure, which will henceforth grow more slowly than Community GNP; secondly, automatic stabilisers in all the main product regimes, under which cuts in support prices for the main commodities will be automatically imposed if production exceeds predetermined levels; thirdly, specific budgetary provision — outside the guideline—to finance the disposal of outstanding stocks; and fourthly, agreement that new stocks will be systematically depreciated when they are established.

The main message from all this, in terms of the Court of Auditors' specific concerns, are that the days of automatic and unlimited price support are over, and that the Community is prepared at long last to adopt a coherent accountancy system for stock depreciation.

Next, there is the question of the Community's outstanding liabilities. Following criticisms made in the court's 1985 report, the Commission adopted an improved presentation of the position in 1986, which showed that outstanding liabilities and potential expenditure had grown from 20 billion ecu in 1985 to 34 billion ecu in 1986 — on the Commission's reckoning. That is indeed a worrying statistic, but it requires closer analysis.

Only 40 per cent. of that total reflects outstanding legal commitments. Around 20 per cent. represents the costs associated with agricultural stocks, which I have already discussed. The remainder is potential expenditure on programmes such as R and D and the structural funds, for which commitments are inevitably entered into some time before the associated payments fall due. It is not therefore very meaningful to aggregate the various liabilities into a single figure. Some may never come to fruition; others are a natural result of multi-annual programme planning; others again are simply the result of ensuring that money is not spent earlier than necessary.

It is none the less vital to avoid any recurrence of the major imbalance between commitments and payments that was allowed to build up in the early 1980s, and whose correction contributed to the big rise in non-compulsory expenditure in the 1986 budget, Here, too, the European Council agreed important reforms for which the Government had been pressing. First, a ceiling has been placed on the overall level of commitment appropriations. Secondly, unused appropriations will no longer be automatically carried over from one year to the next. Thirdly, moribund commitments will be cancelled, other than in tightly defined circumstances.

The reforms will also help to improve the transparency of the Community budget, by bringing about a closer identification between what is actually spent in any given year and the level of budgetary provision for that year. The need for transparency and annuality has rightly been emphasised by the court over the years. The report before us draws particular attention to the so-called "negative reserve". This expedient, first introduced in 1986, is a device which, in the last couple of years, threatened to get out of hand. It is especially gratifying that, at the United Kingdom's instigation, the European Council has now agreed to impose a limit of 200 mecu on the level of any such reserve.

Turning to the important issue of fraud, the Government welcome the initiative shown by the court in devoting a whole chapter of its annual report to this question. The chapter looks at the two main areas of fraud and irregularity — the collection of traditional own resources and agricultural guarantee payments. The court is concerned at the low level of reporting of irregularities by member states. On traditional own resources, reporting is scanty, unsystematic and irregular. The pattern of reporting on agricultural fraud is better but still variable. The court says that only 311 cases, involving about £20 million, were reported in 1986. It observes that the Commission was unable to ensure that all member states had reliable systems for notifying fraud and irregularities. The court proposes a number of reforms, including the setting up of a co-ordinating unit in the Commission and more systematic monitoring of member states' performance in the fight against fraud.

The Goverment fully share the court's concern, the timeliness of which was recently underlined by, among other things, the "Panorama" programme's vivid report on CAP fraud. The United Kingdom is committed to the fight against fraud, whether in this country or in other member states. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food stressed that point at the Agriculture Council last month. It should be noted that the court does not challenge the fundamental principle that member states are, and must remain, the first line of defence against fraud. Only they have the necessary powers and resources. The Commission is responsible for checking that member states have adequate arrangements.

It is important that the Commission should make maximum use of the powers at its disposal, and the Government are ready to consider sympathetically any cost-effective proposals which the Commission may make for new or enhanced powers to improve co-operation, monitoring, reporting or compliance. We welcome the fact that, as recommended by the Court of Auditors and described in the explanatory memorandum which I submitted to the House on 29 January, the Commission has decided to set up a new unit to co-ordinate anti-fraud activities. We shall take a particularly close interest in the unit's role and performance.

Hon. Members will be aware that other, more radical proposals for combating fraud have been made. For example, the court suggests that the Commission should be allowed to intervene as plaintiff in national cases, and the European Parliament's budgetary control committee, which has contributed a great deal to our understanding of the problem of fraud, has proposed so-called flying squads of Commission inspectors, with powers of entry and search in member states. Such proposals pose important questions about the point at which to draw the boundary between Community competence and national independence. Our debate will no doubt be enlivened by comments on that issue from all parts of the House.

The court also looks at the European development fund. No evidence of widespread or serious mismanagement is uncovered, but there are a number of recommendations for improvements. In many cases, however, the Commission has replied that reforms have already been, or are about to be, introduced. I believe that the court could play a more valuable role if it were able to identify areas, particularly in the Commission's aid management systems, in which reforms might lead to improvements in the effectiveness of the aid being provided.

On food aid, the annual report brings out the need for improved co-ordination between donors and better assessments of food aid requirements. The court also dealt with food aid in some detail in a special report issued in August 1987, which severely criticised the performance in 1981-85. Most of the shortcomings indentified were corrected in the 1986 policy regulation agreed under the United Kingdom Presidency, or the subsequent Commission regulation on purchase and shipment. These new regulations have led to substantial improvements.

In conclusion, the Government share much of the Court of Auditors' concern about the management of the Community budget in 1986. We shall continue to press for the application to the Community's finances of the same discipline and standards as we apply to national public expenditure. The reforms agreed at the Brussels European Council represent an important step in this direction. The court can feel justifiably proud that those reforms directly

[Mr. Brooke]

address so many of its recent preoccupations. I therefore commend the report to the House and look forward to hearing the views of hon. Members.

1.14 am

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): While wishing to give credence to the seriousness with which the Government treat these issues of accountability in the use of public funds in the private sector in the Community, I must say that we are struck by the timing of the debate. At 1.15 am, after two orders, it is hardly likely or feasible for hon. Members to be present for the debate, because many of them must be in Committee or have other commitments in the House tomorrow. This debate should take place in prime time rather than in the early morning.

The Paymaster General referred to the Government's commitment to gaining reductions in agricultural spending, and to the failure of the system set up at Fontainebleau. It is worth drawing to the attention of the House just what a failure that was. Agricultural spending has increased by two and a half times since Fontainebleau, despite the fact that we were assured that over-spending would be controlled.

We support the case for stabilisers, and we are aware of the way in which they should work, but we do that very much in the way that Mr. Giscard d'Estaing once supported General de Gaulle by saying : "Yes, but." The "but" is that there is a strong case for production limits. There is now a strong case in the Community for applying the kind of deficiency payment system that obtained in this country before we joined the European Community.

At the time of the signing of the Rome treaty in 1957, one in four of the working population of the Community were employed in agriculture. The argument then was that there were so many farms and small units in agriculture that the application of a production limits system on the deficiency payments basis simply would not be administratively feasible and the costs would exceed the benefits. However, that is no longer the case. The total working population in agriculture in the original six members of the Community is now down to about 5 per cent. For the Community of 10, before the accession of the Mediterranean countries, the figure is about 7 or 7·5 per cent. It is now entirely feasible to apply a deficiency payments system in the Community. We believe that that relates to the kind of analysis that the Court of Auditors has made of the social and regional funds.

Without elaborating on the point in great detail, the agricultural budget for 1986 amounted to precisely two-thirds of Community spending, while the regional fund accounted for only 7·6 per cent. of total spending. If we are to get the kind of reform that will allow us to tackle over-spend properly, and if besides we can get a benefit for the consumer through lower prices — and overwhelmingly more than nine tenths of the population in the Community are now urban consumers — we should recommend that the Government urge in the Community that prices be lowered and that the level of production grants be related to the size of fund.

Many people on a five to 20 hectare farm in a family self-employed operation enjoy a decent standard of living, and many enjoy a standard of living equivalent to that of workers in industry. But others do not enjoy such a standard of living. The average age of the farming community has risen and in many cases is between 55 and 60—close to retirement age.

There is a case for shifting resources from the agricultural fund to the social and regional funds, as that would allow us to avoid causing such a report from the auditors, which has stressed the overrun of farm spending. The excellent Select Committee on European legislation report also stated that the continued accumulated surplus stocks over the years is high and stays high. If the overrun is to be reduced by the stabilisers, it still will not tackle the fundamental problems of excessive expenditure.

I tabled an amendment concerning fraud. We think that that is appropriate and important, inasmuch as it is crucial to stress to the Commission the importance of developing appropriate action to deal with fraud and to emphasise that in the debate. I hope that the Minister will be able to accept the substance of that amendment. I accept that the measures concerned would be within the present Community framework rather than the extended Community framework. We share the view that it is appropriate for the Community to do best what it can best do. However, that does not mean that it should infringe the autonomy of member states in their pursuit of policies to combat fraud.

However, we should distinguish, in the case of agricultural support, between big and small farms. There is a difference between the smallholder, where it is most appropriate for the Community as a whole if the Governments monitor the process of fraud, and multinational agri-business. I stress that. Multinational agri-business is integrated from production through processing, transport, distribution and retailing, and it is easier in such firms for frauds to be perpetuated. That does not apply to the cruder frauds, such as importing meat from Argentina and recycling it as allegedly Community produce, but it does apply to techniques such as transfer pricing. Under-invoicing and over-invoicing are much harder to detect in multinational companies. In that context, the Community should be playing a role by supervising the transactions. It should be gaining transparency. That is considered extremely important in general in terms of articles 85 and 86 of the Rome treaty. The Community should be gaining transparency on such transactions, many of which at present remain opaque.

On the matter of the European regional development fund, it is notable that the report from the Court of Auditors states:

> "The financing of small projects by the ERDF where necessary could take place within the context of national programmes of Community interest since the procedure used for the approval and administration of these programmes should give access to more appropriate information."

We agree, again, that it is appropriate for the monitoring to be done nationally rather than by the Community. However, the process should be extended.

That refers also to the spending by the European Investment Bank, which should be considering joint ventures between regional enterprise boards in the Community. Regional enterprise boards exist in, for example, Catalonia in Spain, Emilia Romagna the German Laender and the west midlands and Lancashire in the United Kingdom. If there is an area where expenditure would be merited, it would be the funding of research projects, such as that which the Court of Auditors analyses, into that sort of linking joint venture approach

of regional enterprise boards, which have shown such success in the effective use of public money in regional development in several countries of the Community.

It is time for a major review of the European development fund and the Community aid programmes for developing countries. The report of the Court of Auditors is not adequate. The slowest institution to evaluate, approve and monitor projects of virtually any of the international multilateral aid agencies is the European Commission. Delays of weeks or months occur. For example, tragically, for months there were delays during the last famine in 1984-85 in the horn of Africa whereas a national Ministry of Overseas Development could take a decision within days or hours.

That is the description of the kinds of delay that occur even for emergency relief programmes. If the Community's concept of emergency runs from weeks to months, it is not surprising that other programmes underspend year after year. The implication is that there should be a major review of the development spending by the Community. If there is a subject that merits a specific research programme—perhaps on an international basis between established overseas development institutes in different countries—it is the EDF programme.

The Court of Auditor's report alone can hardly cover the full implications of research and development, but it is clear that a transmission mechanism is missing for translating research and development into innovation in new investment projects which thereby serve on a coherent and major basis the objective of a European industrial strategy. Again I stress that we share the Government's attitude that such projects should be international rather than supranational. But the transmission belt between R and D and effective innovation too often is missing.

I have referred to the case for distinguishing between expenditure by larger and smaller enterprises—multinational major firms on the one hand and regional or local minor firms on the other. The Commission should attend to this matter, because there are different problems of gaining transparency on the use of public funds for different kinds of enterprise which themselves have qualitatively different roles. That goes, of course, not just for agri-business, but for other multinational enterprises in the Community as a whole.

At the moment there is not even an accounting by the Commission for the role of a single multinational enterprise in the Community as a whole. It is ridiculous that, after so long, and after the Community has published competition studies, which would not just cover the floor of the Chamber but would be piled several feet high, competition is analysed in the Community purely on a national basis. Instead of it being possible to gain transparency for the Community as a whole in the operations of a company such as IBM or any other major multinational, we are given the divided parts of IBM for a dozen individual countries. This is another area in which the Community should be taking more action. It would be of merit to put resources into research and methodology projects which make possible more transparency of the activities of such firms in the Community.

At this time of night, looking across at several Conservative Members, I am reminded of a member of the other place who dreamt one night that he was speaking there and woke to find that he was. I wish those Conservative Members well in their contributions and I hope that the Minister will accept the spirit of our amendment.

1.30 am

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): Hon. Members' attention can be drawn to documents in strange ways. The special report of the Court of Auditors was drawn to my attention in a strange way by a farmer whom I met in Ashbourne at a meeting of the National Farmers Union. British farmers say that they understand the problem of trying to balance production with consumption, but they want to be treated like other Community members. They have long argued that they are not treated as fairly as other members of the Community. That would appear to be the case, from studying paragraph 5.47 on page 57 of the Official Journal of the Communities which states:

"The overall objective of the quota/additional levy system is to re-establish a balance between production and consumption of milk and milk products. The estimated budgetary cost of disposing of the surplus production of milk, which in 1986 was evaluated at 9,6 Mio tonnes, is at least 2688 Mio ECU."

The journal goes on:

"At the end of 1986 the situation was so serious that the Council had to adopt a comprehensive package of measures tightening up the quota/levy system, restricting the scope of intervention for butter and skimmed milk powder, and providing for a special disposal programme to sell 1 Mio tonnes of butter at very low prices. In its opinion No. 1/87 ([23]) the Court has expressed disagreement with the financing arrangements.

5.49. While in general Member States adopted arrangements to implement the system which were in accordance with the regulations as they existed, there were a number of exceptions which directly affected the achievement of the system's objectives:

(a) the absence of implementation progress in Italy;

(b) the overallocation of quota by the F R of Germany and to a lesser extent by the Netherlands and Belgium;

(c) the avoidance of 21,7 M ECU in levy liability in respect of 1985/86 by France by excluding one day's deliveries from the calculation of the levy liability; and

(d) the establishment in Denmark of a single purchaser which corresponded neither to the normal definition of a purchaser nor to the definition set out in the quota regulations."

The journal refers to five countries, so it is no wonder that British farmers occasionally think that they do not get a fair deal.

I am grateful for the way in which my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General responded to the report by saying that it was important that the recommendations of the Court of Auditors should be put into operation. The court shows those areas in which Community legislation is not being applied. We can use that as ammunition to press the Government, the Commission and the Community to take positive action to ensure that British farmers get a fair deal. I hope that my right hon. Friend will pursue that matter in the negotiations on which he is about to embark.

1.34 am

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): May I first put on record my continuing view that we make poor provision for discussion of Community affairs in the House. I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) that it is plumb crazy to begin a debate on anything at all at this time of night. I observe that members

[Sir Russell Johnston]

of the Press Gallery have sensibly gone to bed, so there will be zilch coverage in any of the media, and there will be no way in which what we say here will be forwarded on for any discussion. Putting these important matters on so late is a sign of the unwillingness of the Government to discuss them fully and sensibly, something about which hon. Members on both sides of the House and of the argument could make common cause. We are talking about a document of 261 pages. It has to be discussed in one and a half hours, and it is now 1.35 am. That is not a sensible way to run a country.

Today there were questions to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. No longer do we have any reserved segment of those questions for European Community affairs. We had one question today, and last month we had none because of the vagaries and caprices of the ballot system That should be changed, and the Minister should convey that view to the Leader of the House and the Government managers.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has raised this matter. Can we take it that that is not only his view but that of all his hon. Friends, because it is not only a party matter but one which concerns many people? A regular 20 minutes used to be set aside for EEC questions, but that time has gone.

Sir Russell Johnston: The hon. Gentleman does hard work on the Scrutiny Committee. It is the view of the Liberal party. We formally objected to the change when it took place.

Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones (Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household): All the Liberal party?

Sir Russell Johnston: The hon. Gentleman may fear that, because he is a Whip, he cannot properly intervene, although I know that he would love to. I can assure him that it is also the view of those who will remain in the Liberal party, continuing in the arms of others.

The Brussels agreement came after the end of the period to which the report refers, and it is relevant as it deals with all the fundamental problems raised in the report. I know that the Prime Minister was criticised, but the Government's conduct at the Brussels summit was good. The Liberals have always said that if Britain were prepared to give a little on some points, it could reasonably expect other European countries to do the same. That is what happened at Brussels. If the Prime Minister is now under criticism from her Back Benchers—although I note that some of her more notable critics are not here — the blame for this must lie squarely at her own door because of the public sabre-rattling in which she indulged before the summit, and her fondness for confrontation.

As for the Labour party, the change in its approach, which has been signalled in various well-publicised so-called secret guideline documents emanating from the office of the Leader of the Opposition, did not seem to have reached the attention of the Labour spokesmen on European affairs. Their response to Brussels—I exclude from this criticism the hon. Member for Vauxhall—was to try to be more nationalist than the Prime Minister, which is a pretty formidable task, rather than to address themselves to the need for accommodation and balanced negotiation, without which the Leader of the Opposition's goal of a Socialist Europe does not have any chance of even getting on the agenda.

The agreement is to be welcomed, in that it introduces a number of crucial changes which have long been advocated, not least by the Commission, but on which the Governments of the Community have never before agreed. The first is the limitation of the common agricultural policy expenditure to a progressively smaller share of the budget — reaching, it is hoped, 50 per cent. by 1992 as opposed to 70 per cent. now.

The second is the provision of increased resources which are politically and socially essential for the success of the common internal market, particularly to the structural funds — although I think it is worth noting that the increase in the social fund could be of great benefit in rejuvenating the inner cities of the United Kingdom. The help to Portugal and Greece is also politically and socially vital to the cohesion of the Community.

The third is the Community's own resources: the automatic payments to member states will in future specify a percentage of the country's gross national product as opposed to value added tax. This is a change to a much simpler and more equitable system, about which I have spoken over many years in these debates.

The auditors are critical of the fact that the Community has, in reality, run a budget deficit, and thus broken its own rules. It is very important, in the general debate about these things—because the Commission is always blamed —to emphasise that the Commission is not the culprit. The culprit is the Council of Ministers, which has been responsible for agreeing to these things. That includes our own Government.

I remember very well the late David Penhaligon reminding us, immediately after the introduction of milk quotas, that about six months earlier the then Minister of Agriculture had gone to his constituency to speak to a National Farmers Union meeting, and had said that dairy producers must be encouraged to expand. Six months later we had milk quotas.

So it is really not good enough for the Government to condemn the Commission, or for critics of the European Community on the Government Benches to condemn the Community as a whole, for profligacy, when they themselves contributed to that very profligacy.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about the Council of Ministers, but is it the policy of whatever the new party is to be called to continue the Liberal party's previous policy of a firm commitment never to use the national veto? If that is still the policy of his party, what price membership of the Council of Ministers?

Sir Russell Johnston: This is something of a diversion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I will respond briefly. The policy of the new party will, in the first instance, be based on the manifesto on which we jointly fought the last election nine months ago. There was nothing in that manifesto which said that we would never use the veto; there was quite a bit of the manifesto which said that concentration on the idea of the veto was not the right way to look at the European Community and that one should contemplate its use only in very extreme circumstances. There was nothing in our manifesto along the lines that have just been suggested.

The recent agreement nevertheless goes quite a long way to dealing with these problems of resources, and will free the Commission from having to take the desperate measures that it has often been forced to take.

In his introductory remarks, the Minister rightly expressed his approval of the strong sense of independence which the Court of Auditors has demonstrated. During the exchange at Question Time today, an hon. Member from the Labour Front Bench suggested that the Government ought to sack Lord Cockfield as fast as possible because he was not following Government policy. That appeared to receive some approbation from the Government Back Benches. One should perhaps also emphasise in this debate that the Commission, like the Court of Auditors, is a collegiate body which is not there to advance national interests but to try to work out a common, coherent European attitude which will in the end, one hopes, be to the benefit of all member countries.

The European Parliament, in which I feel honoured to have served for six years is often the butt of abuse from Community critics, so it is worth underlining the Minister's remark that it has played a positive role in ensuring that the Community's finances are properly accounted for, and has been very critical of the Commission's unofficial deficit financing, for example in its administration of butter stocks. It refused to discharge the Community's 1985 accounts until this January for that very reason and it was eventually given assurances that that practice would be changed in future.

The Community's budgeting shows how much better the Community would function if the European Parliament were given a more direct responsibility to do what parliaments are supposed to do—which we find difficult even in the House—and act as a check on the activities of the Executive. I am not terribly impressed with checking the activities of the Executive at 1.45 am.

Later in the debate, hon. Members opposed to the Community may raise the cost of the CAP which is far too much, but even if it were dramatically reduced, the idea that agricultural expense can somehow be avoided completely is nonsense. After all, before we entered the Community, we paid deficiency payments. The massive fall in the value of the pound since then would have made those payments much larger if huge price cuts to farmers had to be avoided.

The myth persists that the British taxpayer is supporting the entire European bureaucracy. The report shows that that assertion is false. It is worth noting that the entire Commission staff is less than the staff of the London borough of Brent. I do not think that the Commission is looking for any support from the Japanese.

The table on page 163 of the report shows the own resources contributed by member states. It shows that Britain's contribution of 4·8 billion ecu is 45 per cent. less than that of Germany and 30 per cent. less than that of France. The move towards defining own resources as a percentage of GNP is likely to increase Italy's contribution relative to our own.

The same picture emerges when payments for the Community are taken into account. Germany's net contribution is more than two and a half times greater than the United Kingdom's contribution.

Therefore, it is important to stress to the public, not that I am arguing that we are not paying a considerable amount of money, but that the picture is put that we are paying much more than others, which is not the case. Also, if one takes into account the calculations that have been made about how much it costs not to have the internal market—I admit that that is a rather difficult, negative calculation—the sum is certainly very much larger.

I conclude by making two more points. First, I hope that we can find more time to debate Community affairs on the Floor of the House at a sensible time of the day. After all, Community affairs are important now, and will become increasingly important in future. Secondly, I hope—so far in this debate it has happened, but it is most unusual—that we can get away from the dreary, dog-eared, endless rehearsed pro and anti debate and get down to the real business of achieving a multinational Community which will and is evolving into a supranational Community, and make it work in a fair and efficient way. To that end, the Court of Auditors works hard and well and ought to be complimented.

1.49 am

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): One of the advantages of having a debate at this time of night is that it appears that one can agree with Opposition Members. I find myself in considerable agreement with the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston).

The Select Committee on European Legislation has drawn attention to the importance of the Court of Auditors' report. The work of the Select Committee is also to be commended. I drew attention in the House last November to some of the strange practices—strange to any accountant, that is—that have been employed by the European Community: the budgetisation of agricultural stocks, the changing of timing within the same 12-month period, changing the assumptions upon which the budget had been calculated between years. They were designed to make good the political pretence that the Community was keeping within the pre-set budget. Yet, as the Select Committee's report says':

"The Court comments critically on the failure of the Budgetary Authority for the third year running to meet the Treaty obligation to balance the Budget."

The difficulty that the European Community faces is that, whereas the Commission is the practitioner, it is the Council of Ministers that is responsible for this strange set of circumstances. Too often, the political reasons for wishing to obscure reality have overridden the need to look properly at what the budget should be and to anticipate the problems of such budgetary requirements. Rather, it has been pretended after the event that excess expenditure has not happened.

For political reasons, there has also been a delay in introducing measures to check overspending. Britain was successful at the recent Brussels summit, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is heartily to be congratulated on achieving, as she said, 95 per cent. of her objectives. The agreement was acceptably in line with our overall objectives for strengthening the Community. We have secured effective and legally binding controls on expenditure, embodied in legally binding regulations.

The Court of Auditors draws particular attention to the common agricultural policy. We now appear to be setting a guideline expenditure base of £19 billion for 1988. There are four safeguards to reinforce that guideline. The Commission's price proposals will have to be consistent with it. There will also be deletion of exceptional circumstances provisions—one of the worst of all ways of getting out of difficulties by claiming that there were

[Mr. Ian Taylor]

overwhelming circumstances for overspending money. There is now to be a sensible reserve for exchange rate fluctuations between the dollar and the ecu, but that is limited to a budget effect of 400 million ecu, above which it has to come out of the rest of the agricultural budget.

The cost of depreciating and disposing of existing surplus stock will have to be financed outside the guidelines but within the budget. Again, that seems to me to be a sensible way to proceed. New stocks will be depreciated when they are established. Furthermore, the guideline will rise at a rate that is significantly lower than the total Community resources. That is what many hon. Members have been urging for some time—a decline in the overall relative position of agriculture within the total Community budget.

It was agreed in Brussels that there would be tighter budgetary management. In her statement to the House on 15 February, the Prime Minister said:

"This will limit the use of carry-over provisions and creative accounting devices, such as what are euphemestically called negative reserves, to which there has in the past been excessive recourse, and which have been particularly unwelcome to us." — [*Official Report*, 15 February 1988; Vol. 127, c. 706-70.]

I entirely endorse that statement and look forward to more flesh being put on those provisions. If flesh were to be put on them, the Court of Auditors would have a much easier time when it reviews 1988.

Next, at the Brussels summit we increased the own resources of the Community in effect by about 25 per cent., to 1·2 per cent. of GNP for member states. With the advantage of our abatement, the British contribution is marginally below 1 per cent. Overall, I agree entirely with the remarks which have already been made, that we want to see a stronger budget for the Community, bearing in mind that at the moment it is £27 billion for a community of 321 million people. The relationship with a national budget has to be stressed constantly. The total of £27 billion is about 15 per cent. of the British Government's budget

The relative importance of the Community and the strength it will get from having a more enlightened view on how to control its budgetary affairs will lead to increased strength as we move towards 1992. The questions with which the House should concern itself, and which it is strange to be considering at 1.55 in the morning are, where will the power lie within the Community; who will control the increasing budget; and how will Parliament be able to monitor the decisions which will be made by the Council of Ministers, many on a majority vote?

We should grasp the nettle and realise that it would be helpful to the House to work much more closely with the European Parliament. It has always seemed to me to be nonsense that British Members of the European Parliament are not allowed free access to the House of Commons. When a constituency problem emerges or when there is a matter of considerable national or Community importance to be discussed, the lack of easy access to Members of the European Parliament is not only a nonsense but embarrassing.

The House has so far taken the unenlightened view that it might threaten the independence of its facilities, whereas I think that it would go a long way to helping significantly our ability to control legislation, which is, of course, our parliamentary right. Lack of access to Members of the European Parliament and the knowledge which they have will increasingly be seen to be dangerous as we move towards the internal market and increased powers for the Commission and the Council of Ministers.

I welcome the report of the Court of Auditors, but I draw attention to the fact that, if the Brussels summit leads to tighter budgetary control for 1988, many of its strictures will no longer be necessary in future and we will find that the European Community will go from strength to strength, subject, we hope, to the parliamentary control which is so necessary.

1.57 am

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am glad to follow almost immediately some of the comments of the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor). Before doing so, may I thank the hon. Gentlemen who have referred to the work of the Select Committee on European Legislation? There are two reports before us which are relevant, one relating to the budget itself and one relating to a document about the prevention of fraud. The reports and summaries are found in House of Commons document 43, xiv and xv respectively.

I think, too, that the Select Committee would have a view on the time of the debate. I am glad that the Patronage Secretary is in the Chamber to hear this. I understand that the lateness of the hour is partly the result of a knock-on effect from the timetable of last week, which became congested because of a controversial and major statement that the Government made, as they have every right to do. But if the Government press large quantities of legislation through the House and uproot some of the conventions that have been accepted by all parties for the last 30 years, they must accept the consequences.

I do not think that it is good enough that we are considering these important matters at this hour because of the particularly controversial legislative statement that the Government made last week. They have every right to do that, but they have no right to impinge upon the ability of the House properly to scrutinise such important matters. The hon. Members for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir Russell Johnston) and for Esher with whom I might not agree in other respects, have emphasised that point.

I made those preliminary comments in my role as Chairman of the Select Committee. What I now have to say I say as an hon. Member, but it could be said by anyone who took a view on the major question of our relationship with the EEC. First, I emphasise again the lateness of the hour. Last week I was involved in a popular talk-in radio programme. The interviewer asked, "Weren't we told about all this before, Mr. Spearing?" I said, "Yes, we were. It was all in the small print. It was debated late at night 10 years ago." "Oh," he said, "if that's the case, what's going to happen 10 years from now?" I said, "It will be less than that. Unfortunately these things are in small print. They are not easily understood. The journalists have gone home, the broadcasters do not tape it and therefore people don't understand what is happening."

I fear that that may be true of this debate, although it is retrospective, whereas some of the debates that we shall have in the near future about EEC monetary matters will be prospective. The House should take these matters seriously and its ability to do so is blunted by the lateness of the hour. If a local authority dared to make

qualifications to the accounts that it had presented of anything like the magnitude revealed in this fat, 200-page volume, the Government would rightly be at its throat.

I thought that the Paymaster General was a little less than his robust self in presenting the documents. Perhaps it was the lateness of the hour that prevented him from exercising his usually perspicacious eye to the full on these matters. I should like to comment on hon. Members' optimism about the effectiveness of the new Copenhagen-Delors mechanism; I had better not refer to Brussels, because it has so many connotations. The mathematical formula that has been agreed seems to me to be in the nature of a dodgy brake on a motor car that is accelerating fast. It is not something that we can call discipline. That brake is not only of untried design; it has not been tried out in prototype. We shall have to see what effects it has, but I am much less sanguine about its results than the hon. Members who have so far spoken.

I remind the hon. Member for Esher that since the Single European Act has been passed the European Parliament in Strasbourg has a direct input into some European Community legislation—that concerning the harmonisation of legislation particularly under article 100A. This House has never had that power. It was voted away in 1972, and co-legislation, at which the hon. Gentleman hinted, simply does not exist as a consitutional fact.

Those powers are with the Strasbourg Parliament. They have left this House. All that we can do is attempt to influence Ministers in what they do and say in the Council of Ministers. We have no direct control over the raw legislation — except in one matter, which is the authorisation through Act of Parliament, statutory instrument or resolution, of the voting of additional moneys or additional monetary mechanisms. We shall have a series of debates about those in future.

That brings me to the procedure and activity of our Ministers in the Council of Ministers, to which this debate relates; as the Paymaster General has said, he will be debating this very matter next Monday, 7 March, in the Council of Ministers. He has described the discharge procedure in his useful memorandum to us. It is up to the Council of Ministers by a qualified majority to discharge this budget, which is then passed to the European Parliament with a recommendation for discharge or not. Perhaps the Minister replying to the debate will tell us whether the Government are minded to vote for discharge of the budget.

In view of the qualified nature of the report, to put it mildly, I should have thought that the Government should not vote in favour of discharge because it would not be appropriate to do so. If one paragraph of the report emphasises that, it is paragraph 1.5, to which the Paymaster General uncharacteristically did not give full weight in his comments. I shall therefore quote it in full. It reads:

"For the third year running, the Communities have not observed the fundamental principles of their financial organization, including, first and foremost, the principle laid down in Article 199 of the EEC Treaty, namely that the expenditure of each financial year must be covered by equivalent annual revenue. In addition, the Court would point out that, by not taking account of the expenditure actually incurred in respect of the financial year 1986, the budgetary authority created the illusion of apparent compliance with the maximum limit laid down for the Communities' own resources, and in particular the rate of 1·4 per cent. set for own resources from value-added tax (VAT)."

I stress the words:

"created the illusion of apparent compliance"

Any firm in the City doing that would scarcely be acting in the full, frank and fair manner to which auditors usually refer.

That is a very strong qualification already, but the paragraph continues by pointing out that, rather than the 1·39996 per cent. shown in the budget accounts, the court thought that the real expenditure of resources would be equal to 1·5 per cent. A company director acting in that way could find himself in court for fraud and the Government would be prosecuting him for false accounting. That point alone justifies querying whether the Government intend to vote for the recommendation to discharge the budget or whether they will diplomatically abstain, as I assume is their right.

The Paymaster General also referred to outstanding liabilities. I agree with him that totting up the total potential liabilities will not necessarily equal the liabilities that will in fact have to be met, but those liabilities are pretty massive. Paragraphs 1.13 and 1.14 and the accompanying tables set them out. Although certain matters have been covered, all that has really been done is the arithmetic to show how big the liabilities are. Paragraph 1.13 reads:

"In its annual report on the financial year 1985, the Court laid particular emphasis on the increasing amount of commitments still outstanding, the inevitable consequences for subsequent Community budgets that would result from the build-up of deficits carried forward from one financial year to the next and on the presentation of the accounts, which only gave a partial and heterogeneous picture of the true situation."

There is another qualification. The paragraph continues:

"The Court then drew up a list of the Community's financial liabilities according to the certain or potential nature of the expenditure involved and invited the Commission to make 'a list of all the financial liabilities accumulated by the Communities in the past and to try to draw up a timetable to show when they are payable'."

Paragraph 1:14 says:

"This table shows that the liabilities existing at the end of 1986 which will have to be honoured over the next few years and which may be described as legally binding amount to 14053,4 Mio ECU, 11681,7 Mio ECU of which are accounted for by commitments outstanding from previous financial years. To this must be added other equally unavoidable expenditure connected with the existence and disposal of agricultural surpluses and estimated by the Commission at 6810,2 Mio ECU, making a total of 20863,6 Mio ECU of unavoidable expenditure."

I emphasise the words, "unavoidable expenditure." The Paymaster General said that further amounts may have to be added to that, but it is still a pretty massive sum. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the new Delors-Brussels arrangement, of which we have not yet had a full account, puts those further amounts outside the agricultural guidelines, which means that they must not be accounted for in the annual increase of expenditure. That may be, although that itself is a questionable procedure. However, the money must be found.

Mr. Brooke *indicated assent.*

Mr. Spearing: I am glad to see that the Paymaster General—who is appropriately named on this occasion —is nodding. The right hon. Gentleman must pay the money, even if it does not come within the formula to limit agricultural expenditure. At least the right hon. Gentleman must pay some of that amount over the next accumulating years.

[Mr. Spearing]

Here we have an example of accumulated liabilities, which the court's report of 1985 said were not in the balance sheet — the court forced the Commission into doing something about it — yet accumulated liabilities have reappeared, and they are very substantial indeed.

In ordinary British language, the report discloses a pretty big fraud. The Paymaster General referred to chapter 6 of the report, which deals with fraud. It is welcome that there is a special chapter in the report on fraud. Paragraph 6.6 says:

"Between 1979 and 1985, the Commission made six proposals to the Council with a view to amending the basic Regulation, No. 2891/77, in order to strengthen its powers of control. None of these proposals has yet been adopted. The six proposals made to the Council in 1979"—

1979 —

"reflect the degree of interest shown by the Commission in the necessary strengthening of its ability to guarantee the collection of the Communities' own resources and to fight fraud and irregularities in that sector."

That paragraph clearly refers to the Council of Ministers. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber and for Esher emphasised that point. I should like to ask the Minister whether document Com. (87)572, on the fight against fraud, and his memorandum take up and give those proposals to the Council? I have read Com. (87(572, and in the language of some of my colleagues, it is the usual high-minded sort of guff. I understand that the Council is setting up units—I think they are called cells —that will report direct to the President on how fraud can be dealt with.

Will the Paymaster General say whether that document contains the proposals that were made to the Council by the Commission in 1979, which appear to be the effective controls that are required, but which are not in the document? The powers that were requested may have been more connected with the collection of money from member states. Nevertheless, the collection of money, certainly from the Treasury point of view, is surely just as important as detecting fraud.

Sir Russell Johnston: Would it not be interesting to know Her Majesty's Government's attitude within the Council of Ministers when the proposals were put by the Commission, and also whether any member countries blocked them?

Mr. Spearing: Indeed. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point. I would be equally interested regardless of what Government were in power at the time.

Although I have stressed that these are my personal comments, I hope that hon. Members will agree that they could equally well have come from anyone who is in favour of the smooth running and expansion of powers in the Community, and everything else about it. The subject relates to the smooth working of public institutions, irrespective of what our views of those institutions may be.

I hope that the Paymaster General will be able to satisfy us on these matters. It appears that the Court of Auditors points them up year after year. The auditors gear them up a little better, but, despite their outspokenness — of which we have shown some appreciation tonight — they are paid in the end, not directly by the taxpayer, but by the national Governments who are ultimately responsible for such matters. The control exercised by the Comptroller and Auditor-General on the House — not on the Government — is not at present mirrored in the Community.

I hope that in his deliberations next Monday the Paymaster General will bear in mind some of what has been said. I hope that the points that I have raised are common among all Members of Parliament in their role inside this country — big or small — or in the wider context of control of the Executive by the legislature, by means of control of finance.

2.16 am

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Inevitably, much of the report — and, indeed, much of the debate — relates to the common agricultural policy and to the farming interests therein. Although, understandably, many hon. Members may complain about the lateness of the hour, I suppose—representing, as I do, a fairly large rural constituency with many farmers — that the advantage of sitting so late is that milk consumption in the canteen will be increased. That may do its bit to help British farmers.

The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) does a particularly good job with his EEC Legislation Scrutiny Committee. I hope that "EEC" is still used, rather than "EC", when the *Official Report* quotes my remarks. I have a particular view about the Community as an economic bloc, although I am afraid that I am not one of those hon. Members on both sides of the House who see a greater Europe as the future for our country.

Page 57, paragraph 5.48 of the report relates to decisions made by the House on 3 July 1984, when we debated EEC document 6059, which dealt with milk quotas, and again when we voted on 18 July 1984 on the Dairy Produce Quotas (Amdt) Regulations 1984. At the time I was rather in the bad books of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Home Department, whom I am now supporting on the Firearms Bill. I incurred his wrath when he was an assistant to the then Patronage Secretary, because I felt unable to support either piece of legislation. I felt strongly that the British dairy producer was doing a first rate job in producing a product for a market which, in this country, was self-sufficient. We were not overproducing, and I felt that many British farmers were being hard done by. I was therefore unable to support my party on that occasion.

During the many discussions that took place in the House, however — not only in that debate, but during Question Time — the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was pressed for an assurance, by me on one occasion, that the application of the quotas would be EEC-wide. Yet paragraphs 5.48 and 5.49 of the report show two objections from the Court of Auditors. The first is:

"Although the quota additional levy system had an initial effect in braking the rise in production, there were flaws in its initial conception and it was progressively weakened by amendments adopted by the Council during the first two years of its operation. As a result, the system had no significant impact on the problem of milk surpluses."

I am encouraged by the fact that the report has endorsed my lack of support for dairy quotas in the first place.

I turn now to the issue whether the British national interest is being safeguarded as fairly as that of the Community. Paragraph 5.49 briefly states:

"While in general Member States adopted arrangements to implement the system which were in accordance with the

regulations as they existed, there were a number of exceptions which directly affected the achievement of the system's objectives".

The Auditors go on to state that Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Denmark did not really play by the rules. The United Kingdom is not mentioned, yet we are often castigated as being the awkward squad of Europe. According to the Court of Auditors, Britain has stood by its commitment—it was wrong to give it—and that should be recognised by those who often complain in the House that Britain has a negative attitude to the EEC.

The table in the review of agriculture in the United Kingdom for 1988 presented by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food shows that milk production in 1983 was 9,450 million litres. By 1987 that was down to 7,750. Undoubtedly the British farmer has played a part in that, as has the taxpayer—as the report shows. The transition period has been a hard time for most dairy farmers, despite the easy words of politicians, Eurocrats or whatever we choose to call each other. For farmers earning a living this has been a difficult time. Their one consolation was the knowledge that dairy quotas were being applied equitably, so they will take no comfort from the fact that six nations have been castigated for not following the rules. I sometimes wonder whether our Civil Service is not being too efficient in this area. I should not be sad if more slackness, of the type used by the Italians, were applied.

I find it a consolation that as long as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister defends our national interests —despite often being criticised by Opposition Members and by some of my hon. Friends for having a robust attitude to the Common Market—we can rest assured that we will not be taken for too much of a ride in the EEC. I am sure that the House will endorse the report. It shows that Britain is not the awkward squad in Europe. Six nations are not applying the dairy quota in the way that they agreed, whereas British farmers are. I hope that my right hon. Friend will draw that point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and ensure that our farmers get a fair deal.

2.23 am

Mr. Brooke: By leave of the House, I shall reply to the debate.

I have greatly enjoyed this the third annual debate to which I have had the pleasure of replying. As I told the House, the Economic and Finance Council will be discussing the report on 7 March.

I have heard the remarks from several hon. Members about the hour at which the debate is being held. The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) explained the circumstances that dictated the change in our arrangements. If I may interpolate a personal note, my birthday started about two and a half hours ago; I have never before started my birthday in this mode.

I enjoyed the thoughtful contributions of the hon. Members for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) and for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) and look forward to reading them again at a more civilised hour. I cannot pretend that I would necessarily agree with everything that they said, but I hope that they will pay me the compliment of re-reading what I said at the beginning of the debate, as some of the points that arose later were answered at that stage.

The Government are ready to consider sympathetically any cost-effective proposals that the Commission may make for new or enhanced powers to improve co-operation, monitoring reporting or compliance. Although the Government cannot accept the Opposition amendment, as it was not selected, we accept the spirit of that amendment.

I was grateful to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber for congratulating the Government. I noted his remarks about the European Parliament being allowed to exercise a check on the Executive. I will remark on the irony of that particular observation in the context of the report. The Council was obliged to take the European Parliament to the Court of Justice over the 1986 budget, which we are discussing because the European Parliament unilaterally tried to adopt a budget outside the treaty limits. The Court of Justice found that the European Parliament had exceeded its legal powers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) represented a welcome new voice in these debates. Of course I found more to agree with in my hon. Friend's comments that I did in some of the comments made by other hon. Members. I want to respond to the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) and for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) as they both made the same point.

The United Kingdom has always considered it important that milk quotas should be applied properly throughout the Community. The prime responsibility for ensuring that rests with the Commission. It takes action. The Commission recently won a European Court case against Italy for the non-implementation of quotas. Member states which have overallocated quotas have been required to cut back. The Commission is pursuing action against France for the one-day reduction, and the French have been required to change their procedure. The Commission opened European Court proceedings against Denmark over its single purchaser although they have been suspended following amendments to the regulations that give the required effect for levy purposes.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham that I will draw this debate to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I will also send a copy of the debate in the *Official Report* to the Budget Commissioner, Mr. Christophersen, to the chairman of the European Parliament's Budgetary Control Committee, Mr. Aigner, and to the president of the European Court of Auditors, Mr. Mart, who will be presenting his report to Ecofin next week.

I thank the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) who is the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, and agree with his desire to see these matters more widely comprehended in the country. I am sorry that he believed that I was less perspicacious than he feels that I usually am. On this occasion I share his basic intent.

The hon. Member for Newham, South asked about the Government's vote for the discharge in terms of the Ecofin meeting on 7 March. It would not be appropriate to vote against the discharge of a budget in which spending was confined within the legal limits on revenue. It may be that some expenditure was pushed from 1986 into 1987, but actual spending in 1986 was within the own-resources ceiling.

The hon. Member for Newham, South also asked me about the 1979 proposed amendments and related matters.

[Mr. Brooke]

The United Kingdom welcomes the Commission's proposals to improve its internal organisation and, in particular, the new anti-fraud unit. With regard to the Commission's appeal to the Council to take action over its earlier proposals for tightening up own resources, the Council is actively considering the suggested amendments to regulation 2891/77 in relation to the establishment of own-resources and will report back to the Commission as soon as possible. However, the Council has had difficulties in agreeing precisely at what point traditional own resources become "established" and therefore payable to the Commission. The question turns on whether a member state should have to pay over money which it has not been able to collect because, for instance, of fraud or insolvency.

On the proposed regulation on reporting, of irregularities, some member states have questioned the need to increase the Commission's powers to collect information. However, I emphasise that the United Kingdom already follows the good practice outlined in the Commission's model reporting form and supports the view that reporting along those lines should be made compulsory. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

It has been a delight to respond to the debate.

Sir Russell Johnston: When the Minister said that the Council was actively considering the Commission's proposals, is that actively since 1979 or more recently?

Mr. Brooke: "Actively" is an elastic term.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted Business).*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the Annual Report of the European Court of Auditors on the financial year 1986, together with the replies of the Institutions; and approves the Government's continued efforts to press for effective Budget discipline and proper financial control of Community expenditure.

Specialised Advertising Services

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

2.30 am

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): The Monopolies and Mergers Commission recently reported on an apparent monopoly in the United Kingdom over the acceptance of advertisements by specialist magazines for campers, climbers and ramblers. The effect of that monopoly in magazines such as *The Great Outdoors, Climber, High Magazine, Mountain, Footloose* and *Country Walking* is that they will not normally accept advertisements that contain any mention of the approximate price of the goods advertised, except where the products concerned are own-brand products or are exclusively imported and available only from the advertisers.

That policy appears to apply to most, if not all, of the magazines listed, although with some variations. For example, it is reported that *High Magazine* will accept advertisements containing prices from national manufacturers for their own brands, but will refuse advertisements from mailing houses at prices that are

"significantly below the going market norms."

We know what that means.

Clearly, such a policy must act to the detriment of the customer. Although the quality of the advertised goods is important—for example, very few climbers would use 5 mm rope where 11 mm rope is needed, and for those who do the laws of natural selection soon prevail—there is considerable price competition for national branded goods and for goods of similar quality. The policy of the magazines concerned clearly denies much-needed information to the consumer.

The damage to the buyer is not limited to the denial of information, which could, after all, be obtained with some additional effort. Although the bulk of the sales of the magazines occur through newsagents, a significant proportion of the magazines are sold by the same retail shops that sell the goods advertised in the magazines. Of the magazines that I have already mentioned, the proportion sold through equipment retailers in 1986—the latest year for which figures are available—varied between 8 per cent. for *The Great Outdoors* and *Footloose* and 28 per cent. for *Mountain* and *High Magazine*.

When it is considered that over two thirds—69 per cent.—of all advertisements are placed by manufacturers whose goods are being sold in the retail outlets concerned, it is hardly surprising that a cosy little cartel has grown up between manufacturers, publishers and retailers, which has the effect of putting the interests of the consumer last. Also, it cuts out a substantial market share from mail order houses, which can afford to sell goods more cheaply but are being denied the opportunity to advertise such a service where it would be most effective. We should not be surprised that in 1986 only 3 per cent. of advertisements by manufacturers contained prices.

It is worth rehearsing, if only to nail them down, the arguments put forward in defence of the policy that I have outlined. It is suggested that potential customers would use a combination of retail shops and the magazines to identify the goods they required and then order them direct from mail order houses. To the extent that such concern is justified—it is clearly not justified when the

goods need to be fitted or where specialist advice is needed from the shop on the type of equipment and its use—it should be pointed out that other businesses use the existence of mail order as a spur to efficiency. I can see no reason why retailers concerned with the sports and recreations I have mentioned should not do so.

It is suggested that those specialist retailers who stock the magazines concerned would cease to do so if they contained advertisements for goods at below the price that the retailers were offering. Again, in so far as this fear is justifiable, it should be pointed out that an average of 79 per cent. of the circulation of the magazines concerned is through newsagents. Clearly, if a retailer decides not to stock the magazines there will not be great difficulty for the potential customer in obtaining them.

What is surprising, and a little worrying, in respect of climbing in particular, is the argument raised by the British Mountaineering Council, which is supposed to look after the interests of climbers, that, because mail order firms cannot offer advice on equipment and its uses, and because, in the BMC's opinion, bad equipment is the most serious safety problem in mountaineering and fell walking, customers should be forced—despite their best interests—to take the opportunity of the advice offered by retailers, whether or not that advice is correct, rather than go to mail order firms. Yet figures produced by the BMC itself show that, in 1984, out of 358 mountaineering accidents, at least 245 had nothing to do with equipment, and many of the remainder were far more likely to have arisen from the absence of equipment than from its poor quality or poor choice.

Although the surveys and discussions on which the recent report is based took place in 1987, there is every sign that the practice criticised has continued. A study of the April 1988 editions of *High*, *Footloose*, *Country Walking* and *The Great Outdoors* and the March edition of *Climber* shows that they contain advertisements for popular branded goods such as Silva compasses, Blue Water ropes, Helly Hansen outdoor clothing, Karrimor and Berghaus rucksacks, Brasher boots, Mammout ropes, Salewa crampons and North Face outdoor clothing, without any mention of price, although occasionally, it must be admitted, price guides are given in the small print in equipment reviews in the body of the magazines. At the same time, mail order companies, which are capable of making up a substantial order for part of the market, to the consumer's benefit, are restricted to advertising their existence together with such meaningless phrases as "10 per cent. off" and a request that the reader write in for his own catalogue.

It is made clear in the report, and is consistent with the observations that I have made, that the publishers of the magazines have no intention of changing their anti-competitive policy unless they are forced to do so, not least because they are backed in that policy by the manufacturers of most of the equipment concerned, and this is borne out in the report. The publishers of *The Great Outdoors* and *Climber* would be prepared to accept advertisements containing prices, including advertisements from mail order houses, if the rest of the industry did so.

The publishers of *Mountain* would prefer, and the publishers of *High Magazine* would demand, to be forced to change the policy rather than to do it voluntarily. The contempt of the publishers of *High Magazine* for the people who buy the goods which they advertise is shown in the comment quoted in the report when, referring to the need to support the retailers, as opposed to the mass market aimed at by the mail order houses, they say:

"the mass market was less knowledgeable and experienced consumers could, to an extent, safely be left to shop around, but there were dangers to the inexperienced."

The report reached certain conclusions, and it will be apparent from what I have said that I am in agreement with them. First, the policy of refusing advertisements, containing prices imposes an extra task on the consumer which amounts to a distortion of competition. Secondly, in the absence of the policy and its effect on the ability of mail order houses to advertise, goods would be cheaper to the consumer. Thirdly, it is necessary that all magazines with any significant market share should end the policy; otherwise the manufacturers and retailers will continue to be able and willing to distort the market.

There is further evidence of this ability to ignore the consumer in the fact that, although the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report was published in January, I have not been able to trace a single mention of it to date—I accept that I may have missed it by accident—in any of the magazines concerned.

Restriction of competition leads inevitably to censorship. It is for that reason that I support the final recommendation of the report, which is that the Secretary of State should make an order under section 56 and schedule 8 to the Fair Trading Act 1973, declaring it unlawful for publishers of specialist magazines intended for campers, climbers and walkers to operate the policy that I have described.

I know from my own experience many years ago as a climber, and now as a walker, that followers of outdoor pursuits are, at this time of the year, planning their summer activities and beginning to look at the often heavy investment in equipment that will be needed for those activities. We are not talking about expenditure of a few shillings. To equip a climber for a season in the Alps or a family of walkers with the boots and outdoor clothing that they all need involves considerable expenditure.

The draft order that is recommended by the report has already been advertised and the period designed for consultation, which has resulted in no more than a deafening silence, is all but over. My hon. Friend the Minister has it within his power, if he acts quickly along the lines suggested in the report, to make a significant difference to the budgets of large numbers of people in their chosen pursuits, both in terms of the quality of information available to them and of the cost of equipment that they will need. I hope that he will take that opportunity at an early date.

2.41 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Francis Maude): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) on his success in raising this subject, although not on the hour at which the debate is taking place. I also congratulate him warmly on the robustness with which he has defended the interests of consumers.

No one pretends that this issue affects a wide range of consumers, but, none the less, for the consumers who are affected, what has been identified here is a thoroughly anti-competitive practice which militates against their interests. I hope that no one needs persuading of the

[Mr. Francis Maude]

importance that we as a Government, and particularly as a Department, attach to competition and its effect on the interests of consumers.

Our recent White Paper enlarged on the importance that we attach to ensuring that the market works properly to allow the free play of competititive forces in markets for goods and services, unhampered by cosy cartels and monopolies which contain the potential for inefficiency and exploitation of the consumer. We must be alert to spot such anti-competitive practices and monopolies to safeguard consumers' interests.

The Monopolies and Mergers Commission makes an important contribution towards our aim of ensuring that markets work properly. The commission investigates monopoly situations that are thought to confer significant market power and reach a view on whether they operate against the public interest.

In the case of complex monopolies—as in the report which is the subject of the debate—the commission is also bound to consider whether those companies which jointly constitute the monopoly

"so conduct their actions in such a way as to prevent, restrict or distort competition."

I welcome the commission's analysis and conclusions in its report, published in January, in respect of this issue. The commission did not consider only the effects on competition of the magazines' policy of refusing to accept advertisements containing price information, except in limited circumstances. In reaching its adverse public interest finding, the commission had a duty to take into account all matters which appeared to it to be relevant.

It considered, for example, the arguments put to it that to compel the magazines to put an end to the practice in question would have detrimental effects on the markets for goods. Those arguments fell into three broad categories. First, it was claimed that consumers would suffer from a reduction in the number of specialist retailers in competition with mail order firms. Secondly, it was said that the range and quality of the goods available would deteriorate. Finally, the loss of specialist outlets, which was seen as an inevitable consequence of the reference policy, was thought likely to undermine the protection of campers, climbers and walkers by removing an important source of professional advice.

The latter view was presented forcefully to the commission by the British Mountaineering Council. Like my hon. Friend, I take issue with the British Mountaineering Council's claim that the ending of the reference practice will inevitably lead to a decline in specialist retailing.

The consumer makes his or her choice on the basis of a number of factors, which may or may not outweigh considerations or price. The service and expertise that a particular retailer offers may well be factors which would cause a consumer to pay a higher price than he or she would when that service was not provided. What is important is that the consumer should have a choice, the ability to choose the goods and services he wants at a price that he is prepared to pay. If the specialist retailers fulfil the important function that the British Mountaineering Council claims for them, they will not be seriously weakened in a more competitive environment.

It is worth noting that other bodies that made representations to the Office of Fair Trading during its investigations have supported that view. The Long Distance Walkers Association told the OFT that the policy restricted the freedom of choice of its members when buying equipment and that consumers required as much information as possible, including prices, before deciding from which kind of outlet to buy. If price information were available, the consumer would not invariably opt for the lowest prices.

The National Consumer Council also maintaind that competition was likely to be distorted and consumers' interests prejudiced if price information about some types of goods was withheld from consumers.

After considering all the representations made to it, the commission reached the overall conclusion that the reference policy operated against the public interest in three respects. First, it prevented consumers from making an informed choice of product. Secondly, it restricted price competition between specialist retailers and mail order companies that sell at lower prices. Finally, it narrowed the range of prices at which goods are offered for sale and increased the average price level.

I announced to the House on publication of the report on 13 January that I accepted the commission's recommendation that an order should be made to remedy the adverse effects on the public interest which the commission identified. I considered it important that the prohibition on the refusal of advertisements containing price information should not apply just to one or a few magazines, as that could distort their market position by encouraging advertisers to turn elsewhere.

The advantage of an order is that it will apply to all those currently in the market, and, indeed, to any new entrants. A notice was published on 29 January setting out the proposed terms of the draft order. The closing date for representations is 7 March and I invite my hon. Friend and any other hon. Members wishing to make representations on the terms of the order to do so as quickly as they can.

I am confident that the action we are taking will be reflected shortly in changed practices by the magazines in question. I assure my hon. Friend that I shall be moving as swiftly as I reasonably can to bring that order into effect.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to discuss this matter and to explain the action that we have decided to take. It is important that such inquiries, although they are not wide in range, should be brought to public attention and the consequences understood.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 3 March 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT BILL *(By Order)*

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on consideration [10 December]. That the Bill be now considered.

Debate further adjourned till Thursday 10 March.

TEIGNMOUTH QUAY COMPANY BILL *(By Order)*

YORK CITY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE BILL *(By Order)*

CITY OF LONDON (SPITALFIELDS MARKET) BILL *(By Order)*

FALMOUTH CONTAINER TERMINAL BILL *(By Order)*

NORTH KILLINGHOLME CARGO TERMINAL BILL *(By Order)*

ST. GEORGE'S HILL, WEYBRIDGE, ESTATE BILL *(By Order)*

SOUTHERN WATER AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time upon Thursday 10 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Church Land

1. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the secretary general of the General Synod of the Church of England on his policy on the use of agricultural land.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): None, Sir, and nor has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales received any such representations from the Church in Wales.

Mr. Williams: Has not the debate in the Synod on the use of agricultural land been crowded out by the Minister's obsessive attacks on the bishops and archbishops? Is it not about time that he decided whether he wants to be a churchman or a politician?

Mr. Gummer: It is a new doctrine of constitution that one cannot be both a churchman and a politician. As an elected member of the Synod of the Church of England, I say no to the hon. Gentleman, and as a Minister I say that that is not an agriculture question.

Mr. Key: Will my right hon. Friend make representations to the General Synod to continue the policy of privatising glebe land, which has been entirely successful in the dioceses that have adopted it? Will he also mention to the General Synod that it would greatly help the social fabric of this country if the dioceses in possession of agricultural land that is surplus to requirements could make it available below the market price for housing projects?

Mr. Gummer: I shall certainly take that opportunity. The Church of England has a good reputation in its handling of both tenants and glebe land.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is it not the case that the Synod has not made representations because its members have completely lost confidence in the Minister because of his savage attacks on the clergy and his bishop-bashing? Does the Minister understand that tens of thousands of church-going people all over the country are tired of the way that he persists in meddling in the affairs of the Church and tries to impose his will——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This question is about agriculture.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: ——and the will of the Government on an independent Church? Keep out.

Mr. Gummer: As an elected member of the Church of England I have more right to comment on those views than has the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). The hon. Gentleman demands the right to be robust in his views. Why does he stop other people from being roboust in theirs?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that although there are a number of questions on this general topic, questions must be linked with agriculture.

Abattoirs

2. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to assist island communities that lack an abattoir.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Donald Thompson): The provision of abattoirs is a matter for the commercial judgment of the businesses concerned.

Mr. Field: Does my hon. Friend agree that this country's experience in animal welfare is second to none in the EEC? Will he urgently consider the provision for casualties in constituencies such as mine, especially given the very tight margins that the pig industry faces?

Mr. Thompson: I fully understand my hon. Friend's problems in his constituency. There is a plan afoot with the National Farmers Union and others for just such a project —in fact a more ambitious project than my hon. Friend asks for—at about £60,000. Planning permission for the abattoir has not yet been applied for, and I advise my hon. Friend to urge those in his constituency forward in that plan.

Cereals

3. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the potential of the United Kingdom pig industry to absorb surplus cereal crops.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The potential for compounders and home mixers to increase their usage of cereals in pig rations is strongly influenced by the movements in price and availability of competing materials and therefore cannot be assessed easily.

Mr. Gill: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. In the light of it, will he seek to restrict the importation into Europe of cereal substitutes, which are undercutting the price of cereals?

Mr. Thompson: There is a GATT arrangement to import cereal substitutes into Europe. For instance, the spot price of manioc for the delivery of a handy load at the farm gate today is £83, compared with feed wheat at £100, or feed barley at about £104. I believe that it would be impossible to re-rig the GATT arrangement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Is my hon. Friend aware that pig producers do not want privileged access to surplus grain, but rather the removal of the unfair disadvantage of an overvalued green pound? Does my hon. Friend agree that pig producers are among the most entrepreneurial and least subsidised of all farmers and that their request for an urgent devaluation of the green pound is entirely reasonable?

Mr. Thompson: As a man who kept a considerable number of pigs, I agree with all that my hon. Friend says about pig producers being entrepreneurial, intelligent and able. I fully understand their request for the removal of MCAs. We have had a promise from my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for action on that matter, and that promise was echoed on 16 February by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Mr. Steinberg: During the last pig industry disaster in the 1980s one of my constituents, a pig farmer, lost about £25,000. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that that constituent—he is still a pig farmer and did not go bankrupt—does not face similar problems now?

Mr. Thompson: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern for his constituents in Durham and the importance of the pig industry to Durham and the east side of the country. We have already introduced private storage aid into Europe and increased export refunds from 13 to 67 per cent. This year we have reduced MCAs from a minus quantity of 27 to about a minus quantity of 11. The other Friday morning I met 200 pig producers from the north of England. I am well aware of their difficulties and we are treating the matter with great seriousness and urgency.

Biscuits

4. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the volume and value of United Kingdom production of chocolate-coated and non-chocolate-coated biscuits for the most recent period for which statistics are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Alliance publishes estimates on home sales and exports based on members' returns. The approximate figures for 1986 are 132,000 tonnes out of 449,000 tonnes, which is £227 million out of £565 million.

Mr. Gregory: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those figures. Does he agree that they are a little disappointing and are even down on the number of chocolate-coated biscuits sold in this country in 1973-74, the last year when such products were rated at the same level as other foods? Is it not time that we considered re-rating those biscuits? Even at this late hour, will my hon. Friend have discussions with our right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to tell him about the increases that took place in 1973 and how much more employment there would be in this important industry if there were such a re-rating?

Mr. Thompson: My persistent hon. Friend again does an extremely good job for his constituency of York. He has drawn to my attention——

Mr. Cryer: He has a very small majority.

Mr. Thompson: So did the hon. Gentleman at one time. I have seen a copy of the submission from the Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Alliance sent to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. As my hon. Friend has underlined, this is a matter for the Chancellor, but I am sure that his spies will be here today to draw his attention to this question.

Mr. Shersby: Has my hon. Friend made any representations to our right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the distortion in trade caused by the imposition of VAT on chocolate biscuits? This is a very serious matter for the biscuit eaters of this country. As my hon. Friend is the Minister with responsibility for food consumption, I hope that he will have something to say about the matter.

Mr. Thompson: I am aware of the MCAs on chocolate and chocolate biscuits. I recently visited an exhibition of the biscuit and sweet industry in Cologne. Our exporters

were in good heart and were jumping the MCA barrier very well. In many cases, they were improving their exports to Europe and the rest of the world. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is aware of the distortion.

Agricultural Stabilisers

5. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest estimate of the impact of the recent provisional agreement on agriculture stabilisers on the level of intervention stocks and the cost of the common agricultural policy.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John MacGregor): The agreements on CAP reform reached at the recent European Council should restrain production, which should in turn reduce the pressure for sales to be made to intervention, and hence contribute to greater budgetary discipline in the CAP.

Mr. Boswell: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on that solid and remarkable achievement. Will he use the authority that that has given to press for a satisfactory realignment of green currencies and, on a wider compass, to press internationally for a measure of multilateral agricultural disarmament of subsidies through GATT?

Mr. MacGregor: Questions appear later on the Order Paper with regard to my hon. Friend's first point. As to his second point, I shall be going to the United States soon to discuss this matter with my opposite number there. I hope that as the European Community has taken some fairly tough decisions on agricultural spending and introduced substantial new restraints, that will help us in reaching agreement in the Uruguay round between now and 1990—which is the timetable set for the round—along the lines that my hon. Friend mentioned.

Mr. Geraint Howells: Will the Minister clarify whether the agreement on sheep stabilisers is provisional or is legally binding on sheep producers? If it is binding, will he give an assurance that the present sheepmeat regime will remain intact for years to come?

Mr. MacGregor: The Agriculture Council is meeting next week to discuss the detailed regulations that will follow the European Council agreement. After that, sheep stabilisers will be in place and will form a binding agreement. We shall turn our attention to the review of the sheepmeat regime shortly afterwards. I am not sure exactly when that will be, but it will certainly be later in the year. I imagine that that will be a protracted negotiation.

Mr. Paice: Will my hon. Friend, in pursuing reform of the CAP, which the agreement that has been referred to set in train, do everything that he can to ensure that British farmers are not at a disadvantage with regard to the implementation of the programme across the rest of the Community?

Mr. MacGregor: A number of measures in the original proposals discriminated much more against the British farmer than do those in the final outcome. That was a successful outcome to the negotiation for the United Kingdom. In particular, heavy emphasis was placed on the use of the co-responsibility levy as part of the cereal stabiliser mechanism. It remains in place because that is what the Commission and every other member state wanted, but it is very much reduced compared with other pressures we were under. I can assure my hon. Friend that, although one never wins 100 per cent. of the cases that one is aiming to win, most of the discrimination in the outcome of the summit was reduced for the United Kingdom, and many other member states had to accept decisions that were quite a long way away from their original starting positions.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister recognise that many small hard-working farmers, who are working the most difficult land in the country, believe that, despite all the reforms, the common agricultural policy is putting them out of business? Will he accept that that policy is a financial disaster for Britain? Is it not about time that we saw an end to the common agricultural policy?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not sure that that is what farmers in the hon. Gentleman's constituency would want. It is worth mentioning that some of the policies that the Labour party would pursue would disadvantage farmers much more. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need for restraint on spending in the CAP, which is what we have been successfully achieving after working very hard to obtain.

As for farmers in the hills and uplands and less-favoured areas, the hon. Gentleman will know that there are substantial policies, such as hill livestock compensatory allowances, designed to cope with precisely the difficulties that they face.

Dr. David Clark: Will the Minister explain how the sheep stabiliser, coupled with the set-aside in agricultural arable land, will not result in sheep moving out of the upland areas to the lowlands, resulting in bankruptcy for many upland hill farmers?

Mr. MacGregor: I take it that the hon. Gentleman is not against sheepmeat stabilisers. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I will answer the question. If he is against the sheepmeat stabiliser, I hope he will take into account, bearing in mind what he has often said about expenditure on the CAP, that the costs of the sheepmeat regime were rising very fast, to well over 1 billion ecu this year.

I hope the hon. Gentleman will recognise that it was necessary to have a sheepmeat stabiliser. There is a small discriminatory element because we have a separate regime. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I fought very hard against that, but in the overall outcome we had to accept it. Nevertheless, there is a need for the sheepmeat stabiliser. I am fully conscious of the hon. Gentleman's point about the knock-on effects for sheep producers in the hills, as restraints must occur in local areas. As for the set-aside, we have to take a decision on grazed fallow, which is what the hon. Gentleman particularly had in mind. This week I have had discussions with the National Farmers Union on that subject, and specifically on the impact on hill sheep farmers.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the imposition of a separate stabiliser for sheepmeat for United Kingdom farmers is deplorable? Is it not a fact that it is most important at the price fixing next week to negotiate the maintenance of the variable premium and to resist the imposition of headage limits on upland farms and lowland areas?

Mr. MacGregor: We do not know yet, because we have not seen the Commission's proposals, whether the future

of the sheepmeat regime will feature in the price review proposals or later in the year. We have yet to see more details on sheepmeat; they are very scanty in many regards. When we see those details, we shall make up our mind. I am determined to avoid discriminatory action against the United Kingdom and to ensure that whatever is done enables the United Kingdom to use its natural advantage in sheep farming. The proposal on ceilings and headage payments for ewes to which my hon. Friend refers was one of the items that we negotiated out of the recent package. We shall be opposing that again if it arises.

Green Pound

6. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received concerning the devaluation of the green pound; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have received many representations on this subject.

Mr. Jones: The Minister will be aware that there was quite a substantial decrease in farming incomes in real terms in 1987. There has been a substantial setback for farmers as a result of the disparity in the green pound at present, which is making what is otherwise a very efficient industry uncompetitive in relation to other EC countries. Does the Minister realise that an immediate 9 per cent. devaluation of the green pound is both necessary and would be realistic bearing in mind that it would add only 0·5 per cent. to the RPI?

Mr. MacGregor: It is not true that there was a decrease in incomes across the board last year. In a number of sectors, including dairy farming, income increased in real terms. One of the areas most affected was the arable sector, partly because of the weather. Having made that clear, we have yet to see what the Commission will propose for further adjustment in green currencies in the price fixing. I am aware of the strong feelings of farmers, which I have heard at many meetings, and I shall take them into account when considering any devaluation of the green pound.

Sir John Farr: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many small and medium-sized farmers are now beyond breaking point? May I express the hope that he will soon conclude his deliberations and provide for a remarkable and notable devaluation of the green pound?

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of the feeling about the green pound. We shall be discussing the price fixing in the Council of Agriculture Ministers towards the end of this month. I cannot say at this stage whether we will complete deliberations then. Obviously, I am anxious to get agreement on that as soon as possible, so that farmers know exactly where they stand.

Mr. Strang: Is the Minister aware that his cautious replies to this question will be a matter of some concern to the agriculture industry? Before he returns to Brussels for discussions on agricultural price fixing, will he make it clear that the grotesque misuse of resources implicit in the CAP will not be resolved by the selective destruction of jobs and livelihoods in British agriculture, which is what the green pound is doing?

Mr. MacGregor: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that in the past nine months we have put an enormous amount of effort into putting right what he refers to as the "grotesque" distortions in the CAP. We shall be completing that next week and then we shall be looking to the price review. In that context, I shall, as I said, be taking into account representations that I have had on the green pound.

Mr. Lord: May I add my voice to those who are calling for a devaluation of the green pound, which, as my right hon. Friend knows, is doing such grave damage to Britain's pig industry, particularly in counties like my own of Suffolk? I know that my right hon. Friend is aware of the problems and I am sure that he will do all that he possibly can, because he, too, has many pig producers in his county. Is he aware that many people are now asking about fairness in Europe and, unless we get that aspect right in all that we do in Europe, the implications, not just for agriculture but for our membership of the EEC, will be grave?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear on 16 February, and as I have also made clear on a number of occasions in the House, I shall be pressing hard to secure the best possible improvements for our pig producers. This is one of the most hotly contested areas in the CAP, so it will not be easy to obtain a majority agreement, but I assure my hon. Friend that I am well aware of the problems and am determined to press as hard as I possibly can.

Pig Industry

7. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the competitive position of the pig industry.

14. **Mr. Haselhurst:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is satisfied that United Kingdom pig producers are competing on fair terms with their Community counterparts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: We are in close and continuing touch with the National Farmers Union and the National Pig Breeders Association about the problems in the pig sector. The action which has been taken to strengthen the market seems to be having some effect as market prices have risen a little from the low point they were reaching at the beginning of February. Cereal prices are now showing a distinct downward trend. We shall be pressing hard in Brussels to secure the best possible improvement in pigmeat MCAs.

Mr. Bruce: Is my hon. Friend aware that the French Government have recently introduced cheap loans for their pig farmers? What representations has he made to remove that unfair practice and any other unfair practices of our EEC competitors?

Mr. Thompson: We are always looking at that matter. The balance between state aids to the farming industry is difficult to strike. Our farming industry receives the equivalent of over £400 million a year because it does not pay rates. I am sure that some continentals would complain about that. Such state aids have been notified to the Commission, which is considering their legality. We are always prepared to refer any evidence of illegal state aids in other member states, and we are determined that United Kingdom producers will not suffer from them.

Mr. Haselhurst: Would it not help to produce a fairer regime for British pig producers if sterling became fully part of the European monetary system?

Mr. Thompson: First, I apologise to my hon. Friend for not informing him quickly enough about the linking of his question. I can assure him that we were only trying to help and we intend to do better in future.

The answer to his question is no, I do not think so.

Mr. Alison: Is my hon. Friend aware that the letters MCA stand not for "Ministers' criticism of archbishops" but for "monetary compensatory amounts"? Is he further aware that the Archbishop of Canterbury for one, among many other pig producers and pig owners, is a great deal more interested in the pigmeat connotation of MCAs? Will my hon. Friend, in the interests of agricultural, ministerial and ecclesiastical harmony, do everything that he can to reduce the MCAs for pigmeat?

Mr. Thompson: If my right hon. Friend were to set that to music it would be chanted in every church in the country next week.

I have had long discussions with my right hon. Friend on this subject. He and I know the value of MCAs—monetary compensatory amounts — far more than others. We are doing what we can to limit them as soon as possible.

Church Land

8. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will meet representatives of the Church of England to discuss the implications for rural areas of Her Majesty's Government's agricultural policy.

13. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will meet representatives of the Church of England to discuss implications for rural areas of Her Majesty's Government's agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: No such meeting has been requested.

Mr. Wareing: I accept that the Church of England has a genuine interest in agricultural and rural matters, but does the Minister realise that many of its members are refusing point blank to treat with him because of his savage and malevolent attacks on the clergy—including the bishops? In view of the Minister's attitude, are not the Government inhibited in their relations with the Church of England when dealing with these matters?

Mr. Gummer: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to our agricultural debates and our discussions of ecclesiastical matters. What he said is entirely untrue and wholly contrary to what the majority of people in Britain think.

Mr. Cohen: Do not Church of England representatives find it difficult to talk to the Minister because of his numerous attacks on them? He has attacked them whenever they have been in any way critical of Government policy. He attacked them for their report, "Faith in the City", and would presumably attack them if they produced a similar report entitled, "Faith in the Rural Areas". Is there not little faith in the Minister now?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman must accept that it is an essential and central part of Judeo-Christian civilisation that Ministers in parliamentary organisations and Governments should be concerned with religion. There has never been a division between the two areas in his Church or mine.

Mr. Latham: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will listen much more carefully to the views of the Church of England on agricultural issues than to any rant from the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) or other hon. Members on his private opinions about doctrine?

Mr. Gummer: I shall do that, but I point out to my hon. Friend that, to judge from the letters I have received and the general reaction in the country, my remarks have had a ready echo among the majority of people.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that any suggestions he might receive from the Church about an easy or quick solution to the problems of the pig industry might appear to be rather a Gadarene reaction to a problem that could perhaps be better dealt with in a condominium of interests?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right. I am pleased to tell him that my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Prior has agreed to take the chair of a Church of England investigation into the way in which the Church can develop in rural areas. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be happy to help in that discussion in any way.

Dr. David Clark: Has the Minister, either in his ministerial or his ecclesiastical capacity, read the booklet, "The People, the Land and the Church", published by the diocese of Hereford, which shows that the result of nine years of Conservative Government is increasing poverty in rural areas, with the result that 25 per cent. of rural dwellers now live on the margin of poverty? What will he do about that?

Mr. Gummer: I have read the book, and it does not show what the hon. Gentleman claims. I was happy to take part in a symposium in the diocese of Worcester, which discussed the nature of the book, and in which we were able to come to conclusions wholly different from those of the Labour party, which would reduce the income of farmers, because Labour Members based their arguments on an understanding of out-of-date Australian figures.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In view of the obvious desire of Opposition Members that the Church of England should be better informed about agriculture policy, will my right hon. Friend explain to his friends in the Synod his progress on the farm woodland scheme?

Mr. Gummer: I hope that the Church of England, like other organisations that own farmland, will be helped by the farm woodland scheme, which will enable us to provide farmers—tenants and landowners—with an opportunity to use woodlands as a crop, thereby decreasing Britain's dependence on exterior supplies of timber.

Marginal and Hill Areas

10. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the implications of recent European Commission decisions for United Kingdom farmers in marginal and hill areas.

Mr. MacGregor: I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the outcome of the recent European Council.

The decisions made there will provide United Kingdom farmers generally with a more stable framework in which to plan their business decisions for the future.

Dr. Thomas: Does the Minister not accept that any reduction in the variable premium would have a particularly difficult impact on the store market, which is so important for hill farmers in rural areas? Is he aware that many hill farmers are still suffering from the effect of the Chernobyl events which was a severe shock to their incomes? Has he had an opportunity to read this week's *Farmers Weekly*, in which an article and the editorial are a devastating attack on the way in which all the Government Departments responsible for agriculture—his Department, the Welsh Office and the Scottish Office—handled that issue? Is it not time that the Government held a full inquiry into the real effects of the Chernobyl disaster on the incomes of hill farmers?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not agree with the point that the hon. Gentleman has just made about the post-Chernobyl situation. In fact, to date, nearly £5·3 million has been paid out under the scheme, which was introduced quickly as a practical method of getting the money quickly to the farmers, and which has been operated flexibly since. There is one tiny point in relation to a small number of producers where we have been unable to see a way ahead. However, it is important to remember that we introduced the scheme very quickly—faster than any other country—to help our farmers.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the decisions arrived at recently in Europe are just the beginning, and the basis of the beginning, whereas when we review the CAP and the MCAs—matters that affect the hill farmers, the sheepmeat regime and the variable premiums—those areas will matter? I remind my right hon. Friend that the highland clearances began in my constituency and that people were replaced with sheep. We now want the sheep to remain there.

Mr. MacGregor: As I have said on many occasions, I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of the sheep sector in the upland areas. I am very conscious of its position and will bear it strongly in mind when we come to the negotiations on the sheepmeat regime.

Mr. Ron Davies: The Minister will find few people to share his complacency about the future of the uplands. Can he explain why, with one hand, the Government give capital and revenue grants to farmers in the uplands to help them to diversify, but will take the money back with the other hand when they introduce the uniform business rate and apply it to farm businesses?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has got it quite right. First, I have no complacency whatsoever about the problems in the uplands areas and I do not think that I can be accused of that. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman knows that farmland and farm buildings will continue to be exempt from the unified business rate. However, when farmers move into a business that has nothing to do with farming, it is right that they should have to pay rates on such premises because often in the same village there may be a comparable business that already pays rates. The most important point—it is real humbug for the hon. Gentleman to have said what he did—is that under the Labour party's proposals those farmers would be paying very much more in rates.

Mr. Marland: With regard to the effect of Chernobyl on sheep farming in upland areas, is my right hon. Friend aware that the Agriculture Select Committee has chosen that as its next subject for an inquiry, and that the outcome of the Committee's findings may be of great help to him in his future deliberations on the subject?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As I have said, I think that the scheme came in with great speed and that it was of great help to the farmers who were affected. The most important thing was to recognise that we needed to get the money to them quickly. Therefore, there were bound to be some elements of rough justice, which were fully agreed with the industry from the outset. I hope that that is a point that the Committee will take on board.

Tree Planting

11. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he is having with environmental organisations about tree planting.

Mr. Gummer: I have had a number of meetings recently with environmental organisations at which various aspects of forestry, including the proposed farm woodland scheme, were discussed.

Mr. Boyes: Will the Minister make representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to reform the tax incentive system which allows rich people, such as Lady Porter, the Tory leader of Westminster council, and the Law Lord Baron Ackner, and media personalities, such as Terry Wogan, to benefit from investment in large-scale, environmentally damaging coniferous afforestation? It is a downright scandal and should be stopped.

Mr. Gummer: Although tax matters are not for me or my right hon. Friend, many of the statements made by the hon. Gentleman in his question were tendentious rather than true.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that an adequate amount of guidance is being given in the tree-planting schemes towards planting broadleaved woodland, which is the most naturally congenial environment for the wildlife in this country?

Mr. Gummer: I hope so. That is the intention. We have a different scale of support for broadleaved schemes and, as my hon. Friend will know, we have been particularly careful to help with broadleaved trees, such as the oak, which takes so much longer to mature. I hope, therefore, that by a judicious mixture—in many cases coniferous trees are a good part of such a scheme—we shall be able to enhance the environment, improve opportunities for wildlife and give farmers a further diversified crop.

Mr. Haynes: Is the Minister aware that we have an abundance of beautiful oak trees in the county of Nottinghamshire and that the chairman of Nottinghamshire county council, Miss Florence Price, is promoting those trees for transplantation to the rest of the country and the world? Will he have a word with her to see whether he can help Nottinghamshire county council in the wonderful efforts that it is making?

Mr. Gummer: I am proud that the county of Nottinghamshire does so much for the oak tree. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will see what he can do to help the county council, but it is my view that the changes that we have made in the woodland scheme from the original plans put forward will help people to plant oaks, which are more difficult and take longer to grow, which is exactly what the chairman of Nottinghamshire county council would like us to do.

Mr. Chapman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a fund of goodwill for tree planting and that the purpose and objective of his Department, in consultation with the Department of the Environment, should be to secure suitable sites for tree planting and to encourage voluntary contributions? To that end, does he agree that it is in the long-term national interest, economically as well as environmentally, to encourage much more deciduous tree planting on suitable lowland sites?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right, and his record in promoting tree planting is the envy of all of us. However, I hope that, in its own way, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is now beginning to help considerably and I trust that in a few years' time there will be a great deal more deciduous planting in Britain as a result of the Farm Land and Rural Development Bill which is now before Parliament.

Dairy Industry

12. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current state of the dairy sector.

Mr. MacGregor: Following the changes that were introduced at the beginning of the current quota year, and the agreement by the European Council to extend the quota system for a further three years, the dairy sector can look forward with more confidence now that measures are in place to bring about a better balance between supply and demand. Average dairy farm income in the United Kingdom increased in each of the last two years and is expected to increase further during the current year.

Mr. Wallace: Will the Minister tell us what steps his Ministry is taking to monitor the operation of quota schemes in other EEC countries, particularly Italy and France? Will he give an assurance to the House that the British dairy industry is not being put at any competitive disadvantage compared with its European colleagues?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, I have raised that subject and consider it quite frequently. I have had discussions with my opposite numbers in those two countries and I can give an assurance that that is what we are always endeavouring to do.

Mr. David Nicholson: Will my right hon. Friend say whether he is satisfied with the innovative record of the United Kingdom dairy industry, in view of the large quantity of imported dairy products on our supermarket shelves? Is he aware that, in my constituency and in four other constituencies, creamery closures have recently been announced?

Mr. MacGregor: On the first point, that is primarily a matter for the commercial organisations concerned, but I would never be satisfied that we had done everything that we should. However, in recent years, great strides have been taken, both by dairy farmers and dairy organisations, to improve marketing and to increase our exports, as well as to increase our sales in this country.

The second point relates to a different matter. It was a Dairy Crest decision to close certain creameries because, as supply and demand became more balanced in the dairy product sector, there was clearly over-capacity and, therefore, like any other industry in that position, it had to take the necessary action.

Alternative Land Use

18. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next intends meeting representatives of the National Farmers Union to discuss the operation of the Economic Community set-aside scheme in the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor: I met representatives of the National Farmers Union on 1 March, and that was one of the topics I discussed with them.

Mr. Davies: Did the Minister manage to persuade the National Farmers Union that the view of the Farmers Union of Wales that the set-aside scheme is a charter for crooks and cheats was accurate?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that is right. As in any scheme, there is obviously scope for abuse. One of my purposes is to ensure that the abuse is limited as far as possible. In any scheme, there will inevitably be some abuses. The hon. Gentleman should look on the positive side and see that it is important for environmental reasons. It is important in assisting the transitional process in the countryside and the rural communities, which he is always going on about. The scheme is important as we have to face the fact that more agricultural land has to come out of production.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is in Brussels for a NATO summit meeting.

Mr. Livsey: Does the Leader of the House agree that the report in *The Times* today of a switch from student grants to loans is totally unacceptable? Does he realise that under the American system a quarter of the civil servants on Capitol Hill had not repaid their loans within 20 years? Does he not think that it would be far better to increase student grants by 20 per cent. in order to keep pace with inflation?

Mr. Wakeham: No, Sir. Our manifesto last year was perfectly clear. We said that we were reviewing student grants and considering a way of supplementing grants with loans. We shall publish our proposals when the review is complete. I understand that that will be about the middle of the year.

Q2. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Stern: Has my right hon. Friend had time to note reports that Derbyshire county council has forced Chesterfield school to alter its 400-year-old Latin motto to something considered more relevant? Does he intend to persuade the Royal Air Force to update its motto, per ardua ad astra, or to approach the College of Heralds over such outdatted mottos as "Ich dien" or "honi soit qui mal y pense" and replace them with what is considered more appropriate, namely, "Derbyshire supports nuclear-free zones"? Will my right hon. Friend try to stop that sort of cultural vandalism?

Mr. Wakeham: I certainly appreciate my hon. Friend's concerns about such reports. Sadly, he will know that we have reached the point where nothing done by Derbyshire county council can cause us much surprise. I can certainly reassure my hon. Friend that our proposals for the reform of local government finance and the introduction of the community charge will help. Indeed, they have already had an effect. A recent issue of the *New Statesman* said:

"The shameful point for municipal socialists is that it has taken Tory legislation to force them into examining their councils' record as a service provider".

Mr. Maxton: In view of the fact that the Government have passed a series of pieces of legislation to try to stop local authorities from using their taxpayers' money to put out what is considered to be political propaganda, what possible justification can there be for the Scottish Office spending £2·5 million on sending out a misleading political pamphlet concerning the poll tax to every household in Scotland? The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the legislation in England and Wales is not complete and, therefore, the Scottish legislation may be changed, and that the rebate scheme has not yet been published.

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland acted totally within the rules in publishing information regarding an Act of Parliament in Scotland. It would be better if the hon. Gentleman read that document and understood it rather than made misleading remarks such as those that he has just made.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Will my right hon. Friend take note of the fact that Tuesday's announcement about British Aerospace and the Rover Group has gone down well in the west midlands, not least with some of the striking Land Rover workers? Does that not represent a first-class opportunity for their shop stewards to re-ballot them about going back to work and being the second best paid car workers in the country?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend makes his point very well, but it is not for me to add anything to what was said by my right hon. and learned Friend in his statement on Tuesday.

Q.3. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wallace: Does the Leader of the House accept that, whatever claims the Government might have for the benefits in England of its policy of privatising cleaning and catering operations in the Health Service, those are singularly inappropriate policies to foist upon island health boards? What advice would he give to the health boards in my constituency if they were faced with an attractive and artifically low tender from an outside company, yet feared that by breaking up a loyal and efficient in-house team they might be held over a financial barrel the next time tenders arose?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman does not make his case at all well. The purpose of using private contractors and going out to tender is to see whether there is a more efficient way of doing the job. Sometimes it will be proved that private enterprise can do it better, and sometimes the job can be done better in-house. In England and Wales the Health Service has saved about £100 million a year, which has gone into further patient care, and that could be emulated in Scotland.

Q.4. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Shersby: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to consider the extent of public concern about the number of bogus public officials who are gaining access to private property and depriving elderly people of their life savings and other possessions? Will he invite the Prime Minister to initiate an inquiry into the matter with a view to adopting a common identity card for all public officials, representatives of Government bodies, local authorities, and public utilities?

Mr. Wakeham: I understand my hon Friend's concern about the risks that old people face when they let others into their homes. I share his view that pensioners and others should ask to see proper identity cards when officials try to enter their homes. I am not sure what advantages standardisation would offer, but I shall certainly refer the point to my right hand Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Kinnock: In view of the justifiable concern of the Leader of the House, perhaps he will see that a special provision is built into the Local Government Finance Bill, which is now going through the House, to require identification for the poll tax snoopers who will come in. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, as a result of the changes that come into effect next month in social security entitlements, 700,000 pensioner households in Britain will lose housing benefit to which they are currently entitled? Can he tell us what justification he can offer for punishing the prudent in such a way?

Mr. Wakeham: The right hon. Gentleman should present his case in a much more balanced way. There are 70,000 families caught in a trap, which means that for every pound they earn they are worse off, because they lose more money in benefit forgone and in tax paid. The new benefit structures will put a stop to that. The vast majority of those receiving income-related benefits, that is about 88 per cent., will see an improvement in cash terms this April, or no change in their position. Under the new scheme, working families with a low income will receive £200 million in net extra resources as a result of the change. That view is more balanced than that of the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Kinnock: I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman has picked out the wrong answer. I was talking about pensioner households. He might be aware that the loss to pensioner households under housing benefit changes is 85p for every extra pound that they will get in one way or another. I am interested to know whether the right hon. Gentleman can tell us what he would say to a pensioner couple who come into his surgery and who receive the national insurance old-age pension and, say, £10 to £15 extra from an occupational pension and have lifetime savings of around £6,000 a year — *[Interruption.]* Lifetime savings of £6,000. When pensioners who come to the surgeries of Conservative Members are getting pensions on the basic rate, a small occupational pension, and have lifetime savings of around £6,000, what does the Gentleman say to them when they say, "Mr. Wakeham, why am I losing my housing benefit?" What is his reassurance to them, when the Government are imposing such a fine on their thrift?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not know what the right hon. Gentleman does when people come to his surgery. The first thing I do is to check on what they are entitled to and see that they get it. That is very important. The second thing I would do is explain to them that at present one household in three is getting housing benefit. I do not believe that the rest of the country should be paying that amount of housing benefit to one household in three. *[Interruption.]* Therefore, I believe that the Government are entirely right to redistribute the income so that it is more fairly spent on those in greatest need. That is what our proposals do.

Mr. Kinnock: Redistribution is all very well, but how does the right hon. Gentleman justify taking away from those who are near poor—indeed, not very well off in any circumstances—in order to lift those who are very poor by just a marginal amount? What kind of reassurance is that for those who in a lifetime of work have shown their prudence, have some small savings and are now being penalised?

Mr. Wakeham: The right hon. Gentleman makes a mistake in thinking that we are taking things away. What we are doing is dealing with taxpayers' money, taken from the taxpayers, and we are redistributing it so that those in society who are worst off get more. I am surprised that there is not more support from the Labour party for that.

Q5. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cran: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government will continue to seek opportunities to relocate Government offices outside London and the south-east, consistent always with costs on the one hand and efficiency on the other? I am sure he knows that London weighting costs taxpayers £147 million a year and office costs for the 93 buildings that the Government use in London cost taxpayers £287 million. That is a not inconsiderable sum of money which could be saved.

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend raises an important point. We made a commitment in 1979 to send 5,900 Civil Service posts out of London to the regions, and that objective has been largely met. Our policy is to site any new Government work in the regions as far as possible, and my hon. Friend gave some reasons for that. He may be interested to know that four out of five civil servants already work outside Greater London.

Mr. McAllion: The Minister, in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), advised Opposition Members to read the booklet on the poll tax issued by the Government today. Is he aware that, although the booklet was issued to the Scottish press and the media at the press conference at 11 o'clock this morning in Edinburgh, it was only posted to hon. Members today? We have not yet received it and are unable to read it, as the Minister suggested. Does he think it right that hon. Members have not had a chance to question the content and legitimacy of the booklet before it was circulated to the Scottish press?

Mr. Wakeham: I suggest that the hon. Member gets together with his hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), who told us that he had read it.

Q6. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cash: Has my right hon. Friend noted that not a one Opposition Member in the questions put to him today has made any reference to the NATO meeting that has just taken place? Will he also note that as a result of the very considerable skill of our Prime Minister and the Government, we have taken a lead in matters affecting NATO and, furthermore, that as a result of the meeting our respect in the world has been enhanced?

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend went to the NATO summit meeting to discuss with our allies the way to ensure continuing sound defence for the countries of the Alliance. That is the first duty of any Government: the defence of the country and the preservation of peace. I believe that it was a successful meeting. My right hon. Friend has not yet returned, and the appropriate document will be available in due course in the usual way.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cohen: The Prime Minister claims to be very happy with the NATO summit. Presumably that means air-launched cruise missiles, sea-launched cruise missiles, battlefield nuclear missiles and many more nuclear missiles based in this country. That massive rearmament programme was never put to the electorate at the last election, yet the Prime Minister must have known that that was what she was planning. Why did she not put it at the last election? Did she not have the courage?

Mr. Wakeham: The first duty of any Prime Minister in any Government is the defence of the country. My right hon. Friend, by her work in international negotiations, has done more for disarmament than all the ravings of the hon. Gentleman over many years.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House whether he will state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 7 MARCH—Debate on a Government motion on the privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

Motion on the Wages (Northern Ireland) Order.

Motion on the Customs Duties (ECSC) (Quota and Other Reliefs) (Amendment) Order.

TUESDAY 8 MARCH—Estimates Day (1st Allotted Day). There will be debates on Estimates relating to the Storm Damage Recovery Scheme 1987 and to assistance to the coal industry subject to the approval of the House of the Liaison Committee's report. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motion on the General Assistance Grants (Abolition) (Northern Ireland) Order.

At Ten o'clock the Question will be put on all outstanding Supplementary Estimates and Votes.

WEDNESDAY 9 MARCH—Consideration of Lords Amendments to the Local Government Bill.

Motion on the Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) (No. 4) 1983-84.

Motion relating to the Electricity Generating Stations and Overhead Lines (Inquiries Procedures) Rules.

THURSDAY 10 MARCH—Remaining stages of the Regional Development Grants (Termination) Bill.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (No. 3) Bill.

FRIDAY 11 MARCH—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 14 MARCH—Progress on remaining stages of the Housing (Scotland) Bill.

Consideration of Lords amendments that may be received to the Social Security Bill.

[Estimates debate on Tuesday 8 March 1988: Supply Estimates 1987-88, Spring Supplementary Estimates (HC 284): class IV, vote 3, so far as it concerns the Storm Damage Recovery Scheme 1987; class VI, vote 1.]

Mr. Kinnock: In view of the conflicting stories in the press this morning, in which the Government proposals for the inner-city policy are variously described as a White Paper and a press conference, can the right hon. Gentleman assure us that any new proposals will be announced in the House rather than in a television studio, and that hon. Members will have an early opportunity to debate them rather than just read about them in propaganda brochures?

Would not the Leader of the House agree that, in view of the substantial number of amendments and the new clause introduced in another place on the Local Government Bill, the very short time allowed for hon. Members to table amendments and the short time allowed for the debate next week reveal either mismanagement or disregard of the House? Will he even now give consideration to postponing the debate and lengthening it in order to meet both objections?

Two weeks ago the Secretary of State for Employment came to the House with a White Paper on "Training for Employment". It was a very superficial and disappointing document in a country in which training provision is a fraction of that in our competitor economies. May we have an urgent debate on the subject of training for employment, which is obviously so vital to the future of our young people and the industrial strength of the country?

Very mixed reports are coming out of the NATO summit on exactly what the term "kept up to date where necessary" means and whether it loses something in translation from German to English and English to German. May we therefore have the Leader of the House's assurance that there will be a statement early next week on the NATO summit and its conclusions?

Can the Leader of the House arrange for a statement next week from the Secretary of State for the Environment on the Government's policy towards local authorities who follow the scandalous practice of selling off publicly owned cemeteries for minute prices in a way that completely disregards the effect that this has on bereaved relatives and friends and is also cynically careless of the wider public interest?

Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the Foreign Secretary makes a statement to the House next week on the effect on British support for social and educational organisations among the majority population in South Africa of the legislation proposed this week by the Pretoria regime, which is designed to block further foreign funding of organisations that seek to counteract the effects of the apartheid regime?

Mr. Wakeham: The right hon. Gentleman has asked six questions. The first was about inner cities. As I understand it, a White Paper is not to be published. The Prime Minister will take part in a press conference. However, I note what the right hon. Gentleman has said and will see what can be done about a debate in due course.

On the Local Government Bill, I regret any inconvenience. The Bill will be available in the Vote Office first thing tomorrow and, on that basis, it seems not unreasonable to invite the House to consider the Lords' amendments next Wednesday.

I note also the right hon. Gentleman's request for a debate on the White Paper "Training for Employment". It is, as he rightly says, a very important matter, and I will have to see what can be done; but I cannot promise something immediately.

My right hon. Friend has not yet returned from the NATO summit meeting. I shall certainly pass on to her the right hon. Gentleman's comments about a statement when I see her on her return.

On the question of cemeteries and the local authority, I do not believe that this is a matter for a statement by my right hon. Friend. The Government consider that it is a matter for the council, its ratepayers and the district auditor. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I understand that he is now investigating the position.

With regard to the question on South Africa, we had a debate on South Africa earlier in the week, but I will certainly pass the right hon. Gentleman's request to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): May I express my gratitude to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for informing the House that it will have the opportunity next week to discuss and, I hope, complete the remaining stages of the Local Government Bill.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that a leaflet has been put out in schools in Derbyshire? I have received a number of

letters from parents, one of whom told me that she was frankly disgusted that her son, aged five, was used to further the Socialist ends of the county council by bringing this letter and leaflet home. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that the sooner we get this legislation on the statute book, the better—and the better for the parents of Derbyshire?

Mr. Wakeham: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend. I notice also that he has an Adjournment debate next Tuesday on Derbyshire county council's spending levels. No doubt he can raise some of his points then.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Given the different structures of the electricity industry in Scotland and in England and Wales, quite properly two separate statements were made. Will the Leader of the House give some indication of the form of the debate on Monday? Will it cover privatisation proposals for both Scotland and England and Wales? If a Scottish Minister winds up, will English Members' points be dealt with, and vice versa?

Can the Leader of the House report any progress in setting up the Procedure Committee?

Mr. Wakeham: I understand that it would be for the convenience of the House for the privatisation of the electricity supply industry both in England and Wales and in Scotland to be taken as one debate next Monday. I have no doubt that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, who will reply to the debate, will cover very adequately all the points raised in the debate.

I hope to set up the Procedure Committee as soon as I can get agreement in all parts of the House.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Does my right hon. Friend think that it may now be appropriate for the House to re-examine the role and activities of Select Committees, particularly their productivity, the attendance of Members, the distances that they travel and the cost to the taxpayer which they involve? Does he not think that we have now had adequate time fully to assess their role, and would he not like to give the House the opportunity of voting on whether they should continue to operate?

Mr. Wakeham: I think that from time to time the House would rightly wish to consider the activities of Select Committees. I am not sure that I can find time for that at the moment. Perhaps it could wait for a little while.

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): Does the Leader of the House recall the anger expressed on this Bench yesterday at the failure of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to make a statement of the House about matters relating to equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland? Instead, the Secretary of State decided to make the announcement to a press conference in Belfast yesterday afternoon.

Has the Leader of the House had an opportunity to consider the implications of that statement for Northern Ireland and the possible application of the principle of ending discrimination on the mainland as well? Bearing in mind that foreign politicians have been given several hours to question the Secretary of State about the matter, and that the press corps in Northern Ireland has also been given time to question the Secretary of State about it, when will hon. Members be given the opportunity to question him?

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State answers questions frequently in the House. He made a written answer yesterday perfectly properly. He issued a consultative document. I wonder why the hon. Gentleman did not give a response to the consultative document when he had the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Given that the recent agriculture debate was dominated inevitably by consideration of the Brussels summit, will my right hon. Friend arrange for another date to take place in the next few months on the farming industry which is currently faced with the greatest anxiety about its future since 1939?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that our debate on agriculture was dominated to a large extent by events in Brussels over the previous days. I should like to be able to offer my hon. Friend a debate in the near future. I cannot see it happening very soon, but I shall certainly bear his request in mind and hopefully will be able to provide a debate before long.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): After yesterday's Welsh debate, will the Leader of the House consider seriously the reintroduction of 10-minute speeches? Out of only six Tory Members representing Wales who attended yesterday's debate, two took one hour of the available time. I think you would agree, Mr. Speaker, that it is high time that the 10-minute rule for speeches was reintroduced. Seven of the my hon. Friends failed to participate in yesterday's Welsh debate because that rule has not been reintroduced. When will the Leader of the House make preparations for its reintroduction?

Mr. Wakeham: I am anxious to make progress with that and other procedural changes which have been recommended to the House by the Select Committee. I am having discussions through the usual channels. When I feel that the moment is right, I will go ahead as soon as possible.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there have been mystification and impatience at the Government's delay in making up their mind about the future of the Settle-to-Carlisle railway line? Various other Government Departments are involved, including those responsible for the heritage, for tourism and for regional policy. In view of the difficulties, which we all understand, in reaching a conclusion, if the Government are not ready to make a statement, may we have a debate on the subject so that the Government can take note of the views expressed by hon. Members?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that there are strong feelings on both sides of the House about the issue. I wish that I could offer a debate in the near future. I do not see that as a possibility, but I shall certainly bear it in mind.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): The Leader of the House has said that Monday's debate on the privatisation of electricity will be all-embracing and will take in Scotland. Does that mean that a Scottish Office Minister will take part in the debate? If no Scottish Office Minister takes part, that will be a calculated insult to the people of Scotland. The two sets of privatisation proposals are totally different. There is simply no way that someone in the Department of Energy can have any knowledge about

[Mr. Harry Ewing]

the proposals which were put to the House yesterday about the electricity generation and supply industry in Scotland.

Mr. Wakeham: I said in reply to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) that my right hon. and learned Friend would reply to the debate. I anticipate that that is likely to happen.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Every week issues arise on the Floor of the House which you, Mr. Speaker, rightly point out are matters not for you but for the Procedure Committee. The answers which my right hon. Friend has given already to a couple of questions are in the same terms that we have had for weeks and weeks. We are nine months into this Parliament, and we still have not got a Procedure Committee, nor have we debated the report of the previous Procedure Committee. May I ask my right hon. Friend to inject a note of urgency into his discussions on the matter?

Mr. Wakeham: Perhaps my hon. Friend will recognise that these things are not all one-sided. One has to do one's best to get agreement throughout the House, and that is what I am trying to do.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Perhaps the Leader of the House should have responded to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin), who referred to leaflets produced by Derbyshire county council, by telling him that that Labour-controlled authority was robbed of £20 million by the Tory Government. If the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West was doing his job properly and defending the ratepayers in his constituency, he would have complained about the £20 million taken away by the Government of whom the Leader of the House is a member, because it has meant that ratepayers in the hon. Gentleman's constituency have had to pay a lot more in rate increases. He would be doing his job if he did that.

Mr. Wakeham: If the hon. Gentleman examines more carefully what happened in Derbyshire, he will see that the excessive spending of Derbyshire county council meant that it lost some grant and that it knew full well what it was doing. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman's strictures do not carry conviction.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Let me reinforce the point made so eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth). Is it not largely the case that the departmental Select Committees are pompous, self-important and possessed of spurious expertise? Is not their first objective self-promotion and their first function—by splitting the difference between Government and Opposition—to embarrass the elected Government? Will my right hon. Friend accept the advice given by Henry II to his barons and rid us of these turbulent and extravagant Committees?

Mr. Wakeham: It would be untruthful of me not to admit that from time to time the Government have difficulties with the Select Committees. However, I am afraid that I cannot share my hon. Friend's view of the work of the Select Committees, much of which I think is very valuable.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helen's, South): Will the Leader of the House use his best endeavours to persuade the Home Secretary to make a statement to the House on the future of the various television companies? When the Select Committee is investigating the future of broadcasting, it is somewhat disturbing to hear an announcement made—almost publicly—that the franchises are to be auctioned off to the highest bidder. The Home Secretary said that there would be a White Paper next summer on the future of broadcasting and the television industry and how that interlinks with satellite and cable. Has not that White Paper been pre-empted by the leaked announcement of the sale of television franchises?

Mr. Wakeham: I shall certainly refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. However, I do not believe that it automatically follows that the Government have to make an announcement when a rumour appears in the newspapers that is not the Government's responsibility. If it did, we should be for ever making announcements.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): Will my right hon. Friend give further consideration to the handling of Northern Ireland business? He will be aware that until this year we had two debates on emergency provisions a year, each of which could last six hours. As he will know, the business on Tuesday of this week and Thursday of last week—one was a continuation of the other—gave the House only four and a quarter hours to discuss the situation in Northern Ireland, which by anyone's standards is both tense and serious. It involves most hon. Members because many soldiers from their constituencies are serving in Northern Ireland. I suggest to my right hon. Friend in those circumstances that if we want to prove to the people of Northern Ireland that parliamentary democracy means as much in Northern Ireland as it does anywhere else in the United Kingdom, more time should be found, or a complete day given, for a further debate on the situation in the Province.

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise my hon. Friend's interest in and knowledge of Northern Ireland matters. I also recognise that his points are extremely important. My task is to fit all the different, conflicting interests into the timetable of the House, which is necessarily limited. I take on board what my hon. Friend has said, and I shall see whether it might be possible to do better on another occasion. When I realised last week that there was not sufficient time, I moved quickly and I hope that my hon. Friend thought that that was the right thing to do.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): The fact that the motion on the inquiry procedure rules for power stations and overhead power lines will be discussed on Wednesday night will be welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House because, as the Leader of the House knows, most of the power stations that have been announced for construction, and naturally the power lines that will lead from them, will be situated in areas of predominantly Conservative interest and support. In the light of that, the positioning of the debate at the fag-end of business on Wednesday means that hon. Members will have a poor opportunity to discuss the matter fully. Will the right hon. Gentleman consider bringing that motion forward to immediately after the main business of the day?

Mr. Wakeham: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to say something nice to me. He pestered me for a long time to put on this debate, and I have done what I can to help him. I fear that that is the best that I can do.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Has my right hon. Friend noted that a staggering total of 318 right hon. and hon. Members have now signed early-day motion 6?

[That this House deplores the fact that, alone among public service pensioners, those whose service was overseas cannot count pre-appointment war service towards their pensions; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to remedy this injustice to a dwindling group of elderly people whose working lives were spent in adverse conditions while dedicated to the service of British interests overseas.]

As my right hon. Friend is rumoured to be party to a mechanism whereby conflicting claims on the public purse are later to be resolved, will he bear in mind the extremely strong feeling in the House about this issue?

Mr. Wakeham: If my hon. Friend is right and I have some responsibility in this matter, I will certainly bear in mind his point. However, on the assumption that he is wrong and I do not have any responsibility, I shall refer the matter to my right hon. Friend who is responsible.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Has the Leader of the House examined early-day motion 773?

[That this House expresses full support for the 229 studio technicians, members of A.C.T.T., locked out by TV-am in a deeply serious battle with a hostile management which, in addition to attacking the trade union, has secretly sold off a significant overseas holding, contrary to the Broadcasting Act 1981, and produced programmes of such appalling quality, due to the lockout, that they are clearly in breach of the franchise; and calls upon the Independent Broadcasting Authority to suspend the franchise pending a properly negotiated settlement of the dispute.]

The motion, which has already attracted 60 signatures and is gathering them apace, expresses support for the locked-out television technicians. Will the right hon. Gentleman bear in mind that, not only have union members been locked out and subsequently sacked, but also trainees who are not even members of the union have been locked out? The public consequences are a lowering of television standards and a breach of the franchise. Part of the station has been sold off to the Saudi Arabians in breach of the Broadcasting Act 1981.

May we have a debate on the early-day motion and the important breach of legislation to which the Independent Broadcasting Authority appears to be turning an indifferent eye? Is it not time that the IBA was urged by the Government to act on this serious breach of standards?

Mr. Wakeham: It is a matter for the IBA rather than the Government to determine whether an independent television company is in breach of its contract. I believe that that is an important point and that the IBA should not be leaned upon by the Government in this matter. The IBA should determine what is the right course of action, and I am sure that it will.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early debate on the correlation between high rates and job losses, bearing in mind that this year the Lyons group of companies in Greenford has had a rates increase of £600,000? That company is now faced with having to make possibly between 60 and 70 workers redundant to pay its rates as it cannot pass on the rate increase in higher charges. Is it not time that we debated this question thoroughly and exposed unreasonable rate increases of 50 per cent. or, in this case, 70 per cent. for what they are?

Mr. Wakeham: As my hon. Friend knows, these are important provisions of the Local Government Finance Bill, which is at present in Committee. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend will make his point when the Bill returns to the House before long.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is not the Leader of the House uniquely well placed to shed light on early-day motions, 228, 253, 272, 273 and 286?

[That this House notes in the book, Campaign, by Rodney Tyler, the Selling of the Prime Minister: from behind the doors of Downing Street and Conservative Central Office—A unique inside account of the Battle for Power that the author on page 1, chapter 1, paragraph 1, sentence 1, states 'It was an extraordinary turnaround in fortunes from the moment on 27th January 1986 when Mrs. Thatcher secretly confided to a close associate that she might have to resign . . .' and on page 3 that 'On the eve of the crucial Westland debate she herself felt shaky enough to doubt her future' though some around her later sought to dismiss this as late evening anxieties of the sort that had disappeared the following morning). It is certainly true that if Leon Brittan had chosen to, he could have brought her to the brink of downfall, by naming the real culprits inside Number 10. Instead, he chose to remain silent', and calls on the Prime Minister to give a full account of what transpired between 3rd January and 27th January 1986, at Number 10 Downing Street, in relation to the selectively leaked Law Officer's letter concerning the Westland Affair.]

[That this House notes that the Member for Aldershot on page 136 of his book Heseltine: the unauthorised Biography, states in relation to the Westland Affair that 'John Wakeham issued an order of the day which contained the trite, if effective message, that it was time for all good men to come to the aid of the party. We did and calls on the Leader of the House, The Right Honourable Member for South Colchester and Maldon, to explain when he first knew the role of the then Trade and Industry Secretary, The Right Honourable Member for Richmond, Yorks, in the matter of the disclosure of a selectively leaked Law Officer's letter.]

[That this House notes that in his book Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution, published this week by Jonathan Cape and Co., Mr. Peter Jenkins writes on page 200 'Brittan himself refused to enlighten the Select Committee on any point of substance. However, he is reputed to have told close friends subsequently that not only has she known perfectly well what had happened but that, on the day following the leak, had expressed her satisfaction to him at the way things had been handled. However, at that time, the downfall of Heseltine had not been achieved . . . He (Mr. Brittan) might point the finger at her (Mrs. Thatcher). Potentially he now had the power to destroy her'; and calls on the Prime Minister to give the House a full account of her conversations with the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the Right honourable Member for Richmond, Yorks, over the period from 3rd January and 27th January 1986, in relation to the selectively leaked Law Officer's letter concerning the Westland Affair.]

[That this House notes that in The Thatcher Years A decade of Revolution in British Politics, published by BBC Books, Mr. John Cole, on page 170, considering the selectively leaked Law Officer's letter in the Westland Affair, writes 'why did he (Sir Robert Armstrong) not give her a quick interim report when he discovered that the leak was an inside job, authorised by her office? Why did Leon Brittan not tell her? Or the private secretary concerned? Or

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

his chief, who sits in the same room? Or her press secretary? And why did she never ask?'; and calls on the Prime Minister to inform the House of the answers to these questions.]

[That this House notes that, in the book 'Not with Honour—The Inside Story of the Westland Scandal', on page 142, Magnus Linklater and David Leigh write that 'Instead, following Havers's complaint, she spoke privately to Brittan about the leak. Although this is something the Prime Minister has failed to disclose, to widespread disbelief, the evidence comes from an authoritative source, who told us: "The Prime Minister knew about the leak. She was pleased it had been done. There was a meeting between Brittan and her after the complaint from Mayhew. Only the two of them were present . . . Brittan assumed she knew of [the leak's] origins. You must draw your own conclusions." One of Brittan's friends adds, "Nobody thought it was a problem. The complaints were out of the public domain and any inquiry was expected to be a formality. Leon wasn't worried at all about it."'; and calls on the Prime Minister to give a full account to the House of the meeting between herself and the Right honourable Member for Richmond, Yorks, referred to therein.]

Is Mr. Peter Jenkins correct, on page 189 of his book, "Mrs. Thatcher's Revolution: ending of the Socialist era", in saying that on Sunday 5 January 1986, at Chequers, he was exercising his mind, along with Lord Whitelaw and the Prime Minister, about how to stop the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) running rings around the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan)? Was the problem on that occasion, as Mr. Jenkins suggests, how to deal with the Mayhew trap?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman may be right or wrong about whether I have any light to shine on these matters. I have said all that I have to say; I have nothing more to say. I should tell the hon. Gentleman, if he is remotely interested, that on that afternoon my children put on a play at home, which I saw and enjoyed very much.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Will my right hon. Friend, given the marriage of convenience that took place today between the Liberal party and the official wing of the SDP, give urgent consideration to the future of the Short money that is given to those parties and to the allocation of party political broadcasts?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that these matters may have some significance for Short money. Having seen the amount of champagne that was drunk, I wondered whether that might be of some relevance to the misuse of alcohol committee, for which I have been responsible.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): May we have a statement next week on the refusal of the Government to support a BBC Wales television service, so that we can confront the Prime Minister and ask whether that refusal has anything to do with the televising of Parliament at the end of this year and the Prime Minister's fear that the rest of the world will see how vulnerable she is?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not like to disabuse the hon. Gentleman, but I believe that he lives in a world of make-believe most of the time. I do not believe everything that I read in the newspapers, and the hon. Gentleman should not either.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in Scotland we are concerned that the Act concerning the community charge is being misrepresented by the Opposition and the media? Frequently it is called something quite different from a community charge. That has led to Scots being misled. Therefore, it was essential that the Government should have produced a leaflet explaining clearly the effects of the Act and the fact that only 14 per cent. of the total spent by local authorities will be charged in the community charge. Every hon. Member should have had a copy of that leaflet today.

Mr. Wakeham: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point. I understand that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland intended that the leaflet should be available to hon. Members before the press conference this morning. He regrets that there was a mistake in the arrangements and that the copies were not delivered to the House until 2 pm. He apologises for any discourtesy, which certainly was not intended.

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made next week on enterprise zones? A judgment in the House of Lords on 11 February this year in the case of Clement *v* Addis Ltd. has resulted in a substantial reduction in rateable value for a company outside an enterprise zone, which has been able to show that it has suffered from competition as a result of the existence of that enterprise zone. That has enormous implications for ratepayers located anywhere in the United Kingdom, because any commercial operator can now apply to the district valuer for a reduction in rates. It could also have enormous implications for domestic ratepayers. Therefore, I ask the right hon. Gentleman to consider carefully whether the Government should act soon in case local authorities are put in an impossible position.

Mr. Wakeham: I know about that case and I recognise its importance. My right hon. Friend is considering very carefully the implications because they are important and in some way very serious. No doubt he will decide how best to proceed when he has finished his considerations.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): In view of the amount of time that the House spends on dealing with matters affecting Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, will my right hon. Friend consider sponsoring over the next few months a number of debates on the regions, perhaps beginning with a debate on Yorkshire and Humberside? Among the matters that could be discussed, could we not consider further the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) during Prime Minister's Question Time that we relocate more Government Departments to the regions? That would benefit taxpayers in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Wakeham: At the moment there is a limited amount of Government time and a heavy legislative programme to get through, so I cannot be too encouraging to my hon. Friend. I remember that some years ago the Opposition used a great deal of their time for debates about the regions, but since the sustained improvement in the economy they have not found that subject so interesting.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Was the Leader of the House present today during the Gummer slot of Agriculture questions when matters pertaining to

the Church were raised? Will he tell his right hon. Friend the Minister of State that, if he persists in his attacks on the Church, I personally will ensure that in future there is a good flavouring of questions of a similar nature on all Order Papers relating to agricultural matters?

Mr. Wakeham: Although I admire the hon. Gentleman, if it came to a verbal exchange between the hon. Gentleman and my right hon. Friend, I know where I would put my money.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): May I refer my hon. Friend to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett)? I suspect that my hon. Friend was motivated not by petty party politics, but by a serious concern for the public interest. Bearing in mind that the Social Liberal Democratic party—or SLID for short—has slid into a position in which fewer than five out of 1,000 people questioned in a recent opinion poll said that they would vote for it, and less than half its members actually voted for its culmination today, there is a serious point in relation to Short money. Bearing in mind that at the last general election a large number of people voted for what was then the alliance, or for the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), who is now the leader of the Campaign for Social Democracy, the House demands and needs answers on those serious matters.

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that my hon. Friend has a serious point. It is public money voted by Parliament for those purposes, and we have to be strict and correct in the way in which we deal with it. As my hon. Friend knows, some problems have to be resolved. I hope that everyone will be as constructive as they can in suggesting how to deal with this matter. I cannot add anything at the moment, except to say that I am well aware of the problem.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Would it not be appropriate, before the Chancellor of the Exchequer presents his Budget, for there to be a debate on the report of the Select Committee on Social Services which stated that substantial extra sums of money should be given to the National Health Service, bearing in mind that that Committee has a Conservative majority and that the report was unanimous? I notice that the Chancellor has just come into the Chamber, perhaps to watch over the Leader of the House in the Prime Minister's absence. Would it not be an affront for the Chancellor to cut taxes again for the very rich while the National Health Service desperately needs cash and so many hospital wards are being closed?

Mr. Wakeham: I know that the hon. Gentleman is not too fussy about these matters, and makes his political points whenever there is an opportunity. I should remind him that the Budget is about taxation and borrowing and not about spending and that spending plans have been settled.

The Select Committee report is interesting, particularly because it recognises that there is a need for a full review of the Health Service. The Government are conducting such a review and I am glad that we have the support of the all-party Committee.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Will my right hon. Friend again consider the matter of financial assistance to Opposition parties — the so-called Short money? It rather concerns me to hear that the matter will be sorted out almost behind closed doors. It is clear from the motion passed by this House on 20 March 1975 that this money is not transferable to another political party. It is money given to political parties that put up candidates at general elections. The formula is based on that. Will my right hon. Friend therefore bring the matter before the House and not try to conduct it behind closed doors?

Mr. Wakeham: I assure my hon. Friend that, if there was not a bit of thinking behind closed doors, we really would be in a mess. I suspect that we might be in a bit of a mess even after we had done the thinking. I can also assure my hon. Friend that the Short money is paid in accordance with the resolution of this House, and that resolution will be adhered to until such time as we come before the House with a different resolution and that resolution is passed by the House. In spite of the fact that we shall have to think quite hard about how to get ourselves out of a predicament that is not of our own making, I promise my hon. Friend that everything will be conducted with propriety.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Is the Leader of the House aware that I am delighted to have confirmation from the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) that the Opposition have overwhelmingly won the arguments about the poll tax in Scotland, and his admission that the Opposition have won so convincingly? However, I am concerned that he believes that £2·5 million should be spent to tell the people of Scotland that the poll tax is really called the community charge.

May I ask the Leader of the House what progress has been made in establishing a Scottish Select Committee? Will he tell the House which Tory Members of Parliament, Scottish and English, have been invited to form that Committee and have refused to serve on it?

Mr. Wakeham: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the selection of Committees of this House is not for me but for the Committee of Selection. My difficulty was that the Labour Opposition originally laid down conditions about whom they would or would not be prepared to serve with on the Select Committee. I have done my best to resolve that situation and matters will move on from there. Discussions are still taking place, but we are trying to resolve the matter.

Consolidated Fund (No.3) Bill

4.6 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have a short statement about arrangements for the debate on the motion for the Adjournment which will follow the passing of the Consolidated Fund (No. 3) Bill on Thursday 10 March.

Hon. Members should submit their subjects to my office not later than 9 am on Wednesday 9 March. A list showing the subjects and times will be published later that day. Normally the time allotted will not exceed one and a half hours, but I propose to exercise discretion and to allow one or two debates to continue rather longer, up to a maximum of three hours. Where identical or similar subjects have been entered by different hon. Members, whose names are drawn in the ballot, only the first name will be shown on the list. As some debates may not last the full time allotted to them, it is the responsibility of hon. Members to keep in touch with developments if they are not to miss their turn.

Points of Order

4.8 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the presence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Yesterday, I received a letter dated 29 February, a copy of which I gave to your secretary last night, from the Chancellor of the Exchequer relating to my point of order of 23 February, as reported in column 160.

I assume, though the Chancellor does not make it clear, that he is referring to paragraph 17 of Sir Peter Walters's letter. Sir Peter Walters is the chairman of BP, with whom I have always had good relations on account of constituency involvement in the Grangemouth refinery. In that letter Sir Peter Walters promised to maintain existing commitments. However in the small print, he goes no further in essence than to "expect"—that was the word I used in column 154, quoting from the Chancellor's statement about Scottish research. I have quoted accurately because the Chief Whip gave me his copy for the sake of accuracy. Even if I had been able to read Sir Peter Walters' letter rather than Sir Peter Middleton's letter, my question and point of order happen to have been legitimate.

There are three other considerations. First, If the Chancellor is going to refer to documents, why does he place a single copy in the Library for which one has to queue at the desk? I make no complaint whatever about the Library staff, who happened to be harrassed at the time that I rushed out of the Chamber to try to check, as any Back-Bench Member of Parliament would, and had to take my place at the queue. If the Chancellor intends to refer to documents, surely he should put them in the Vote Office, the proper place for documents to which senior Ministers intend to refer on important statements, not the Library.

Secondly, why does the Chancellor scurry from the Chamber as soon as a point of order is raised? We all have to reflect on our parliamentary manners — I say this quite gently—but in opposition the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) would have been the first to complain if Labour Ministers had left after making a statement on which there would clearly be points of order.

Thirdly, we Scots can be forgiven for going into the small print of company undertakings. After all, Guinness reneged on its Edinburgh headquarters commitment. Since this is not a party issue, I shall not stick to what happened under a Conservative Government. We have memories, too, of the undertakings that Chrysler and Peugot gave to a British Government.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have allowed the hon. Gentleman to raise this point of order as a special matter, but he must not go into great detail. Will he come to the point of order?

Mr. Dalyell: That is why it was perfectly legitimate to ask questions on the small print and why I say quite gently to the Chancellor that, although he asks in his letter for some kind of apology, on this occasion I am not prepared to give one because I do not think that I have done wrong.

Mr. Speaker: The Chancellor is present and has heard what has been said.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have to spend your time in this part of the world and you reside in the area covered by

Westminster city council. I just wondered whether we could join with you, as a resident in this area, to take appropriate steps to call for a special audit of the Westminster city council which has sold off three cemeteries for 15p.

If you were prepared to head the list of signatories, Mr. Speaker, as a resident within the area, we would join you in such a petition. I do not know whether, as a resident, you have any special powers, but I am pretty certain that you would be a formidable signatory in seeking to make sure that the selling of those cemeteries for 15p would be cleared up. Many people in and around this area have strong misgivings, and if we cannot get anything done by an extraordinary audit we should have a public inquiry.

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for audits, but I write many private letters.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the answer to the question that I put to the Leader of the House at business questions today, can the Chairman of the Committee of Selection come before the House either to answer questions or to make a statement about the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs? The Leader of the House misled the House today because he——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a parliamentary expression. No right hon. or hon. Member misleads the House.

Mr. Maxton: The Leader of the House said something different this week from last week when he referred to a helpful letter that he had received from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). In a discussion in the House on the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Garscadden said that he was happy not to lay down conditions because he wanted the Select Committee to be set up as soon as possible. Since we should be making some progress on this matter as soon as possible, can the Chairman come before the House to make a statement?

Mr. Wakeham: If I did not give as full an answer as I should have done, let me try to be helpful now. We originally failed to set up the Select Committee because agreement could not be reached on its composition. My correspondence with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) was to clarify the basis upon which the Labour party would be agreeable to the Select Committee being set up and it was a helpful correspondence. Other hon. Members have other considerations on the setting up of the Select Committee and discussions on those will continue.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You could say, Mr. Speaker, that I have a long-standing interest in this matter. Will you confirm that no Member of the House can be ordered to be a member of a Select Committee? Unlike Standing Committees, on to which hon. Members are drafted, if I can put it that way—Conservative Members are happy to be drafted — hon. Members can opt not to be members of a Select Committee. One cannot be made to become a member or be forced to attend.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members can be invited to join a Committee and they can also be appointed to a Select Committee.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, in a point of order, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcester (Mr. Forth) raised a question, of which he had been unable to give me notice, on the use of stationery to distribute a letter for which I had been responsible. I told the House at that stage that I had paid for the stationery and envelopes that had been used. I have now received a receipt from the Fees Office accounting for all the stationery used, but I must tell the House that some of the envelopes used were not paid for by me. I have now put that matter right and I apologise for what was a technical mistake.

May I also tell any hon. Members who feel that they may have been in any way wronged by anything that I said in the letter that I distributed to a small number of people, that if they give me the undertaking that they are in no way involved in any filibuster, I shall happily withdraw any criticism? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has made his explanation and apology.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcester): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I acknowledge what the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) has just said to the House. Further to the exchanges between us yesterday, I wrote to the Serjeant at Arms, but in view of what the hon. Gentleman has just said I am sure that the Serjeant at Arms will be able to regularise the matter.

I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman was able to take action between yesterday and today in order to put right what may have been wrong, but, when they become available, I invite the hon. Member to read the proceedings of the Committee which is considering the Licensing (Retail Sales) Bill — an important Committee dealing with an important matter. All the members of that Committee made it clear that the sort of action that was being taken by and on behalf of the hon. Member for Mossley Hill was distasteful, unacceptable and potentially unparliamentary and I believe that you, Mr. Speaker, may be considering the matter.

Mr. Speaker: I am considering the matter and we should not discuss it further now.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is great interest in the debate on the Royal Navy. I do not know whether those hon. Members who are rising wish to take part in it.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not often raise a point of order, but I am sick to death of the question of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. It holds up business nearly every flipping day and it must be sorted out. Will you, Mr. Speaker, put your foot down, knock one or two heads together, and get the beggars sorted out?

Mr. Speaker: I shall have to put my head on my foot.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There was a suggestion that the rules of order in the House are not being carried out properly by yourself or members of the Chairmen's Panel in that filibustering is not allowed in the House. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the Standing Orders specifically allow the Chair or you, Mr. Speaker, to stop hon. Members being repetitious. It is up to the Chair and to you, Mr. Speaker, to carry out those Standing Orders. To the best of my

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

knowledge, and the knowledge of hon. Members on both sides of the House, those rules are adhered to and it is a general understanding that filibustering is not allowed in this place and I should be grateful if you would confirm that.

Mr. Speaker: That is absolutely correct.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Further to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance about the conventions of the House. Perhaps I owe the hon. Member for Mossley Hill an apology; if so, I willingly give it. Yesterday, he told me privately that he had not written to my constituents. However, it is clear that other organisations have taken up his allegations. I have dealt with that and received a fulsome apology from them.

Is it right that an hon. Member should go behind the backs of other hon. Members and approach their constituents, whether on House of Commons stationery or not? Such an action puts hon. Members in an intolerable position. As a result of the whole wretched affair, I am now receiving many cards from my constituents who were under the impression that I was going to be part of a filibustering exercise. As I said yesterday, I am actually in favour of tightening up the law on abortion.

It would be extremely helpful to the House if you, Mr. Speaker, laid down some ground rules for the benefit of hon. Members about hon. Members who go behind the backs of their colleagues and approach their constituents. It is difficult to pull back this matter once it has happened.

Mr. Alton: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and I discussed this matter yesterday. I have not written to any of his constituents; as he knows, I am sorry if anyone has. This is an issue that concerns all hon. Members. Whatever our views, most people want the matter to be processed properly, not by foul means but by fair. Democracy will be done no justice by a misuse of proceedings. I am sure that sensible arrangements can be arrived at if only hon. Members will speak to one another about them.

Mr. Speaker: I am considering these matters. As the House well knows, I have had a number of letters about them.

ESTIMATES

Resolved,

That this House agrees with the Report [1st March] of the Liaison Committee.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

The Royal Navy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

4.22 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Ian Stewart): Even by its own standards this last year has been a busy one for the Royal Navy. Since the Navy debate last year, our ships have made almost 500 visits to a total of 70 countries, among them the first visit for more than four years to Somalia and two highly successful visits to Mauritius. Royal Navy ships have continued to fulfil a vital role in the Gulf, providing reassurance and, where necessary, assistance to our merchant shipping in that troubled area. They have continued to provide a presence in the south Atlantic and in the Caribbean and they also make an important contribution to the prevention of illegal immigration into Hong Kong. In the NATO area, the Navy has continued to exercise and deploy, helping to maintain the peace through its deterrent power and practising the war roles which we hope it will never be called upon to fulfil.

Last September, 20 British warships and RFAs took part in the major NATO maritime reinforcement exercise, Ocean Safari, which involved 150 ships and 250 aircraft from 11 NATO nations. Earlier last year, the Royal Marines, who form our contribution to the United Kingdom-Netherlands amphibious force, participated in another NATO exercise, Cold Winter, in Norway, which proved to be the most complex yet of its series and demonstrated the flexibility and adaptability of our amphibious forces. Not only has there been extensive co-operation with allied navies, in the Gulf as well as in the NATO sphere, but the Royal Navy has also contributed significantly to that much closer relationship between our own three services that has been developing in a most encouraging way in the past few years.

The major improvement of recent years in the ability of the Royal Navy to carry out such a wide range of activities effectively is the direct result of the far greater resources that the Conservative Government have devoted to defence than were provided by our Labour predecessors. After allowing for inflation, defence spending is now 20 per cent. higher than it was in 1979. In practice, that means that we have spent more than £16 billion more in real terms on defence than if spending had remained at the level we inherited, and more than £4 billion extra has been devoted to the Royal Navy.

That additional expenditure is reflected in the comprehensive ship building programme that we have followed since coming to power. During the past eight years, 61 ships have been ordered for the Royal Navy with a cost, at current prices, of more than £6 billion. They include 12 frigates, 11 submarines — including two SSBNs—and 25 mine counter-measures vessels.

In 1987, four new ships joined the Fleet: the SSN HMS Torbay, the type 22 frigate HMS London, the Hunt class MCMV HMS Berkeley and the new RFA Sir Galahad. This year, four more type 22 frigates are due to be accepted from their builders, the first of which, HMS Cornwall, joined the Fleet two weeks ago. The training ship RFA Argus has today been accepted from its builders, leaving 26 major ships and submarines on order, with a value of about £4·5 billion.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): In view of the Minister's criticism of the last Labour Government, will he tell us why, under this Government, the size and numbers of the surface fleet have continued to diminish year by year; why all the latest surveys suggest that the present surface fleet is the smallest in the history of the Navy; and why some who are inclined to support the Government nevertheless ask whether the Navy can any longer meet its worldwide commitments?

Mr. Stewart: I shall come to the issue of availability of surface ships later in my speech. It is clear that the destroyers and frigates that we have are fully capable of carrying out the tasks that are needed.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead) *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: I have just given way. I shall come to that point later.

Before looking at our naval activities further afield, both in the NATO context and elsewhere, I should say something at the outset of the role of the Royal Navy in our home waters. The direct defence of our own islands was a primary task of the Fleet in the days of the Armada, 400 years ago this year, and it has remained so ever since. Not surprisingly, it is a task which has increased enormously in complexity as a result of the huge advances in technology in the 20th century.

Today, the naval defence of our home base is provided not only by ships and submarines in the eastern Atlantic and the Norwegian sea, but in our home waters. The Royal Navy, ably supported by the Royal Naval Reserve and the Royal Marine Reserve, remains alert to the threat of mines in coastal waters and ready to defend key points, ports and anchorages.

It is worth remembering, too, some of the other roles which the Royal Navy performs at home. Apart from providing a valuable element of our military search and rescue services, the Royal Navy helps to safeguard the United Kingdom's fishing interests and North sea energy resources, as well as supporting the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the difficult but important task of patrolling the Province's 150-mile-long coastline.

Meanwhile, the Royal Navy's contribution to NATO remains the central ingredient——

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): The Minister mentioned air-sea rescue in passing. In the RAF debate we received what we assumed to be fulsome assurances about the future public ownership of that facility. Before the Minister leaves the subject, will he comment on the prospective arrangements for Lee-on-Solent, which, I understand, may be different from the impression that the Minister sought to convey in the last debate? What is happening to Bristow's role in Lee-on-Solent? That, surely, has an impact on some of the Royal Navy services.

Mr. Stewart: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Solent is one of the busiest areas for civil shipping and boating. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has decided that he wants to add extra cover in that area for civil purposes. That does not affect the fact that cover for all military and many civilian services will continue to be provided in the area, but from Portland rather than Lee.

Mr. O'Neill *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend will respond later to the other points that will no doubt be raised during the debate. I think that I should get on with my speech.

Mr. Duffy: This is a debate.

Mr. Stewart: Yes, but if I give way every moment, it ceases to be so.

Meanwhile, the Royal Navy's contribution to NATO remains the central ingredient of the United Kingdom's maritime defence effort. The successful defence of western Europe, in the event of Soviet attack, would depend on NATO's ability to ensure the safe passage of seaborne reinforcements and supplies across the Atlantic, the Channel and the North sea. Britain provides nearly 70 per cent. of the maritime forces that would be immediately available to NATO in those areas, prior to the arrival of Unites States reinforcements. The Royal Navy would thus make a key contribution to NATO's strategy of forward defence, seeking to contain and intercept Soviet maritime forces in the Norwegian sea before they could reach the wider expanses of the Atlantic.

As in the second world war, the submarine is likely to pose the greatest threat to our reinforcement and resupply routes, and it is in that connection that the massive expansion and modernisation of the Soviet submarine fleet constitutes such a threat to the West. I do not believe that the Soviet Union has any current intention of attacking NATO by land or sea, but, with its history of sudden changes in policies and leadership, we can afford to take no risks.

It is difficult indeed to see the huge build-up of Soviet submarines as part of a purely defensive strategy. In the 1970s and 1980s the Soviet navy has built up a submarine fleet of about 400, of which over 200 are nuclear-powered; and new submarines are still being completed at an average rate of about one every six weeks. However, it is not only the sheer size of the Soviet submarine fleet which poses a major potential threat to NATO. The new classes of SSN, such as the Sierra and the Akula, show clear design improvements over their predecessors; modern Soviet submarines are much quieter, making their detection increasingly difficult. At the same time, older submarines are being modernised and their capabilities significantly improved.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the priority for our major investment in the Royal Navy's equipment has been to provide an up-to-date capability for anti-submarine warfare. For this reason we have developed new weapons such as the Stingray and Spearfish torpedoes, as well as greatly improved means of detection through towed arrays and other surface ship and submarine sonars.

Many forces contribute to the overall anti-submarine effort. Our nuclear-powered submarines will be crucial in the forward areas, and RAF maritime patrol aircraft will also have an important contribution to make. But surface ships are an essential part of that effort because they can remain on task for long periods, yet react quickly to contacts over a wide area.

HMS Cornwall, the first of the type 22 batch 3 frigates, well illustrates the scale of our investment in that area. Her weapons include a highly capable hull-mounted sonar and a towed array passive sonar that will enable detections of submarines to be made at very long range. She can then prosecute contacts using the Lynx helicopter armed with

[Mr. Stewart]

Stingray torpedoes. Finally, her comprehensive communication system enables her to assist in the co-ordination of an ASW battle with a variety of other surface, air and submarine units.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Many people will be pleased that the captain of Cornwall is Captain Wrexford-Brown. Would he have been given accelerated promotion if in any way he had been responsible for losing his submarine's control room logbook?

Mr. Stewart: I do not want to speculate on the processes of promotion in the Royal Navy, but we have many good captains, and he is one.

HMS Cornwall is also well equipped in the anti-surface and anti-air roles. She is the first Royal Navy vessel to deploy the Harpoon anti-surface ship missile, and the first to deploy the Goalkeeper close-in weapons system for anti-missile defence, in addition to the well-proven Seawolf. That element of HMS Cornwall's equipment reflects the fact that the past year has seen a major step forward in the air defence of the Fleet, the universal importance of which has been demonstrated by developments in the Gulf. To that end, we have accelerated our plans for the introduction of Phalanx into the type 42 destroyers, and we also placed an order in January for full development and production of the lightweight Seawolf missile system.

HMS Cornwall is a good example of the point made in last year's Navy debate by my predecessor, that the acid test of the Royal Navy's ability to perform its role effectively is not simply ship numbers, but its overall capability. Nevertheless, as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) pointed out earlier, there have been suggestions recently that we do not have enough operational destroyers and frigates, and that few of them would be available for the defence of the waters around the United Kingdom.

I am glad to say that the real picture is very different. Of course, some of our ships are engaged in tasks out of area, but they could be recalled in the event of an emergency. We currently have 49 destroyers and frigates in the Fleet, of which no fewer than 43 are available for operational deployment immediately, or within a short perod if required.

In addition to the nine frigates currently on order, we have now received and are assessing tenders for up to four more of the highly capable type 23 frigates. Looking further to the future, in January——

Mr. Frank Field *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman as he tried to intervene earlier.

Mr. Field: I am grateful to the Minister of State for giving way. Can he tell the House something about the Government's plans in relation to those four tenders? Is it still the Government's intention to order four boats? Will he give the House the assurance that when the Government decide which yards are to get the order, that will be done on the basis of cost?

Mr. Stewart: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a definitive answer to that question, because decisions have not been taken. However, I have no doubt that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement will deal with procurement matters, including the procurement of ships, when he replies to the debate, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He will have heard the hon. Gentleman's point.

Looking further to the future, in January the United Kingdom signed the memorandum of understanding for the project definition phase of the NFR 90 — the proposed NATO frigate which could eventually provide a replacement for the type 42 destroyer at the end of the century. In doing so, however, we have made it clear to our partners that our continued participation is conditional upon an agreement of a timetable that is both realistic in technical terms and consistent with the time scale for progress with the ship's major weapons systems.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): On the point about the NFR 90, my hon. Friend will appreciate the enormous political significance that is attached to the commitment of the United Kingdom Government to a joint project with our NATO allies. I hope that he will assure the House that technical details — I know that some can be important — will not stand in the way of full-hearted co-operation.

Mr. Stewart: I assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Ministry of Defence fully appreciate the international significance and importance of co-operation with our allies in equipment of that kind. Equally, I am sure that he would not expect us to agree to go full ahead with the project unless it was on a realistic basis, which is the condition that we have suggested.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Will my hon. Friend tell us the Treasury's view on that matter?

Mr. Stewart: Having left the Treasury, I think that I shall leave the Treasury to answer for itself.

The plast year has also provided further proof of the unique capacity of the Royal Navy to support our interests and connections worldwide. Royal Navy ships, and especially destroyers and frigates, can be used for a variety of purposes on the international scene. On the way to and from tasks both in the NATO area and beyond, our ships are frequent and welcome visitors in the ports of friendly and allied states. A ship can be dispatched almost anywhere at short notice, if need be, and provide us with a range of diplomatic or military options. Indeed, history, including quite recent history, is full of illustrations of the usefulness and flexibility of sea power.

The Royal Navy's Armilla patrol in the Gulf is just the latest example. It has been a busy year for the patrol. Since our last Navy debate, seldom has a week passed without news of events in the Gulf, and in particular of the so-called "tanker war". Throughout the year we have seen on television the results of attacks on merchant ships in the Gulf, many of them innocent victims caught in the middle of the conflict. During this period, the Armilla patrol has continued to carry out its task in a quiet but effective way. In 1987, the patrol accompanied no fewer than 405 merchant ship movements through the Straits of Hormuz. No ship eligible for Royal Navy protection has been attacked while in the vicinity of the patrol. That is a record of which the Navy can be justly proud.

Mr. O'Neill: We are grateful for the protection afforded by the Navy of British ships in the Gulf. Will the

Minister tell us what is the total number of ships that have gone through the Gulf and what proportion of them were British?

Mr. Stewart: I can give the figures, as I have done, for British shipping, but, in view of the large number of foreign ships which have gone through the Gulf, I am not sure whether I can provide an accurate figure. I require notice to reply to that point.

Mr. O'Neill: I understand that the information was made available to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and that 80 per cent. more foreign ships than British ships went through the Gulf. Our shipping is in a rather special position, largely due to the efforts of our men who are serving in the area and to whom we must be grateful.

Mr. Stewart: I believe that the hon. Gentleman is correct. I particularly welcome his comments about the contribution made by the Royal Navy in that difficult and dangerous area.

The House will recall that, at the end of July, a new threat was posed by mines laid in shipping lanes, one of which was to cause damage to the merchant ship Bridgeton. Shortly afterwards, mines were found off Fujayrah, within Armilla's area of operation. Accordingly, four Royal Navy mine counter-measures vessels were promptly dispatched to the Gulf in support of the Armilla patrol. During their operations to date, our minesweepers have successfully disposed of 10 mines, representing a major contribution to safety of navigation for all shipping in the area. Recently we have been able to reduce the number of our minesweepers in the Gulf from four to three in the light of our experience in operations to date and the very close co-operation which I am glad to say we have developed with allied navies, in particular the Dutch and Belgians.

I know that hon. Members on both sides of the House would wish to join me in paying tribute to the outstanding contribution made by those serving in the Royal Navy in the difficult and demanding circumstances of the Gulf. In recognition of those exceptional conditions of service, I am pleased to be able to tell the House that free aerogramme letters will in future be provided to all those serving in our ships in the Gulf area and to their families at home. I have asked the naval staff to make arrangements to introduce this service as soon as possible, and they expect to be able to do so within the next few weeks.

Last autumn, the Royal Navy's out-of-area capability, as well as that of the other two services, was thoroughly tested during Exercise Purple Warrior, the major tri-service amphibious exercise held in the Irish sea and south-west Scotland. A force of 39 ships, including HMS Ark Royal, Illustrious and Intrepid, took part with two brigades and support from over 100 helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. Twenty thousand service personnel took part, of whom approximately 10,000 were deployed ashore. The exercise was an outstanding success in many ways. In particular, the complex command and control structure of joint amphibious operations was thoroughly tested and proven, and significant benefits were achieved in integration and co-operation between the three services.

Having myself acted as host at a dinner in Stranraer to the 34 observers from 20 states which accepted the invitation to observe aspects of the exercise under the terms of the Stockholm agreement, I can affirm from my own experience the value which I believe those arrangements have in encouraging personal contact between representatives of Warsaw pact and NATO countries, something which I am sure can contribute to a lessening of suspicion and mistrust between us. Over the years that could prove to be one of the most important elements in improving the security of Europe.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): I apologise for not being present to hear the Minister's initial remarks. Will he tell us whether any reciprocal arrangements might be made to watch the work of the Warsaw pact navies, particularly the Soviet navy?

Mr. Stewart: I do not know whether the Warsaw pact countries carry out amphibious operations in the same way as we do, but, as the hon. Gentleman will know, there is an arrangement whereby all exercises over a certain size automatically qualify for reciprocal observation under the Stockholm agreement. Western observers have witnessed some exercises on land during the past year.

Looking much further afield, I was very pleased to be able to announce a few weeks ago that the Royal Navy will be making a group deployment later this year to the far east and Australia. The task group is set to leave the United Kingdom in June, and the focal point of the deployment will be the Fleet review in Sydney early in October. Named Outback 88, the Royal Navy task group will consist of HMS Ark Royal, as flagship, with HMS Edinburgh and HMS Sirius, together with the Royal Fleet Auxiliaries Fort Grange, Olwen and Orangeleaf. It was a previous Sirius which led the orginal first fleet two centuries ago and it is fitting that her namesake will be able to represent the Royal Navy at the Australian bicentennial celebrations this year.

Throughout the six months' deployment the ships will exercise with the forces of our friends and allies, including two exercises with nations which are party to the five-power defence arrangements, and also separately with the United States navy and the Royal Australian navy.

The task group will sail and return via the Suez canal and on current plans the first point of call will be Malta. Thereafter, the deployment will include visits to Singapore, Brunei, Hong Kong and Thailand. Those visits will be a valuable opportunity for the Royal Navy to renew links with other navies and with countries which cannot easily be reached during normal operational tasking. They also provide an excellent occasion to display a wide range of defence equipment in a realistic environment, which I hope British industry will be ready to exploit.

While speaking of exercises, let me also say a word about the Falklands — a theatre in which co-operation between the three services has flourished, particularly since the construction of the new complex at Mount Pleasant. Exercise Fire Focus, which takes place this month, will be the first occasion on which we are able to exercise the procedure for reinforcement in line with the policy that we set out in our White Paper after the conflict in 1982. During the past couple of years, completion of the airfield and the development of contingency plans for the rapid reinforcement of the Falklands have enabled us to halve the size of the resident garrison.

Such a substantial reduction of the military presence in the Falklands serves to confirm that our purpose is entirely defensive, but, in the light of recent history, it would not have been a responsible step unless we were in a position

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to bring more troops to the islands at short notice in case of need. It is, of course, our profound hope that actual reinforcement of the kind that we will be exercising will never have to be put into practice, and I believe that the very fact that we would clearly be able to do so will help to ensure that such circumstances do not again arise.

Fire Focus will involve the movement of no more than one battalion group and a small number of aircraft, with fewer than 1,000 men in all. Although that is, of course, no indication of the numbers that might have to be moved in a real emergency, it is the minimum required to conduct an effective test of the process of reinforcement. Some of the stories about the scale of the exercise have been so enormously exaggerated, I am not surprised that they have given rise to misunderstanding in some quarters. Therefore, I am very glad to have the opportunity to set the record straight.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Minister explain why, although 23 south American states have come out against the exercise, he has not managed to obtain the support of Washington for the exercise?

Mr. Stewart: International reaction to the exercise has been greatly coloured by the exaggeration of its scale. I would merely repeat, for the benefit of those countries where there may have been such anxiety, that we have decided to establish the exercise on the basis of the minimum required to make an effective exercise of the process of reinforcement, which we hope that we shall never have to use for real.

The Royal Navy's most important resource is, of course, its manpower.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Stewart: I have given way many times, but I shall do so again.

Dr. Godman: Before the Minister leaves the subject of the Falklands, may I ask whether there have been any occasions on which the Falkland Islands Government fisheries protection vessels have called upon naval vessels in support of their operations in policing the fisheries zone?

Mr. Stewart: We do not discuss operational matters. However, I have no doubt that the presence of a Royal Navy vessel in the area has contributed to the stability of the Falkland Islands conservation zone for fishery purposes. Incidentally, I think that it has been of great benefit to the Falkland Islands' economy, and that is something that we welcome greatly.

The Royal Navy's most important resource is, of course, its manpower. This country is outstandingly well served by the men and women of the naval services. Currently the Navy, the Marines, the Nursing Services and the WRNS number just over 10,000 officers and about 55,000 ratings in total. During recent years the Royal Navy has progressively transferred manpower and other resources from the base areas to the front line, and fighting ships and their direct support now account for 70 per cent. of the Navy's uniformed strength. The overall result is a much more streamlined and effective Navy than we inherited in 1979, and the drive towards great efficiency continues.

That brings me to the question of recruitment and retention. When one considers the enormous demands made on the members of the naval services, particularly those filling appointments at sea, the retention rate for those very highly trained people is pretty healthy. The level of premature retirement applications has broadly stabilised during the past 18 months at a level far below that experienced when this Government took office.

The retention of trained people is, of course, crucial to our manpower plans, and we are always seeking to improve it. The stress of separation and service at sea are an inevitable part of naval life, but that does not mean that we should take their acceptance by our naval personnel for granted. Much has been done in recent years to consider the needs of the sailor at sea, and we are looking into possible ways of improving conditions of service for seagoers.

Mr. Sayeed: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, although what he has just said was true a year ago, the curve has, regrettably, gone the wrong way and that the retention rate of officers and senior ratings with mechanical and electrical qualifications is declining?

Mr. Stewart: The figures have been similar over the past 18 months or so. I can assure my hon. Friend that that is not something about which we are complacent.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my hon. Friend confirm that, broadly speaking, the projections for manning in the Royal Navy, as outlined in Cmnd. 8288, have been maintained, even though the numbers of ships have, mercifully, not declined to the extent anticipated? Will he please bear in mind the fact that that causes stresses and strains for the families of men in the Fleet and that everything possible must be done to ensure that the separations are not too long? If he does that, the premature outflow of people will be minimised.

Mr. Stewart: I accept entirely my hon. Friend's point about the problems of separation. Indeed, I hope that the words that I have already used will show that we recognise the problems that that can cause.

Last year was one of the most satisfactory for naval recruitment in a long time. We are not, however, at all complacent about that. Like many employers, the Royal Navy is conscious that a progressive reduction in the numbers of young people joining the labour market over the next few years is likely to pose a considerable challenge to recruiting. Many of the young people now seeking employment are well qualified and have high expectations of themselves and of any potential employers. The Navy wants their qualifications, and it provides a well paid and challenging career.

The Government remain committed to expanding the Royal Naval Reserve and the Royal Marine Reserve. It is to those men and women that the nation would look to provide an important element of our wartime manpower and, in the case of the RNR, to man the majority of its mine counter-measures forces. We appreciate that, with competing demands of work, family and activities outside the reserve, finding time is not always easy, and we are therefore grateful not only for the dedication of those concerned but for the understanding of the many employers who allow the reservists time off work to carry out periods of continuous training.

On Monday, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces announced the funding of a

national television campaign to explain the attractions and importance of reserve service. I hope that will encourage more employers to recognise the debt we owe to those who join the reserves. We should not forget the civilian volunteers in the Royal Naval Auxiliary Reserve, which celebrated its silver jubilee last year. The importance of their potential role at key United Kingdom ports and anchorages in the event of hostilities is fully appreciated.

One of the most demanding, as well as one of the most vital, tasks which our sailors have to discharge is the maintenance on patrol of our Polaris submarines. Throughout the past year, as in every year since 1969, the Royal Navy has continued to maintain at least one Polaris submarine on patrol at all times, thus ensuring the constant readiness of our nuclear deterrent. Although the Government"s policy of maintaining the British strategic deterrent was so emphatically endorsed by the electorate last June, the present Leader of the Opposition is equally determined that it should be abandoned.

I hardly need remind the House that the Labour party's policy of one-sided nuclear disarmament would pose great risks for Britain. It is not only a dangerous policy; it is a profoundly illogical one. For the Labour leadership to claim that they would remain good members of NATO, while repudiating the whole nuclear dimension of NATO strategy, is simply dishonest.

The logical consequence of the Labour party's nuclear unilateralism would be to pull out of NATO altogether, and, as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) suggests, to adopt a policy of non-alignment in defence and foreign affairs. To do as Labour proposed in the last election—scrap Polaris, cancel Trident, expel all United States nuclear weapons from Britain—in short, to deny the whole concept of nuclear deterrence, but at the same time to take shelter under the protection of the NATO nuclear umbrella provided by the Americans, is a nonsensical policy.

No wonder there is talk in the Labour party of trying to find some form of compromise. One idea is that Polaris and Trident should be negotiated away as part of the wider disarmament process. The fact is that, for the foreseeable future, the British nuclear deterrent is of fundamental importance not only to our own security but to that of NATO as a whole. By providing a second centre of nuclear decision-making, it greatly complicates the assessment of the consequences of aggression against NATO and so makes such aggression itself much less likely.

Another idea canvassed by some in the Labour party is that, regardless of multilateral negotiations, or if such negotiations were not to succeed, a Labour Government would negotiate Polaris and Trident away for equivalent reductions by the Soviet Union. As the Soviet Union would still have more than 10 times as many strategic nuclear warheads as the United Kingdom with Trident, even if the proposed START agreement between the superpowers were to reduce their number by 50 per cent., such a bilateral agreement between Britain and the Soviet Union would be worse than useless.

If there are two parties to a duel, one of them with 10 bullets and the other with only one, it is an unequal contest. But if one has nine and the other has none, then it is no contest at all. In the words of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore):

"It would be simply folly for Britain to unilaterally abandon its new Trident fleet. And it would be equally foolish for us to negotiate it away on a bilateral one-for-one basis with the Soviet Union. The arithmetic is obvious. The possession by both France and Britain of an independent nuclear capability remains a major counter and deterrent so long as the Soviet Union itself possesses nuclear arms."

It is good to know that there are still a few voices of sanity on this subject in the Labour party, but it is a sad fact that they are now so heavily outnumbered.

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I want to refer to the analogy that the Minister has made with bullets. The hon. Gentleman talked of our having one and the others having nine. What kind of contest would there be with nuclear weapons? How many nuclear weapons does he believe that Britain could use, and in what scenario would we use them?

Mr. Stewart: I thought that the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) was to be one of the voices of sanity among the Opposition, but I despair of that. She knows, as everyone in the House should recognise, that a nuclear deterrent is to deter war, not to fight it. We believe that the effective deterrent that we have maintained for the past 40 years is the best chance of making sure that a war in Europe does not happen again.

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): Before the Minister moves to another subject, may I take this opportunity to remind him of the complete contradiction of the Opposition's policies. In their general election manifesto, they committed themselves to cancelling Trident and phasing out nuclear energy, as well as increasing the hunter-killer programme, although those submarines are nuclear-powered. That is completely inconsistent.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) is quite right about the inconsistency of the Opposition. It will not have gone without notice that whenever embarrassing subjects are raised, all the Opposition can do is to resort to barracking.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): So that we can put the record straight, we have made it clear, in relation to civil nuclear power, that our policy is to phase it out. We also made it clear that, in relation to nuclear submarines and military use, we would retain nuclear generation for conventionally armed nuclear submarines.

Mr. Stewart: Let me conclude, as my speech has continued longer than it should have done, on a note that I trust will meet with more general agreement.

In all its roles, the Royal Navy makes just as important a contribution to our defences today as it has done for many centuries. We owe our respect and gratitude to all those whose skill and dedication continues to maintain the highest traditions of the senior service.

5.2 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I start by echoing the Minister's appreciation of the sterling efforts of the senior service. I recognise that it often has a difficult job to do in hard conditions. I am not surprised that the Minister took the opportunity to set the record straight in this debate about Fire Focus. While he was opening this debate, I took the opportunity to read again what he said in the previous debate. Certainly, the small-scale operation in the Falklands called Fire Focus, which we have heard about today, is somewhat different from the first full-scale reinforcement exercise that was described so fulsomely in the Royal Air Force debate a few weeks ago. The Minister

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has taken rather a gung-ho approach, however, and his retractions today will not do anything to reduce the anxiety in Latin America, and indeed in the whole of America, about what is at least a gaffe by the MoD in building up the image of a modest exercise.

We recognise that if troops are in the Falklands they must be exercised and trained, but it is evidence of the bellicosity of the Government that the most puny little exercise is blown up by the tinpot generals on the Conservative Front Bench. They take every opportunity to preen and inflate themselves, although admittedly the present Secretary of State does not need the hairnet of his predecessor when he went on these excursions. Nevertheless, the Government take every opportunity to blow up the significance of their military activities, often in a destabilising way that causes far more harm than it is designed to avoid.

To return to the debate, I believe that Opposition Members and those on the Conservative Benches who participate regularly in defence debates—I can see some real kind faces there—value services debates. With the reorganisation of the Ministry of Defence, it was feared that the identity of the individual services would be lost. I expect that many of my hon. Friends who have served in the Royal Navy or who have constituency interests relating to warship building and other similar industries, always like to argue in these debates for further procurement announcements. Today, I am afraid that we shall have to wait until the Minister's wind-up for reference to the procurement side of the Ministry of Defence. There has been nothing so far, not even an updating or comment on the royal dockyards, which have been operating for 10 months under privatisation. I expect that some of my colleagues will wish to refer to procurement as the debate continues, and I hope that I shall be able to refer to some procurement problems that the Opposition thinks should be aired.

At present, despite the optimistic noises coming out of Geneva and meetings between American Secretary of State Shultz and his Soviet counterparts, there is still heightening tension in the northern waters and problems are being created by what is now generally known as the forward defence strategy. We realise that much of what has happened in the past few days in Brussels has still to be assessed properly, and we might have to wait until the Estimates debate before the outcome is considered.

We hope that the Prime Minister will report to the House the events of the NATO summit. One of the regrettable aspects of the conduct of Ministry of Defence affairs under this Administration has been the failure of Secretaries of State to make a statement to the House when they return from NATO meetings. If the Prime Minister does that on Monday that might be the start of a change in approach, and we might be given more information about what takes place at NATO summits.

Much of the discussion, as I understand it, at the NATO summit has been concerned with central Europe and the modernisation of compensation, call it what you will, for the short-range weapons. It is inevitable that the greatest interest shown by the countries that have been making the most noise will be in relation to central Europe. Nevertheless the United States, Norway and the United Kingdom must be aware that changes in the ladder of escalation, and the removal of some of the rungs of the INF treaty and subsequent changes will result in a significant heightening of maritime strategy. As a result of that maritime strategy being applied nearer to Soviet bases in the Kola peninsula, there will be increased problems, and dangers, which are recognised by Norway but seem to be ignored by this Government and the United States.

I realise that the capabilities which must exist to meet the perceived threats and challenges are the result of a compromise between resources and needs, but as long as we have the massive expenditure on the Trident programme, anything else we seek to do in the Navy will be gravely limited, which will have a deleterious effect on our contribution to the Alliance and will weaken the overall defence of these islands.

In the 1987 Statement on the Defence Estimates we were told that the Navy had four tasks:

"the interception and containment of Soviet forces in the Norwegian sea;

direct defence of reinforcement, re-supply and economic shipping, in conjunction with US and European maritime forces, and supported by the RAF;

anti-submarine defence of the NATO Striking Fleet Atlantic; and

protection and deployment of the combined United Kingdom/Netherlands Amphibious Force to reinforce the Northern Flank of NATO."

The first three tasks indicate a change in strategy. The Royal Navy is now integrated in the United States forward maritime strategy. Instead of using Royal Navy destroyers and frigates as convoy escorts, the vessels, together with the Royal Navy anti-submarine carriers such as HMS Invincible, HMS Ark Royal and hunter-killers, will attempt to fight the next war in the Norwegian and Barents seas. Their task will be to destroy the Soviet fleet, destroy the Soviet means of second strike and their nuclear submarines in their bastions, and to launch attacks on Soviet territory.

United States and Royal Navy ships are armed with a range of conventional and nuclear weapons. Their nuclear inventory consists of gravity bombs, which can be dropped by Royal Navy Sea Harrier aircraft, and nuclear depth charges carried by frigates and destroyers. An increasing number of sea-launched cruise missiles are being fitted to United States ships. In a crisis it is clear that the Royal Navy and US Navy warships would surge forward to apply coercive diplomatic pressure, to contain the Soviet fleet and threaten the Soviet means of second strike.

In peacetime, in order to prepare for the strategy, the Royal Navy and US navy warships are operating in the Barents sea, shadowing Soviet ships and submarines. The danger of the tactic of shadowing ships was illustrated just a couple of weeks ago in the Black sea, when two United States and Soviet warships were in very close proximity. The Royal Navy could be similarly involved in northern waters. While the Ministry of Defence is quite relaxed about that, I have gained the impression from talking to people in the Norwegian Government that they are not quite so relaxed about it and are far more acutely aware of the high-risk strategy in the northern waters.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is the hon. Member suggesting that the Royal Navy should deny itself the right of free passage in international waters just because of the risk of accident, collision or some other eventuality? Surely it is necessary that the navies of the free world should exercise their fundamental right in international waters?

Mr. O'Neill: The hon. Member is confusing the two issues. If he allows me to answer the question, he can make

up his own mind. It is clear that the long-standing convoy protection and support role and the plugging of the Greenland-Iceland-Norway gap have long been accepted as legitimate tactics and part of the strategy for the defence of these islands and the Atlantic convoys. We are seeing a change in the strategy; a pushing further forward into areas where the Royal Navy is participating in ways that it has not done before.

The United States navy, under the direction of Assistant Secretary of State Lehman, developed the strategy as part of the campaign for the 600-warship navy. The Lehman approach was graphically described in a metaphor, which would probably appeal to the Prime Minister, as "bearding the bear in its lair". That is highly provocative and not greatly appreciated by the people of Norway. It could create problems and dangers in northern waters at a time when we are led to believe, according to "Jane's Fighting Ships" that the Soviet Union is curbing some of its activities in the Barents sea. There is a long report in today's "Jane's" about the way in which the Soviet Union has been reducing its activity. It is not clear what the motives are; seeking to adopt a lower military profile or attempting to save money, co-operation——

Sir Geoffrey Johnson-Smith *rose*——

Mr. O'Neill: When I finish the point, I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The point I am making is that even if we distrust and are suspicious of the Soviets, they appear to be seeking to reduce the tension in the northern waters. Gorbachev has already suggested having talks about reducing the tension. I am not one of those people who embrace everything Gorbachev says. He is not necessarily the kind of man we should do business with. We ought to put his remarks to the test, and the test can only be put in serious discussions. The offers made in Murmansk last October have not been taken up yet or adequately considered by the Alliance.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: The hon. Gentleman has raised an interesting point. It is difficult to do justice to it in putting a question to him, but he should tell the House that the idea of moving our submarine force closer to the Soviets, into the Barents sea, is based not just on a provocative view of the Lehman strategy for the Navy but on the fact that Soviet technology has changed. The Soviets have gone further away from the United States with their submarines by developing long-range weapon strike systems. If we are to shadow their submarines, we have to move closer to them. It is a matter of geography and good naval tactics; nothing more or less.

Mr. O'Neill: The hon. Member could be answered by the point that we have Trident and the Soviets have their weapons systems. Perhaps if we were to talk seriously—I hope we will—in the context of START, in a year we could say that because of the reduction in the Soviet threat we could talk in a different context. On this point the hon. Member and I will have to agree to disagree.

At a time when there seems to be an opportunity for certain localised initiatives to be taken, it would be foolhardy of us to urge the Alliance to ignore the initiatives. That is the point I have been trying to make in the context of the Murmansk speech by Secretary Gorbachev. Our position is not enhanced by reports such as those in *The Times* of July last year which showed HMS Superb joined with the USS Sea Devil and USS Bullfish surfacing at the north pole.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): Why should not the Royal Navy submarines surface at the north pole and exercise their right of freedom of navigation on the high seas? It is typical of the appeasement policies of the Opposition Front Bench that just because a couple of Soviet warships in international waters should have deliberately collided with a couple of United States warships, they are now telling us that the Royal Navy should not be allowed to go anywhere close to Soviet shores.

Mr. O'Neill: I am sorry that I let the hon. Member in. I did so because I expected something more than the usual old claptrap, but I will respond on this point. Since that time, and since Gorbachev's speech in October, I do not think that such an incident has happened again, and for that I am grateful. I hope that this will mark a better understanding between the Soviet Union and the Alliance, instead of the provocative and—to use the expression I used at the beginning of my speech—gung-ho mentality that seems to pervade the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Sayeed *rose*——

Mr. O'Neill: No, I have to make progress. The hon. Member will I am sure, be able to catch Mr. Deputy Speaker's eye.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. A lot of hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. Perhaps hon. Members who are waiting to catch my eye would save their interventions for their speeches.

Mr. O'Neill: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We know that Defence Minister Yazov will be meeting Secretary of State Carlucci in the near future to discuss strategy and military doctrine in its wide sense. According to press reports, one of the matters on the agenda will be the very point that the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) has made. One of the encouraging things we see in prospect at a discussion of this nature is that problems of this kind will be discussed frankly. I only wish that the Government would assist this process by giving vocal support for this kind of discussion, because we have yet to see from the Secretary of State—who I am glad to see is in his place—any such expression of enthusiasm or support. It is from such informal discussions that the other things that we all want will develop.

I have referred to the forward strategy and deployment of our Fleet in northern waters. This stretches the capabilities of the Fleet and brings into question our ability to discharge our responsibilities in the other parts of the maritime strategy, as laid out in the Estimates. Obviously, the convoy support role is critical for two reasons: first, because we recognise that material has to be transferred in time of crisis from the United States to Europe, and, secondly, because it is with our Royal Navy above all that responsibility for that protection will rest.

We have heard from press and other reports that the Select Committee has been looking into this function and has been taking evidence. I do not think that we are at liberty to speak about this in any context but press reports at the moment. We see that this Fleet protection role is being gravely stretched and strained by the small size of our Navy. Members of the Opposition are not too clear about exactly how many craft are available to the Navy.

Some weeks ago we heard an estimate made by Mr. Desmond Wettern, who has a certain expertise in these matters. Over the years he has caused a fair degree of

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discomfiture to the MOD and has tended to require it to be more frank than it would otherwise be. In conjunction with the Maritime League — not an organisation that is noted for its appeasement tendencies, but a non-political organisation made up of people who are very strongly committed to the Navy, and enjoying the support of hon. Members from all parties — he set a figure of 28 ships being operationally available to the Royal Navy.

We have heard today that the figure is now 43. Yesterday morning I heard an official giving evidence to the Select Committee in which he said that the figure was 36, but it now seems that seven have been found overnight. It may be that we shall get another seven before the Estimates debate and get back to 50.

I believe that many Opposition and Government Members will want to come back to this. It is only the understandable, but in this case, I think, culpable, loyalty of many Government Members to their Front Bench that prevents their taking this up with the vigour that they might well show once they get the evidence properly sorted out by the Select Committee and its report comes out. I hope that that report will be available for the Estimates debate later in the year, because this is a matter that exercises the mind of anyone who has at least the best interests of the defence of this country and the maintenance of the good name of our senior service.

The fact that we have a smaller Fleet means that, of necessity, we need to have more people at sea for longer periods. This is one of the most distressing aspects of the impact of the cuts in our Navy, because of the damage that it does to the manpower and the morale of our service men and service women.

It might be said that the Minister's brief was somewhat economical with the truth in relation to figures concerning manpower. He said that they had stabilised. On 15 February I asked the Secretary of State for Defence questions about the numbers of Royal Navy artificers who had left certain branches in each year since 1979. I was told that in 1986, 70 air engineers left and in 1987, 75 left, while in 1979 the figure was 29. The figures for marine engineers were, in 1986, 371 and in 1987, 345. The figures for weapon/electrical engineers were, in 1986, 444 and in 1987, 357.

The numbers leaving prior to completion of engagement have been higher in some years than in others. In 1986, the figure for marine engineers was 189, and in 1987, it was 176. The figures for air engineers leaving before completion of engagement were 18 in 1986 and 22 in 1987.

These figures may well give the Minister some comfort. They may well have stabilised. And, of course, in every debate of this nature we are told what it was like in the days of the Labour Government. In the days of the Labour Government there were at one point 1·7 million people out of work, and by April 1979 that figure was down to just under 1·3 million. We are now talking in terms of 2·9 million to 3·5 million, depending on which set of fiddled unemployment statistics one chooses to base one's argument on.

If there is one rule of recruitment for the services it is that unemployment is the best recruiting sergeant. There must be something wrong with a service with such long-standing traditions, which over the years has had a great reputation for morale and has provided people with the best possible training, if people are continuing to leave in the numbers that they are, to the detriment of the service as a whole.

If we have strains on our Fleet, if we have a loss of manpower and morale, and if there is a time of crisis, we have to look for additional support for our Fleet, as we had to do in the Falklands exercise. We have to look to the merchant marine.

The somewhat inelegant acronym, STUFT, is a word that I would not normally use in this House, but for this purpose. Ships taken up from trade are the backbone of the support that our navy expects in a time of crisis. Certainly the military requirements are seen solely in terms of ships taken up from trade for direct naval purposes. Yet ships so utilised cannot be used for their primary transport function and could represent a significant drain on our vital shipping resources, especially the fast cargo liners which are vital for reinforcement and re-supply.

There were 193 British-registered large ocean trading vessels, that is container and roll-on/roll-off ships, in March 1987. I understand that the figure this year is expected to be about 130. This deterioration in numbers is significant for more than one reason, the obvious one being, that on the one hand, it denies us naval support and, on the other, the facility for transporting the material. What is also significant is that it denies us skilled naval personnel because, as we lose each ship, so we lose the services and the skills of trained merchantmen.

The de-flagging of ships and the recruitment, by some of the unscrupulous shipping lines, of cheap foreign labour to work in intolerable conditions, creates problems. I cannot see why poorly paid foreign nationals would necessarily want to come to the defence of this country, a country which has done nothing to improve their working conditions and pay.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): I hope that the hon. Gentleman makes these points to the National Union of Seamen before it calls its people out on strike and asks them to take other industrial action. There are major problems, and increasingly shipowners will be unable to rely on British crews if we have these strikes. So I hope that he will put these views very strongly to the National Union of Seamen.

Mr. O'Neill: If the hon. Gentleman is arguing a case for the low pay of British merchantmen, he can do so in Portsmouth and see what he gets for his labours. Hon. Members on the Opposition Benches believe that our sailors in both the merchant marine and the Royal Navy are entitled to the best possible working conditions, pay and opportunities for reasonable periods of leave at home — because the Government's policy means not just the removal of the opportunity for merchant navy support, but the problem that many of our naval seamen are spending far too long at sea and far too short a time with their families. That is, above all else, the reason why we are seeing this decline in manpower and morale.

The lack of resources can be attributed to the distortion of the defence budget by Trident. In the past few weeks we have had a series of disclosures. We have had the rent-a-rocket scandal. We do not yet know whether we will own all our D5 missiles or just 80 per cent. of them. We have gone through the arithmetic and we get the usual Panglossion stuff from the Minister, that everything is fine and up-to-date. According to reports which appeared in

The Independent about production of warheads, staff shortages and the difficulties with the facility at Aldermaston, it is quite possible that there will be considerable delays in the production of warheads.

I know that the Secretary of State said recently that everything was up to date. This may well be true if he is describing the position that we are expected to be in at present, but we may well find ourselves before too long in the position of having the first submarine but no missiles or warheads; we will probably have missiles if the Americans are prepared to grant us them but not warheads because that is the British part of the operation and we cannot produce them in time.

Perhaps when he replies tonight, the Minister will confirm the position on the production of warheads for the Trident system. Perhaps he will tell us the position regarding the facility at Aldermaston. We have had these arguments before in this Chamber, and somehow the reasons are always based on either commercial considerations or security. It does absolutely nothing for security for the House to be given either evasive replies or obfuscating statements from the Government Front Bench. We want the position clarified. We believe that defence and security matters must of necessity be subject to a degree of confidentiality, but that this Government's desire to cover up and conceal is out of all proportion to the nature of the problems that we are discussing.

We had from the Minister, in the last few minutes of what I imagine he would seek to call his peroration, the apologia for the British nuclear deterrent, so-called. When the Minister replies, will he say to what extent in the Trident programme the Government have considered the consequences of a treaty being produced from the strategic arms reduction talks? If we have a 50 per cent. reduction — and all hon. Members would want such an eventuality—that would not be an end in itself but only a means to an end. We are entitled to some thoughts from the Government on how they would meet their responsibilities in a phase two of START.

It is certainly the intention of the present incumbent in the White House and of Secretary Gorbachev to seek to secure a nuclear-free world. We know that the Prime Minister does not like such talk, that she finds it completely otiose and unacceptable. It seems that other Conservatives in other parts of the world, in Moscow and Washington, are prepared to view this, with some equanimity, as something to be desired. So it will be useful if we can have some indications of the Government's thinking on this strategic matter. It ill behoves the Government to carry on addressing the problems of defence and security in a provocative and bellicose manner which completely ignores the change in the climate of world opinion and denies Britain access to any of the meaningful discussions that take place.

Our reading of the limited reports from Brussels is that, rather than being a triumph for the Prime Minister, the meeting has been a massive rebuttal of the Prime Minister and her Secretary of State — the man who went to Monterrey a few months ago, arguing not for modernisation but for compensation and ending up with "modernisation wherever possible".

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton) *rose*——

Mr. O'Neill: I am just about to finish.

The Opposition believe that what has happened at Brussels marks a turning point in the attitude of the alliance to those who seek to jack up the arms race at every turn. What is a matter for regret is the fact that, as long as the Government keep their head in the sand with regard to the Royal Navy we will have to go on raising the questions of the inadequacy of the surface fleet, the poor morale and the drop in manpower.

Hon. Members, not only on the Opposition Benches but also on the Government Benches, who have some affection and respect for the contribution that the Royal Navy makes to the country's defences, recognise that we have the wrong strategy and the wrong priorities. These in turn, cause some of our finest and most committed people to give up in disgust and disillusionment — something that we deplore.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I see that 20 or more hon. Members want to take part in the debate. Arithmetic suggests that if speeches average about 10 minutes we may avoid disappointments.

5.38 pm

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): I hope that the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) will forgive me if I do not go through what he has said in detail, but one thing I must say because he provoked me somewhat. He must recall the days when we Conservatives took over from the Labour Government and when service pay had sunk lamentably low. The lifeblood of our forces was being drained away, and applications for premature voluntary release were being made—as a former Navy Minister, perhaps I may be allowed this phrase—at a rate of knots.

The first thing that we did on coming to office was to deal with the pay of our armed forces. That at once stopped the outflow of what might have been described as middle management in the armed forces. Many chief petty officers, lieutenants and middle management were leaving. Admirals are important, but I think that all hon. Members would agree that the middle ranks are also vastly important. In the Army, sergeants, staff sergeants and captains are very important. It was the middle ranks who were leaving when we took office.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Clackmannan agrees. I find it a little rich that the hon. Gentleman should take us to task about a problem which has been dealt with in the past. I have every confidence that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will deal quickly with the matter if he thinks that the position is deteriorating. If not, it will be drawn to his attention by many of his hon. Friends and, I suspect, by Opposition Members. We will keep an eye on things to see that nothing too disastrous happens.

It is right and proper that we should continue to have single-service debates. Quite a few of us were worried about the reorganisation of the Ministry of Defence when single-service Ministers were abolished. One thing which appeased us and led us not to take too strenuous a view against the reorganisation was that we were assured that time would be made available for the House to home in on each service. I am glad that the procedure has been adhered to. We can deal with matters of some detail though not the minutiae. What would not be appropriate in a two-day debate on the Defence White Paper is appropriate tonight. I welcome very much the fact that the debate is taking place.

[Sir Antony Buck]

We are proud that the Royal Navy is the custodian of our independent deterrent. As long as we remain in government, that will be perpetuated by the D5 unless there is a major breakthrough in the arms reduction talks on both sides of the iron curtain. The chances are that we shall be going for the D5. I look forward to hearing later from the Front Bench, but I understand that we are getting the D5 for the Royal Navy for the same reasons as the Labour party updated the deterrent when it was in power.

The Labour Administration updated the Polaris weapons system by bringing in the Chevaline system. They did so without telling anyone. It is rich for Labour Members to talk sometimes about lack of open government when a former Labour Administration did that. Some of us got wind of it, but we thought that it was not appropriate to blow it because we agreed with what the Labour Government were doing. They had such trouble with some of their own supporters that if we had let it be known that they were updating the deterrent, they might have been forced not to do so. We had a shrewd idea about what was happening but, for patriotic reasons, we did not let it become public. Opposition Members should not criticise us for lack of open government when we consider their track record.

Sometimes people ask if our deterrent is independent. Of course it is. Once it is operational, the deployment of the boats will be under our control. It is appropriate that there should be full co-operation with our allies about deployment, but in the last resort it is an independent deterrent. It might be difficult to paint a scenario in which we would want to use it independently, but it is useful to have it under our control. It is another centre of decision making. The tough men of the Politburo might think that if they were to attack us our American allies would not come to our assistance. While we maintan the capability of inflicting unacceptable damage on the other side, that makes us all the more secure.

I know that the Royal Navy is proud to have the independent deterrent within its control. It will be updated by going for the D5. I hope that in the reply to the debate we will be given more detail about cost. It is considerable, but as a proportion of the Defence Estimates it is relatively small; its importance transcends the small portion of the defence Vote which is necessary .

That might be described as the top end of the Navy requirement. At the other end I should be interested to hear what my right hon. Friend has to say about the number of frigates. There seems to be a muddle about the numbers game. I am not good at numbers; I am rather a matches man. Like Randolph Churchill, every time I see a decimal point I think of those damned dots. Various numbers of frigates have been bandied about. I hope that my right hon. Friend will clear the matter up. The British Maritime League has circulated a document on the Defence Estimates in which it suggests that the total number of hulls is 46 and that it is expected to drop to 41

far below the 50 major vessels about which we have had oft-repeated assurances. The surface fleet is of vast importance and my right hon. Friend should give us more information about it.

The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), a former Navy Minister, would have virtually done away with the surface fleet because he was hooked on the idea of the hunter-killer nuclear submarine as the battleship of tomorrow. We need a substantial surface fleet, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will tell us how many vessels he expects will be in service.

This is an occasion when we have the opportunity of mentioning the Royal Marines and their tremendous amphibious capability. They are deployed now, as they have been all along, in Northern Ireland. I think that 40 Commando has just gone there. It is appropriate in a Navy debate that we should pay tribute to what the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines do on the ground in Northern Ireland and what the Navy does through the Granada patrol which prevents gun-running into the Province.

Perhaps in his reply my right hon. Friend will deal, too, with the deployment of the Royal Marines on Carlingford lough, which is very important. That was suggested by some of us much earlier to stop gun-running across the lough. I understand that the ship that was there has recently been replaced. I hope that in his reply my right hon. Friend will tell us how the Royal Marines are operating in South Armagh, which is often known as cowboy country, and will update the position on the Granada patrol. In these debates we can deal in more detail with such matters than is appropriate on the Defence Estimates.

The royal naval school at Holbrook is not often mentioned in the House. I have had the privilege of being on the board for a considerable time. When I was a Navy Minister I was chairman of the governors on the board of management, on which I still serve, together with Opposition Members. I greatly admire that school, which vastly values its connection with the Royal Navy. It is valuable in providing recruits, although not in large numbers, and particularly in providing the children of seafaring folk with a good, sound and fairly robust education. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will have a word to say about that.

It has been suggested that that school should be co-educational, and I think that that would be a very good thing. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy), who is a former Navy Minister, shakes his head. I know that Opposition Members are deeply conservative about these matters. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I believe in co-education. We have a very good school in Holbrook and it is right to pay tribute to the work that it does.

I promised that I would be relatively brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I end as I began, by paying tribute to the calibre of the personnel in the Royal Navy. Whenever I visit a frigate, shore establishment or the Royal Marines, I am amazed at the professionalism, keenness and pleasantness of the young men in our armed forces. One might argue that too high a proportion of our best young people go into the armed forces, but I would never deploy that argument. It is a fault for the good that so many high calibre young people go into the armed forces. I am glad that we can focus attention this afternoon on the Royal Navy, with which we are all very proud to be associated.

5.50 pm

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): I am probably the only hon. Member to have been on two of Her Majesty's ships in the past two weeks. I refer to the visit to the Tyne of HMS Ark Royal, and, last weekend, HMS Illustrious. Both ships have completed their tour of duty in northern waters and are now making their way south for a short period of leave. I was impressed by the enthusiasm with which the ships were received on Tyneside. Swan Hunter,

the prime shipbuilder in the country, North Tyneside borough council and the Tyne and Wear development corporation made arrangements to ensure that the ships came up the river and were berthed safely and that their crews enjoyed the traditional Tyneside hospitality.

It crossed my mind that in a year or so at least one of those ships would be coming up for a refit. I am sure that Swan Hunter will submit a tender if invited, and I hope that the Minister will consider that tender carefully. If he does, he will not only get the ship into the right place and a good job done on it at the right price but he will get it returned to the service in the time allocated.

The affection of the people in my region for the senior service has long been established. For generations, men have served on famous ships built in the region. Both HMS Ark Royal and HMS Illustrious were built on the Tyne, and when I made my layman's tour of inspection, both ships presented a clean and smart appearance. I shall not dwell on the subject of morale. All ranks were present at the receptions after the tours. I am a bit of a chatterbox, so I talked to many of the men. I found that morale was good. Not one of the men raised the issue of pay.

I talked to chief petty officers who were ending their period of office after 22 years. I even met one who had served 25 years. I talked to men of different ranks and in different appointments who had served for 17 or 18 years. They enjoyed their work.

The Minister will be pleased to know that I talked to the one Royal Marine on HMS Illustrious. It shook me to realise that there was only one Royal Marine on a ship of that size, out of a crew of about 1,260. When I asked him about it he explained to me, with a pained expression, that he was only the link man and that, if necessary, the same vessel could carry 800 men into active service virtually overnight.

We should not exaggerate the problem of pay in the services. I think that the pay is about right and that even if it is not, the tales that we hear about people drifting away from the services because of the pay are slightly exaggerated. But I know my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) disagrees.

I am rather disappointed that the Minister did not refer to AOR 2, the contract for which is still up for grabs. I recall the arguments that took place over the contract for AOR 1. I should inform you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the AOR 1 is the auxiliary oil replenishment vessel, and AOR 2 is a similar ship to AOR 1.

Mr. Sayeed: Thank you, Ted, but we know what an AOR is.

Mr. Garrett: Well, they are different ships and slightly different designs. The amateurs will have to smarten up—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should remember that I did two and a half years in the Royal Navy.

Mr. Garrett: In that case, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you should have checked me earlier, because I am sure you knew what an AOR was.

After keen lobbying, the contract for the AOR 1 went to Belfast. Some people in the north suspected that that was for political reasons and that it was not to do with competition. The contract went to Harland and Wolff. I understand that that ship has not been completed within the stated period and that there is an overrun on cost. If that is so, why has not the Minister told us about it?

Is it not time that the ship was towed away from Harland and Wolff and brought around to Swan Hunter for completion? Will the Minister see whether that is possible? We have done that in the past. We took HMS Cardiff from somewhere else and finished it to schedule. The Swan Hunter group deserves AOR 2 and it will get it by competitive tendering.

I am trying to stay within the 10 minutes suggested, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I should like to deal with the four frigates. I think that they should be ordered in one batch. That would be better than giving one to this yard, one to that yard and one to the other yard. Such a decision would be partly political and probably a bit more expensive than allocating the four orders in one batch. Swan Hunter has undergone dramatic changes since privatisation and is now fit and lean. No doubt it will compete with any other yard in the United Kingdom and I am confident that it will get the order if the four frigates are allocated in one batch. If that happens, the savings to the taxpayer will be considerable.

I do not know much about the NFR 90, although we look forward to its coming into service. Perhaps the Minister will give us an idea of the time scale for this European-designed vessel—if it ever comes to anything, bearing in mind our experiences of the European Economic Community. As I understand it, it will not come into operation until the end of this century or the beginning of the next century, but I gather that feasibility studies are taking place. Can the Minister tell us what progress has been made with those feasibility studies? I believe that the House is entitled to know.

This afternoon mention has been made about encouraging volunteers to the senior service. I recall that, some two years ago in a debate about the Army, I mentioned men who were unemployed volunteers finding the financial incentive of such service blunted because of tax claims on their allowances and bounties and the fact that their unemployment benefit was deducted. I gather that, since then, that problem has been partly resolved. I believe that that problem was a disincentive especially in areas such as the north of England and some parts of Scotland and Wales, where there are some first-class volunteers for the armed services.

I believe that there should be no hindrance with regard to the financial provisions made available to such volunteers. If I have any influence with the Chancellor I hope that when he makes his Budget Statement on 15 March, he will say that all earnings that volunteers receive for their services will be exempt from income tax. Those volunteers are committing their time and leisure to the services, and they should be exempted from such tax.

With those remarks, I shall leave the rest of the debate to my colleagues, who I am sure will be prodding the Ministers for their views on some urgent matters.

6 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): It is a fortunate coincidence that the Navy debate is taking place at the same time as the NATO summit. This is an accident, but it gives us an opportunity not just to deal specifically with Royal Navy matters, but also with the maritime strategy of the Alliance to which the Royal Navy makes an important contribution.

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces gave an extremely lucid account of the Government's thoroughly responsible stewardship of the Royal Navy. It was a somewhat nuts-and-bolts account, as is fit and proper for a single-service debate. However, I believe that the House all too rarely has the opportunity to debate maritime strategy and that is what I wish to discuss tonight.

I believe that it is absolutely right that, at the summit in Brussels, the leaders of NATO should address themselves to the most pressing issue which the Alliance faces—how to render our overall deterrent effective in the new era into which we are entering after the decision, in principle, taken between General Secretary Gorbachev and President Reagan to sign an accord to eliminate land-based intermediate nuclear forces. That decision renders more important rather than less the contribution of the French and British national deterrents and of sea-launched nuclear deterrent systems to the overall Alliance deterrent.

At subsequent summits I hope that the leaders of the Alliance will address themselves to another pressing and urgent matter—how to secure a more equitable sharing of the burden of Alliance defence among the members of NATO.

Mr. O'Neill: The hon. Gentleman has been extremely careful in his use of words and he mentioned sea-launched missiles. Would he include cruise missiles in that category, or is he talking about existing or prospective French and British deterrents? We have had discussions about sea-launched cruise missiles and I remember that the former Minister of State was strongly opposed to those missiles because of verification problems. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is developing a theme, but I believe that it would be useful to examine his premises closely before he develops his argument further.

Mr. Wilkinson: I was implying that we would do well to recognise that the Soviet Union has a formidable sea-launched nuclear cruise missile capability as well as an increasingly formidable strategic ballistic missile capability. Furthermore, NATO will become more reliant rather than less on sea-launched systems such as Trident and the new generation of modernised submarine-launched missiles coming into service in the Royal Navy, together with the force de frappe of the French Navy.

In the long overdue process of re-examining roles and responsibilities within the Alliance, I hope that its European members in particular will come to terms with today's reality, the decline of American economic power. That decline has been coupled with a decline in the ability of our United States ally to undertake all the roles and responsibilties upon which we have come to rely. It has been extremely useful and convenient to us that, in the 40 years in which the NATO treaty has existed, our American friends have been the dominant partner in the Alliance. I am sure that they will remain so, but it is clear that America will not, for ever and for aye, be able to do all the things which we have found so militarily convenient in the past.

If we consider burden sharing within the Alliance rationally and coolly, we recognise certain cardinal facts. The first is that the United Kingdom is the sole nation among the leading countries of Europe, either East or West, that does not have any form of conscription or national service. Secondly, we are geographically placed in a special position to the rear and flank of the Alliance. Thirdly, due to history and the development of our economy over the years, we are, especially in comparison with European members of the Alliance, dependent upon access to overseas markets and overseas sources of raw materials.

NATO strategy has been extremely effective and the strategy of flexible response has, to date, thank God, deterred war in Europe, but as the challenging document produced by the Iklé commission on integrated long-term strategy points out.

"the strategy has also had some setbacks. Soviet power has bypassed the lines we drew and has pushed into Southern Asia, the Middle East, Africa, the Caribbean and Central America."

The Soviets have learnt the potential of long-range power projection, which air power and, above all, sea power afford. The Soviets have made gains, in part because of the enhancement of sea and air power at their disposal, and access to positions of considerable strategic influence world wide.

I do not believe that the threat to our security interests rests above all on the central front. I believe that the threat is multi-dimensional and global and that this threat will grow unless the Alliance finds appropriate means to contain it. For Britain it means that we should revert to a strategy that is flexible and makes use of the special skills and talents which are afforded by professional, long-service Regulars. Navies and air forces require levels of technological competence and the ability to operate sophisticated equipment which are not found to the same extent in armies.

We have noticed with great interest the ever closer understanding on defence matters between the Federal Republic of Germany and France. Anything that brings two leading European members of NATO closer in co-operation is to be welcomed. French strategic doctrine is evolving so that they, through the force d'action rapide, are better able to support the Germans on the central front.

We, however, are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain the present level of commitment—to which we are required to adhere by the Brussels treaty—of 55,000 men and a tactical air force on the central front, given that our defence budget is declining in real terms. The consequence is that our strategy is inflexible. We are faced with choices which are extremely difficult to make and which threaten an imbalance in our overall defence planning.

To take one example, the press—in particular, *The Independent*—has suggested that we need another 500 Challenger tanks for the British Army of the Rhine. I do not believe that tanks in situ on the north German plain are the most effective antidote to armour. Intelligent munitions, fire-and-forget weaponry, and above all air power are the best antidote to armour, particularly for a defensive Alliance which does not know when or from where the threat will come, and which will need to concentrate the maximum force against it. This is particularly so for an island maritime member of the Alliance.

We risk an imbalance, and it must make it harder—to take a maritime example—to provide the necessary

replacement of the amphibious vessels, Intrepid and Fearless, with purpose-built amphibious vessels of some new class in the near future.

The threat is not just global, but in the European area it seems highest on the northern and southern flanks. The Mediterranean flank of the Alliance, from the Balkans to the Iberian peninsula, is politically unstable. The North African littoral has regimes that are unpredictable at best and potentially dangerous at worst. The Soviets, at the northern extremity of Europe, have the greatest concentration of military power anywhere within the Eurasian land mass on the Kola peninsula.

The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), in a most interesting speech, challenged the forward naval strategy. I am sure, for good naval reasons, as explained by my hon Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), that it is necessary for us to deploy forward naval forces. To do so presumes, first, a willingness to get those forces in place early enough, and, secondly, that the Alliance retains control of northern Norway. Without the control of Norway it would be hard for NATO to win a future battle of the Atlantic. One does not need to read Tom Clancy's stirring tales to recognise the basic strategic truth of this fact. It is particularly important that we should be able to reinforce our Norwegian friends because they do not allow nuclear weapons or foreign troops to be stationed on their soil in peace time.

We should recognise the fact that an equation which was already loaded against us on the northern flank may be made even more unfavourable if our Canadian friends, for understandable reasons, go ahead with their declared intention no longer to commit a sea-transportable brigade and two air squadrons to the northern flank.

It is high time that the leaders of the Alliance sat down and coolly and rationally reappraised roles and responsibilities within NATO. As part of that reappraisal, Britain should do more at sea and somewhat less on land in central Europe. The Statement on the Defence Estimates for last year pointed out that we spent no less than £3·757 million on the central front and only £2·632 million on our maritime commitments to the east Atlantic and channel command areas.

We need, as the Defence Select Committee understands, to keep our surface fleet up to date. Perhaps above all, we need to be the leading nation among the European members of the Alliance, with a formidable attack submarine capability, as that is the best instrument against hostile submarines.

Last but not least, we need maritime air power in its fullest dimensions from organic naval air power to land-based maritime patrol aeroplanes to counter the ever-growing Soviet submarine threat.

We should never forget that the defence of western Europe rests not only on the Weser river but is ultimately secured by the ability to reinforce western Europe of our friends and allies in the United States. Without a secure bridgehead across the Atlantic, no long-term defence of our continent is possible, and no effective deterrent can be maintained.

The debate has come at an appropriate time. It brings home to us the key role that our strategic nuclear forces play, which are now embodied in the Polaris force and which will shortly be embodied in the Trident D5, which the Royal Navy is to acquire. It makes us think more deeply, in a changing strategic scenario, about how Britain can better play its part within the Alliance.

I am sure that the logic of all those arguments, which will be carried through in a spirit of goodwill in the Alliance, should lead us to modify our strategy to do rather more at sea, which our allies would welcome, particularly those who are potentially most exposed, such as our friends the Norwegians, on the northern flank.

6.8 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I am sure that the House is grateful to the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) for giving his views on the strategic considerations in this debate. He highlighted—I am sure that this fact is known to all hon. Members—the growing strength of the Soviet navy, not only in terms of its increasing number of vessels but their increasing sophistication. That poses challenges to the strategy to be adopted by NATO in response.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the build-up of forces in the Kola peninsula and the consequences of that. If it is thought necessary to develop a strategy of more forward defence in that area, one should take into account the problems that it raises. Inevitably, such action is perceived as being a more aggressive and more offensive posture than if we were to adopt a position further back.

When there is concentration of so much military might, particularly in times of tension, the risks are very high indeed. We hope that the Government will try to support initiatives to increase confidence-building measures with regard to naval action. For example, the type of notification that is given, which was agreed in September 1986, for land-based exercises could be extended to sea-based exercises. There should also be an exchange of observers for those exercises. Such measures would make some contribution to reducing possible tension in the area. We all welcomed the INF agreement, the first historic reduction in nuclear arms.

Mr. Duffy: This is a debate on the Navy.

Mr. Wallace: I was coming to that.

The INF agreement was limited to land-based nuclear missiles. Inevitably, the next round of talks will include strategic missiles, many of which are sea-launched. No one would suggest that Britain should put Polaris or Trident on the negotiating table in the first round of talks seeking a 50 per cent. reduction. However, in the second round, we may well be asked to make a contribution, and it would be welcome if the Government would say whether they would be prepared to join in, and consider what concessions they would be prepared to make in the event of Britain being asked to play a positive role in disarmament.

In recent weeks there have been alarming reports in the press of incidents relating to the civil aspects of the nuclear submarine force, rather than to the nuclear weapons, such as the incident at Faslane on HMS Resolution. The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) may well try to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to discuss the alarm that that caused in his constituency. I shall deal with the matter on a more general basis.

Obviously, for reasons of security, there is not much open discussion about the nuclear propulsion of many of our naval vessels. HMS Vulcan is situated immediately

[Mr. Wallace]

opposite my constituency, and there have been trials of a PWR reactor there for some time. When it was proposed by the civil nuclear authorities to build a reprocessing plant at Dounreay, the public inquiry was the longest in the history of Scottish planning. However, military nuclear installations can go ahead and develop without the need for any of the public discussion which would be required for a civil development.

After Chernobyl, there is undoubtedly considerable public anxiety about the nuclear industry. I hope that the Government will become increasingly open about the incidents that occur on board nuclear submarines, and about the nuclear developments that take place in their establishments.

In the Clyde area public safety scheme, the Ministry of Defence estimated that maximum design accident is likely to occur once in 10,000 years of reactor operation. We were not told the technical basis for that. It almost certainly predates the comment of the safety chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency who recommended that the chance of an accident causing severe core damage must reduce by 10 times for existing plants. That brings the likelihood down to one in 1,000 operational years. We have already had 200 operational years, so the chance of an incident resulting in severe core damage seems inevitably to be increasing. Therefore there must be more openness about the incidents that occur so that there can be greater discussions among scientists.

We should like to see details of the incidents referred to in the main article in today's edition of *The Guardian*. It would be welcome if the Ministry would update the figures, which only go as far as 1979. The figures suggest that up to then 475 incidents had occurred. We should like to know how many incidents have taken place since then.

Clearly, the operation of nuclear reactors requires the highest training of the men involved. That applies equally to training for the use of the increasingly sophisticated weaponry and electronic equipment. The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), in a question answered on 24 February, elicited some important information about some worrying trends. The hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) also mentioned that highly trained people are leaving the Navy.

Why is that happening? What studies is the Department making into why men who have been trained at great public expense are now leaving the Navy? Is that trend reaching such a proportion that, although we shall have sophisticated equipment, in future there will not be sufficient men able to use it? Clearly, that goes to the heart of naval operations. There is little point in working out strategies and buying expensive hardware if we cannot retain enough skilled trained men who can use that equipment.

A number of hon. Members have mentioned the surface fleet. I seek a further assurance from the Front Bench that the Government's commitment to a surface fleet of about 50 frigates still remains. It seems that over the years the commitment has been reduced from 50 frigates to "about 50". There are doubts about when "about 50" becomes "about 45" and about whether the fleet will be reduced to the lower forties from the upper forties. It would appear that the present ordering rate is only about half the number that would be needed if we are to maintain our fleet of about 50 frigates. The response appears to be that many older vessels are to be kept in service for much longer.

That may be one solution, but the equipment on those vessels should not remain as it was. There are new and developing threats, and it is essential, if we are to keep older vessels, to ensure that they will use modern equipment and weaponry that will be able to meet the new challenges and threats posed by any potential aggressor.

Finally, both sides of the House have paid tribute to those who serve in the senior service, and on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends I too pay tribute, not least to those who currently serve in the area where they are most at risk—the Gulf. We have had a naval presence in the Gulf for some time, which was increased with the heightened tension at the end of last summer when, quite clearly the Iranians were planting mines.

It is a credit to our Navy that the quality and skills of our minehunters were internationally recognised. I certainly welcomed the action taken by the Government when they agreed to send out more support and protection to our merchant fleet. I stopped to consider that, if the Government had not done that, and if British merchant vessels had been involved in an incident and lives had been lost, those who challenged the Government's wisdom in sending out an additional minehunting force would have been first to complain that the Government were not performing their duty in providing adequate protection to our merchant fleet.

At the time, reasonable fears were expressed that by having a larger military presence in the Gulf, we could be sucked into the conflicts that were taking place there. Fortunately that fear has not materialised, but we should be ever conscious of it.

Although we have had excuses or explanations that it is almost impossible to integrate our vessels and create a United Nations naval presence in the Gulf, it is still worth making further efforts. Of course there are problems of integrating control and command, but the international threat to shipping is not necessarily directed at any particular country. Once mines have been laid, they can damage or destroy vessels from any country. The threat is to the international community, and the response could well be international. I very much hope that the Government will consider whether a United Nations-based naval presence could be created to police that very dangerous and tense area.

6.29 pm

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in this debate. Conscious as I am that many hon. Members wish to speak, I am sure that I shall be forgiven if I concentrate on one aspect of naval defence — the Trident programme.

The nuclear deterrent has kept the peace in Europe for over 40 years, and I welcome the statement yesterday from Brussels at the summit meeting of NATO reconfirming our commitment to the nuclear deterrent.

It is perhaps worth while reminding the House that it was a Labour Government and a Labour Cabinet who, in 1978, took the decision to replace the aging Polaris fleet with the Trident submarine and missile. That decision is in stark contrast to the Labour party's policy statement in

the 1983 general election, and in even starker contrast to the Labour party's 1987 manifesto pledge to cancel forthwith the Trident programme if elected.

It is perhaps worth while also reminding the House of the total contradiction which came then, and still comes, from the Opposition Front Bench. Unless there has been a change of policy, the Opposition are committed to phasing out nuclear energy on land, but are apparently committed to increasing nuclear energy at sea because the money that the Labour party reckons would be saved by cancelling the Trident programme will be committed to building more hunter-killer submarines that are nothing more and nothing less than floating nuclear power stations.

The decision having been taken in 1978 to replace Polaris with Trident, the first long lead orders were placed in 1981 and 1982. By 1983, 500 of the work force at the Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering company's yards in Barrow were working on the Trident programme. That figure has increased year on year so that over 5,500 at today's date are working on the Trident programme and over 9,000, when the programme reaches its peak in 1990-91, will be employed on the construction of Trident.

The order for HMS Vanguard, the first of fleet of the Trident submarines, was placed in April 1986, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister came to my constituency in September that year to open the new ship hall and ship lift and to lay the keel of the first Trident submarine. I understand that that project is proceeding on schedule and on time.

The order for HMS Victorious, Trident II, was placed in October 1987 and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State laid the keel in December 1987.

The launch date—by then, the traditional method of launching a submarine by a slipway will have been replaced by a ship lift which lifts and places the ship or submarine in the water—for Trident I is the spring of 1991 with a delivery date and commissioning by the Royal Navy in mid-1993.

Trident is being built by a privatised company. It is salutary to remind the Opposition that the most successful part of the naval defence contracts from the Ministry of Defence has, for many years, been the Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Co. Ltd. in Barrow. The Ministry of Defence has benefited from the company's privatisation. It is well managed, there has been an increase in productivity and it has a good work force. Perhaps no better example can be given of the new spirit and confidence than that 83 per cent. of the employees, when they had the opportunity in March 1986, bought shares in the new privatised company.

One of the interesting points that has emerged from this debate, contrasting it with earlier debates, has been the total silence of the Opposition Front Bench on the cost of Trident. I can well remember sitting in the House time after time listening to the wild figures being perpetrated by the Opposition. It is less than two years, perhaps less than one year, since we were being told by the Opposition that the cost of Trident would be £15 billion. In fact, the latest figures, given last month by the Ministry of Defence, show that there has been a reduction in the cost of Trident to just over £9 billion. That is at an exchange rate of $1·62 to the pound, which is lower than the current level, which has applied for some time. Whilst it is dangerous to make forecasts on the cost, from the experience of the past two or three years one can confidently expect the cost of the Trident programme to decrease rather than increase in real terms.

Mr. Dalyell: If Trident is so important, how does the hon. Gentleman explain that on 5 February part of Trident was lost from the deck of a ship off the Mull of Galloway, and in his own constituency next day, lo and behold, other parts fell into the sea? How is such carelessness explained?

Mr. Franks: I am sure that the management of VSEL would be more than delighted to have an explanation. That incident involved a subcontractor in Scotland. I gather that a part of Trident III was lost off the coast of Scotland, and, in a second incident on the same day, part of Trident II was lost off Walney Island, Barrow. I understand that efforts are being made to locate those lost parts. Their loss certainly had nothing to do with the VSEL management. I am also informed that they are currently being replaced, so the schedule, timing and production of Trident II has in no way been jeopardised.

Trident is extremely cost-effective. At its current cost, Trident will take 3 per cent. of our total defence budget and 6 per cent. of our equipment budget. At its peak, that will rise to 6 per cent. of our defence budget and 11 per cent. of the equipment budget. I remind the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) that on 2 February 1987 he told the House:

"spending on new equipment as a consequence of Trident will fall by 30 per cent. in real terms between 1984-85 and 1989-90 and that by 1989-90 Trident will account for about 24 per cent. or 25 per cent. of expenditure on new equipment."—[*Official Report*, 2 February 1987; Vol. 109, c. 712.]

Those were the hon. Gentleman's words 12 months ago. He has been extremely prudent to remain silent in 1988 on the cost of Trident.

Mr. O'Neill: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for preventing me from remaining silent. He is selective in his use of the English language, which I would expect from an English lawyer. I expressly referred to the new equipment budget. The hon. Gentleman has referred only to the equipment budget. Those are two different items. I do not have the figures with me, but I think if the hon. Gentleman reads the earlier part of my speech he will find that I drew a distinction between the two and it is consistent to talk in terms of new equipment as distinct from what he is talking about. We were saying then, as we do now, that Trident will account for 30 per cent. of our new equipment budget in the peak expenditure years.

Mr. Franks: I take that comment with the same pinch of salt that I took the cost of Trident being £15 billion.

I remind the House that the last submarine in the Trafalgar class, which is nuclear-powered with a conventional weapon, has been ordered and that its launch will be in 1991. I am pleased that the shipyards have recently been invited to tender for SSN 20, the successor to the Trafalgar class of hunter-killers, and I thank the Secretary of State for that.

I want to close my remarks by asking the Opposition to state clearly and unequivocally, in this debate, whether the Labour party is still committed to the cancellation of the Trident programme.

Mr. O'Neill: Yes.

Mr. Franks: I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman has said yes and I am sure that his comment will have been noted by many people.

Mr. O'Neill: The election commitment by the Labour party to abandon Trident still stands.

Mr. Franks: I am even more grateful that the hon. Gentleman took that opportunity to clarify his first monosyllabic reply. His words will come back to him over and over again during the coming months and years.

I close by reminding the House and the country that successive generations have enjoyed something that my generation did not—peace. I can well remember being a young child in the war years, and I can remember the horror of those years. Generations since have taken for granted the peace which we secured in 1945. We would be utterly foolish, and remiss in our duty to future generations, if we lightly abandoned our independent nuclear deterrent just to satisfy the political whims and philosophies of a moribund Opposition.

6.41 pm

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Unhindered use of the high seas worldwide, as well as in the north Atlantic, is vital to this country and all the nations of the Alliance. Raw materials essential to our survival come from all over the world. Worldwide tonnage of trade has tripled in the past 20 years, and 90 per cent. of it is seaborne. On the other hand, we are faced, in the Soviet Union, by a nation virtually self-sufficient in raw materials, with secure internal lines of communication. We cannot escape the fact, therefore, that in peace and war our ability to traverse the oceans with least risk is an essential element of the Alliance's ability to survive.

Yet for more than two decades Soviet maritime capability has been expanding at an unprecedented rate. We have not kept pace with that increase, and the former worldwide numerical superiority of the NATO nations' maritime forces slipped from 3:1 in 1949 to 2:1 in 1964, until today we are not sure how thin the margins really are.

There must be a logical explanation for this Soviet maritime build-up, which is far greater than that needed to defend the homeland. Whatever moderate and reasonable intentions we may read into the Soviets and their Warsaw pact allies—and in the case of detente and disarmament we unhesitatingly do that—it is important to look beyond those intentions at their capability. Capabilities provide options, while intentions can change overnight.

Soviet naval programmes reflect two priorities. The first is to expand forces ideal for sea denial. The second, as the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) reminded the House in an interesting speech, is to create greater depth in Soviet power projection capability. In the event of a NATO-Warsaw pact confrontation, the pact's major sea goal will be to deny the allies the use of the Atlantic sea lanes. That consideration is reflected in the composition of Warsaw pact naval forces. The underwater threat today, for example, is as great as it was in 1942 and 1943. I remember how dark and grim those days were. It is only now, with complete access to archives on both sides, that we have the full picture. But submarines today are much more sophisticated than they were then. So the scale of the problem is similar to that which faced the allies in those dark days.

In spite of advances in methods of detecting submarines and the effectiveness of the weapons used against them, operational research in world war 2 showed that the submarine threat could be effectively countered only by adequate numbers of escorts and aircraft operating together as an integrated ASW force. Within the NATO Alliance, our country has the prime responsibility for providing those ASW assets, and more and more people are questioning whether we any longer have adequate numbers. We have heard that already tonight from the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and from the hon. and learned Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck), a former Minister with responsibility for the Navy.

In the event of crisis, shipping will be exposed to the submarine threat unless the routes are secured by adequate escorts and ASW assets. All that shipping will be at the mercy of the mine, too, unless routes are also secured by NATO's mine counter-measures forces. It is on the doubts that have been entertained by many hon. Members—as well as by people outside the House — about the adequacy of escort and mine counter-measures vessels that I want to speak tonight.

In 1980, under a £1 billion modernisation programme, it had been intended to replace the existing obsolete mine warfare vessels with at least 50 new hulls. To date, perhaps only half of that planned number of ships has been ordered, and contracts due for the next four vessels of the SRMH type have been deferred until 1989.

I have tried to outline three maritime perspective. First, the sea is a unique international highway, a dynamic medium on which conditions change daily. Secondly, the freedom to use the sea in peace and time of crisis is vital to this country and the Alliance. Thirdly, the build-up of Soviet maritime capability far beyond its needs to defend its homeland poses a big threat to Alliance security. Alliance security in the maritime context, and in so far as it would devolve upon Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic would relate first, to the northern flank; secondly, to the reinforcement and supply of Europe; and thirdly, to support for the shallow seas campaign in the area between the United Kingdom and continental Europe. Yet the greatest shortfall in SACLANT's force levels — I remind the Minister of this; it is known to some of his colleagues — is in escorts. No amount of carriers, submarines or aircraft can prevail without the support of those escorts. Their lack degrades the ability of the other forces.

The 1987 Statement on the Defence Estimates spells out some of the Navy's tasks, but, in view of what I have said, I must ask how those commitments are to be met. The Minister claimed that 43 destroyers and frigates were available to the Fleet. He did not say that they were operational, or how they are assigned, or in what category. It is only that sort of information that will convince some of us of how far——

Mr. David Martin: The Minister said:

"43 are available for operational deployment immediately, or within a short period if required."

Mr. Duffy: That is why I asked the Minister for further information. Without it we shall not be reassured—and neither will some of his hon. Friends.

The reader of the Estimates is invited to turn to various tables showing the current strength of the Fleet and the number of ships completed orordered in the previous

financial year. I remind the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) that there are 54 destroyers on operation, or on standby, or undergoing refit, but two of them, the Aurora and Naiad, which are listed as fully operational, were paid off for disposal last April before the statement was made available to us, and perhaps even before it was published.

The destroyer Fife was disposed of seven weeks later in June. The frigates Sheffield and Coventry were not due for completion until this year. Similarly, the total of 32 submarines includes two, Orpheus and Sealion, which the House had already been told were due to be paid off last year for scrap or sale, along with the ocean survey ships Hecla and Hecate, which were also listed as operational.

From that, one can see what a confusing picture we are given by those Defence Estimates. A footnote shows that the main elements of the standby squadron which, incidentally, was revived only two years ago with a fanfare — the frigates Leander and Galatea — are also on the disposal list. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South then pondered on the kind of disposal list that his hon. Friends on the Front Bench are already drawing up for next year. My information is that it could run to as many as seven ships.

As the House has already been told once this evening, a British Maritime League survey shows that the surface fleet is quoted as being at

"its lowest ebb in the Navy's history".

The people responsible for making that judgment care just as much as we do. They are not trying to degrade the Government. They say that only 28 destroyers and frigates are ready to meet commitments worldwide. We all know — we have just been reminded — that the position will only worsen as the average age of the Fleet increases. We also know — some of us keep reminding the House, and have done so for several years — that the rate of ordering new ships is falling behind the rate at which older ships leave the Fleet.

Exercise Purple Warrior was intended to try out the services' capability for amphibous operations outside the NATO area. It reiterated a number of lessons — none of them surprising — but whether such lessons are acted upon by Ministers will give a fair indication of how much the Government's avowed intention to maintain an amphibious capability can be taken seriously, because to date the Government have yet to place a design study. I know that they have set some money on one side, but the design study itself is the second step for which we are all waiting.

Not a single aircraft order was placed last year, nor is there any mention in the Estimates of the crucial importance of the Sea Harrier and Lynx modernisation programmes. Both are key elements for the maintenance and effectiveness of the British contribution in the east Atlantic.

The Minister made questionable claims about outflow and retention. The total number of male officers in all the services — there is no individual service breakdown — leaving prematurely at their own request rose in 1985-86 to 1,223 compared with 1,094 in the previous year, while the figures for service men increased from 6,113 to 7,215, yet we all heard the Minister claim that the position on outflow and retention was stable. That simply is not true.

Despite the Government's much publicised intention of two years ago — reiterated last year — to boost the strength of the volunteers in the Royal Naval Reserve by 40 per cent., the total number of male volunteer reservists on 1 January last year was 4,200 — the same as in 1986, 200 more than in 1985, but 100 fewer than in 1981. We now know — and the Minister knows — that those reservists, unlike former reservists — I used to be one — are now a key element in the manning of the Fleet, and we need them.

In view of the time, I must come to a conclusion, but there is much more that could be said about the Estimates that would call into question some other statements that have been made this evening. I hope that if hon. Members cannot recall their earlier reading of the Estimates, they will return to them, because they deserve study. However, I think that the House has already got the impression that they are out of date, and I hope that we are not asked again to debate Estimates that are so woefully out of date.

The world gave a sigh of relief in December with the signing of the intermediate nuclear forces agreement. If it is succeeded in June by the signing of a START agreement, the world will have become a safer place in which to live.

One has only to look at events in the Gulf, however, to realise that, no matter to what extent East and West agree, to reduce their arsenals, there will still remain the need to retain some form of conventional forces simply to protect legitimate trading interests in areas of hostility. Much of the world's economy is still tied up in shipping, and it is the shipping routes which are a nation's jugular vein.

So, while the world can indeed sigh with relief at the reduction in the nuclear arsenal, there can be no let-up, certainly in the foreseeable future, in the need for a nation to maintain adequate maritime forces with which to protect its maritime interests. The failure of the Government to maintain adequate maritime forces, especially in respect of the surface fleet and in particular escort vessels, gives rise to grave concern, even on the part of many of their supporters.

6.55 pm

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy). I have, as done on several occasions. As one would expect from a former Defence Minister, he is thoroughly well-briefed and not a single hon. Member in the Chamber doubts his interest in the Royal Navy or his determination to see an improved and strengthened Royal Navy in the future — and, of course, many of my hon. Friends agree with much of what he said.

I listened closely to the speech of the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), who was also thoroughly well prepared. Listening to both those hon. Members, I thought of a line from Matthew Arnold about

"The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea."

How wide the gap is between those two hon. Members and the 100-plus members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament who have now joined the parliamentary Labour party. Those members of the Labour party decry service life and tradition whenever they get the chance and are contemptuous of NATO and our nuclear forces.

One is tempted to say something about the defence policy of the new party that has emerged in our midst. However, some of my sporting colleagues might say that that would be shooting at one-day-old chickens, so, although there is plenty of ammunition lying around, we shall wait for the official open season.

On hearing the meaty, almost fulsome, Front-Bench speeches, the main course, I thought that there might be

[Mr. Cyril D. Townsend]

a little role left for me as a sort of choccie going round with the coffee, but then I heard that the hon. Member for Clackmannan is coming back for seconds. He has had about three buns in between.

I shall try to be short and sweet. The Whips, who are always the waiters at these meals, tell me that there is increasing reluctance among new Members to take part in defence debates. Apparently, there is a feeling that it is all getting rather technical and difficult. I am not sure whether I entirely believe that. I have not noticed that my colleagues are overawed by speaking in public life when they do not know all the arguments and all the facts. I should like to think that, like me, they keep in their locker that marvellous quote by Gladstone:

"Expert knowledge is limited knowledge."

I draw to their attention also the words of their Lordships of the Admiralty at the beginning of the 19th century when they formally stated that they regarded it as "their bounden duty to discourage to the utmost of their ability the employment of steam vessels".

My great grandfather was captain of HMS Warrior, which has since been restored, so I am sure that he would have wished to enter that debate.

In the 1920s, their Lordships

"saw no use for aeroplanes".

I am glad that they had changed their views by the time of the landing at San Carlos.

I shall confine my remarks to nuclear weapons — those obliterating weapons of our age. I make first the almost trite remark that, once they have been invented, we have to learn to live with them because they cannot be disinvented. I have heard President Reagan, and a Soviet diplomat, talk about the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons. Either that is childish or they are deliberately misleading their people. I do not believe that there is the slightest chance that we shall suddenly wake up to a world without nuclear weapons. If we did so, the one country that then reinvented nuclear weapons would be able to blackmail its neighbours.

Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield once said that the grand fleet of his day was the queen of the chess board. Even though it remained in harbour, it dominated the game. I like to think that our Trident submarines will be the queen of the chess board and that they will stop that game of chess ever starting.

In an article in *The Times* of 6 February 1985, Lord Lewin wrote:

"Spreading Trident's running costs across the three services might allow the Navy to run 12 extra frigates, the Army four more armoured regiments (55 tanks per regiment) and the RAF perhaps one more base of 50 Tornados. Adding 220 tanks to NATO's 13,500 when the Warsaw Pact order of battle is 42,600 is not a dramatic swing in the military balance. These marginal increases in NATO's conventional capability might cause the Soviet planners to recalculate how many days a conventional war might last. For the same cost, Trident can convince them that war is not worth starting."

Perhaps, as a sailor, Lord Lewin was rather optimistically expecting that the Chancellor of the Exchequer would say that if we do not need that money for nuclear weapons, then we can have it for tanks and frigates. I do not think that the Treasury is quite like that. I have never accepted the argument that we need nuclear weapons to sit at some mystical table, and I hope that Ministers do not use that argument.

I believe in the principle of a NATO defence deterrent. One Western European country should have that deterrent as well as the United States of America, and that country must be part of NATO. It will not be West Germany. It is us, and the Royal Navy seems to be the ideal service to have that awesome responsibility. I am absolutely convinced that we are right to have a Trident nuclear force in the future.

I wish to turn now to the INF agreement. I suppose that that was the obvious layer of weapons to seek to remove. I remain to be convinced that it was the best layer of weapons to seek to remove. For the first time in our history, we have reduced a whole range of weapons, which is enormously important. Like Harold Macmillan, I believe that, in politics and in life, one must offer some light at the end of the tunnel. For the whole of my lifetime, we have been piling up nuclear weapons on both sides and at last have removed some of them.

In a speech in Strasbourg in May 1979, which has been much seized upon by CND, Lord Mountbatten had these wise words to say:

"To begin with we are most likely to preserve the peace if there is a military balance of strength between East and West. The real need is for both sides to replace the attempts to maintain a balance through ever-increasing and even more costly nuclear armaments by a balance based on mutual restraint. Better still, by reduction of nuclear armaments, I believe it should be possible to achieve greater security at a lower level of military confrontation."

That puts the case clearly and effectively.

Many of us have received letters from the Nuclear Weapons Freeze campaign in Britain. Superficially, Freeze is very attractive, but I am sceptical. Surely, in the history of warfare, individuals, armies and navies have sought to modernise and enhance their weapon systems, whether they consist of bows and arrows, cannons or tanks. To have a national policy of wear-out and rust-out, at a time when the Soviets are building up their own armed and nuclear forces does not seem to make much sense. It does not take into account either the fact that they are improving their ability to shoot down our missiles.

I hope that we shall continue to resist what appears to be the attractive option of holding back on modernisation. At the same time, I say bluntly to my hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench that I see no case for compensation to make up for the departure of those intermediate nuclear weapons. I think that the money could be better spent elsewhere. I do not think that a strong case has been made out, and I hope that it will be resisted.

We are at a very exciting time in the defence world. Great changes are taking place which worry the practitioners in the defence world because they do not like the uncertainty. Genuine disarmament, much talked about, is now happening before our eyes. I hope that we shall be cautious. There is no need for haste. It seems to be important that NATO should design and create some over-arching strategy of policy under which we can operate.

I leave my colleagues with this thought. Much as I respect what Mr. Gorbachev is trying to do, and much as I recognise the changes that are taking place in Soviet society, I wait to see the first rouble being knocked off that ample Soviet defence budget.

7.6 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): It is a great privilege for me to speak in the debate because the Clyde submarine

bases at Faslane and Coulport are in my constituency. Polaris and Trident do not give me great comfort, but more than 6,000 people in my constituency work on them. I am accountable to my community and am proud to speak on its behalf in this Chamber.

My remarks will reflect two or three main issues — first, accuracy, in the light of my experience in the past few weeks when dealing with the Ministry of Defence; secondly, truthfulness; and, thirdly, accountability to Parliament.

With regard to accuracy, if one lives in Dumbarton, the statistics produced by the Ministry of Defence since 1980 do not give one great comfort. I concur with the sentiments of the Select Committee on Defence which, in its report of April 1987, stated that very little indication is given as to how taxpayers' money is spent. That applies to the building of Trident in my constituency. In 1980, we were told that the cost would be just over £5 billion. The latest estimate is just under £10 billion and, when it comes into operation, I am sure that we shall see a figure of some £15 billion.

The Select Committee's report also refers to contracts. It stated that, in 1980, when Trident was commissioned, 70 per cent. of the contracts would be undertaken by United Kingdom contractors and 30 per cent. by United States contractors. However, according to the Audit Commission in July 1987, 236 contracts have been awarded in the United Kingdom at a total of $62 million. It stated that that was very disappointing in view of the magnitude of the project.

Accuracy has not been forthcoming on the issue of jobs. In 1980 we were told that 25,000 to 35,000 direct jobs were at stake with Trident. The report of the Select Committee on Defence shows that the figure has gone down to just 9,000 direct jobs and 7,000 indirect jobs. The statistics represent a considerable decline in the original optimistic assumption. Is that inadvertent or is it by design? It is not for me to make the decision on that.

Little accuracy has been provided for my constituents who live in an area where economic deprivation prevails and where unemployment is 20 per cent. and has decreased only marginally in the past few months. Indeed, the areas closest to the Clyde submarine base such as Helensburgh and Greenock have suffered increasing unemployment in the past year.

I would contend that the Ministry of Defence has little accountability to my constituents. Yes, there was the 1984 environmental impact assessment, but nothing tangible has come out of that other than to say that when Trident is finished there will be fewer jobs than we had to begin with. The MOD did provide a nine-mile private road in Glen Douglas, but that does not prevent the bulk of my constituents from suffering noise, dirt and environmental disruption. There are 1,000 journeys a day up and down my constituency and there is no recognition from the MOD of the impact that that is having in the area. There is no financial compensation. There is precious little comfort for my constituents.

The missiles are now being serviced at King's bay, Georgia. I appeared on a television programme last week with the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). He was introduced as the Scottish defence spokesman for the Government. I have a transcript of the programme before me. He said:

"What we said before Trident came into being in the early part of the last Parliament was that it would create more jobs. But, of course, we then ran into the most appalling opposition from all the local opponents, particularly politicians in Strathclyde, who declared their area and Dumbarton nuclear free zones. So, we decided, quite properly, that we could save a lot of money—and a lot of jobs were lost because of that—by having the missiles serviced in the United States."

I ask the Minister to support or reject that statement.

Perhaps I can help the Minister. I went to the Library as a result of that statement and discovered that on 9 September 1982 John Nott said that, because of the great advantages of commonality between the systems in the United Kingdom and United States, the Government would have the missiles serviced in King's bay. According to the press release from the MOD, the main reason for that was that it would produce savings of millions of pounds. They said that they would continue to communicate with the trade unions on the matter. If the MOD is to have a Scottish defence spokesman, it could tell us whether he is economical with the truth or economical with intellect. The Scottish public deserve an answer.

In the United States, the committee of appropriations assigned $3·1 million for the local community as compensation for the disturbance caused by the work around King's bay. The magnitude of the disturbance around the Clyde submarine base and my Dumbarton constituency is as worthy of compensation as the disturbance in King's bay, Georgia. If the MOD has any feelings for the local community, it should consider making a payment such as that. The approach of the United States contrasts strongly with the ad hoc attitude of the Ministry of Defence.

I shall now deal with truthfulness and the warhead convoys in my constituency. The MOD has never admitted that such convoys exist. I have been put off the road by one of those convoys going through my constituency. My young son was in the car and he asked what it was. I said, "That is nothing. You do not see anything because the Ministry of Defence does not accept that anything is passing through my constituency. It will not tell me about that." Therefore, we saw a non-existent convoy. That story created great amusement among my son's school friends.

In the week of the general election the local papers in my constituency were saying that the return of a Labour Government would mean the loss of 4,000 jobs at the Clyde submarine base. I tabled a written question on 8 December and the Minister said that there would have to be a loss of jobs but that the Government were looking at alternative employment. I was intrigued by that answer, and on 15 January I tabled three more written questions asking how many jobs would be lost each year, what type of alternative employment were being considered by the MOD, and how many jobs could be generated by alternative forms of employment. I am sad to say that I did not receive an answer other than that of 8 December. The Government have recognised that there will be job losses, and it is incumbent on them to tell my community what is in store for it.

I should also like to deal with the question of truthfulness surrounding the incident on HMS Resolution on 26 January. The MOD said that it was an "electrical malfunction". As the Minister knows, I contacted him on the matter and I thank him for his answer. I said at the time that I did not necessarily accept what was said in the newspapers. I still hold that view. I said that I wanted candid and truthful answers. An exclusive report on page

[Mr. John McFall]

1 of *The Guardian* today provides a little hope on that front. We are now told that 700 such incidents occurred in the first 16 years of operation.

In a spirit of co-operation and moderation, I ask the Minister to explain what was meant by "electrical malfunction." Did it mean that a fuse had to be replaced? Was it on the microwave, the submarine or somewhere else? The Minister's answer was bland and he was doing a disservice to the MOD and to my constituents.

In the light of the report in *The Guardian*, I feel that we may never really know what happened on 26 January on the Clyde submarine base. One thing is sure: something happened. The incident was minor to the MOD, but it was major to the people living in the area and to those who have an interest in defence.

One would hope that one would be reassured by looking at the material in the Clyde public safety scheme. However, I have before me the announcement that would be broadcast after an incident. It says:

"An accident has occurred . . . which has resulted in the release of a small quantity of radioactive products."

Irrespective of the magnitude of the incident, that phrase is to be used. I do not consider that to be appropriate for the whole range of accidents that could occur.

Over and above the incident of 26 January and the questions that should follow, there are other issues. There is the need for co-operation, the need for honesty and the need for information. As a constituency Member of Parliament, I shall be giving those needs high priority. I give the MOD notice of that and it had better be aware of it.

7.19 pm

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): It can only be a matter for regret that the hon. Member who has the honour to represent the constituency of Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) should be so vehemently opposed to the activities that are taking place in his constituency and the enterprise of some 6,000 of his constituents.

The debate today on the Royal Navy takes place against the backdrop of a relentless Soviet build-up at sea and in other spheres of military activity. As the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) pointed out, the build-up at sea by the Soviet Union is far beyond any requirement for self-defence. It can only be disturbing that expert analysts agree that so far—and I must emphasise the words "so far"—there is no evidence of a slackening in the furious pace of build-up of the Soviet war machine, on land, in the air and at sea. They continue to outbuild the entire inventory of Britain's armed forces every four months.

Mr. Cohen: On just that point, may I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to *Jane's Defence Weekly*, which, in its edition published today, says that there has been a reduction in the Soviet efforts at sea, which the hon. Gentleman has described as a build-up. Their programme has slowed down substantially, especially in relation to nuclear-powered craft.

Mr. Churchill: Evidence is not available at present to show that what the hon. Gentleman says is correct, although I very much hope that such evidence will be available in the coming months.

Mr. Denzil Davies: In view of the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the relentless build-up of Soviet naval forces, does he agree that it would be a good thing if naval forces on both sides were included in the talks on conventional arms stability? It would obviously be to our advantage to achieve a reduction in that build-up.

Mr. Churchill: It is important that our disarmament should be on a step-by-step basis. It was right for us to start with INF and to continue with the START agreement, which I hope will be signed later this year. In terms of the build-up in Europe, it is essential to bring Soviet forces on land, both conventional forces and those with short-range nuclear and chemical capability, into line with those of NATO. Ultimately, I have no doubt that it would be desirable if we could agree on some form of balance at sea, but that is not and cannot be the highest priority.

I warmly welcome the improvements in East-West relations, especially between Britain and the Soviet Union, which have taken place since my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and Secretary-General Gorbachev have come to power. There are those who say that Mr. Gorbachev's approach is merely a ploy to persuade the West to lower its guard. I happen to disagree. I believe that Mr. Gorbachev, although this is surmise on my part, is sincere in his wish for better relations between East and West and in his desire to see expenditure on armaments reduced in the Soviet Union in favour of civil programmes.

But the decisions affecting military security in our nation, and which our Government and the House are required to take, can be based only on perceived capabilities, as has been said by hon. Members on both sides, rather than some supposed intentions of a potential adversary. It certainly cannot be on the basis that today the Secretary-General of the Soviet Union is smiling, and therefore we can afford to stand down significant elements of our improvements for the Royal Navy or any other part of Britain's armed forces.

Who knows whether Mr. Gorbachev will be here in five years' time and what pressures there might be within the Soviet empire as a result of the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan? What message will that send to the occupied nations of eastern Europe? There is every danger that one could be moving into an era where Mr. Gorbachev's glasnost is in danger of undermining everything that he hopes to achieve and, indeed, his own position, although I certainly wish him well in his endeavour, which is important for mankind as a whole. But who can tell whether circumstances might push him aside and bring back a cold war, where tanks again roll into Budapest, Prague or possibly into Warsaw? In those circumstances, we would rue the day that we had lowered our guard, whether in Britain or among our NATO allies.

Under this Government, the power of the Royal Navy beneath the sea has been growing apace. We have 15 nuclear-powered fleet and hunter-killer submarines, 12 of which are operational at present. That represents a potent and important capability. The construction of the Vanguard submarines for the Trident missile and submarine programme is going ahead to plan, with the second boat under construction already.

When the Minister winds up, perhaps he will tell us whether there is any truth in recent press reports that all is not well with the warhead programme that is under way at the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at

Aldermaston. There have been suggestions that the programme has slipped by a year, or perhaps two years. That could turn in turn require refitting of one of the Polaris boats beyond the time scale that had been previously planned. Any reassurance that the Minister can give that that is not the case will be most welcome.

It is true that the Trident submarine will carry significantly more warheads than the Polaris boats do at present; that is undoubtedly necessary, because the relative increase as between Polaris and Trident is no greater than the increase taking place over the lifetime of the Polaris boats in the Soviet nuclear missile fleet at sea. But if good progress is being made by the submarine forces of the Royal Navy, the same is not the case for the destroyer/frigate force.

The surface fleet of the Soviet navy has been growing relentlessly in strength and capability over the past 20 years. Meanwhile, the surface fleet of the Royal Navy has been significantly reduced under successive Governments, to the point where today we have only 49 frigates or destroyers available with the Fleet, and three of those already exceed their supposed lifetime of 25 years. This is no wonder, when we have an ordering rate that has slumped in the past five years to little more than one ship a year.

One must acknowledge that inevitably a hiatus will occur when moving forward to a new generation of vessels such as the type 23, but if the ordering rate has been only one per year, instead of the three per year which is the rule of thumb for the Ministry of Defence to maintain a 50-destroyer frigate navy, the rate of ordering must go above three per year if we are to get back to the Government's target of a 50 escort fleet.

I agree with the Government's commitment to maintaining 50 vessels. The difference of those extra 10 ships will give the Royal Navy the flexibility to deploy around the world. Without those 10 additional frigates or destroyers, the Royal Navy would become almost entirely a home-based fleet chasing submarines in the north Atlantic and it would have to jettison on a major scale its worldwide commitments out of the NATO area. We would no longer be able to maintain a ship, or two ships, in the Falklands or a guard ship in the Caribbean, and we would certainly not be able to undertake the very frigate-intensive Armilla patrol, which makes an important contribution to the protection not only of our vessels but of all vessels in the Persian Gulf going about their lawful occasion.

That is the sort of operation in which the Royal Navy should be involved, but if we were to allow the number of escorts available to the Royal Navy to slip from about 50 to about 40, those capabilities and commitments would have to go. That would be a devastating blow to the Royal Navy, to our country's capability and to our standing in the world.

I have no doubt that the Government fully intend to honour their commitment of a 50 destroyer/frigate fleet, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister in winding up the debate will spell out clearly how that will be achieved, because between now and 1992 some 11 of the Rothesay and Leander class frigates will have reached retirement age, and I understand that there will not be 11 new vessels joining the Fleet between now and 1992. I hope he will tell us what the Government foresee the frigate/destroyer force slipping to before they start to build up with new orders and also tell us what the new rule of thumb is to be if it is not that three frigates or destroyers a year must be ordered to maintain about 50 in the destroyer/frigate fleet.

The debate is important, and the men and women of the Royal Navy look to us to maintain their capabilities. Much has been said about the threat, but one element of it has been largely ignored — the threat from the Treasury. That threat is pressing and immediate, and I strongly urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his colleagues resolutely to resist it.

7.34 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): The hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) has continued his great family tradition of being unfair about the Labour party. Nevertheless, it is a pleasure to follow him.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Not too far.

Mr. Brown: Of course, and not along the same lines.

I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about the size of our surface fleet, but I hope he will forgive me if I do not follow him in the remarks he made about strategy or the size of the Soviet fleet. I would like to make a few points, as old hands in these debates would expect, about the size of our fleet and procurement.

The debate is dominated not by the decisions that the Government make on defence expenditure but by their decisions on public expenditure. It is clear from the response of the Ministry of Defence to the Treasury's outline of public expenditure that it will not be possible for the Ministry of Defence to meet its current commitments from its current allocation. The Ministry of Defence has already stated that there may have to be some rescheduling of equipment purchases. Those of us who follow defence matters, with or without constituency interests, know what that means for the Royal Navy.

When I was elected in 1983, the Government used to speak of their commitment to 50 surface vessels. That commitment has altered to about 50 surface vessels, so it has shifted slightly. It is difficult to get accurate figures, but some of us think that when the Government compile the figures they include HMS Victory, to make matters seem a little better than they are.

Different figures float around. It has been said that we have a surface fleet of 43 and a surface fleet of 36, with or without HMS Victory. My hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) suggested that the operational fleet was fewer than 30 vessels — he said 28. If one excludes other commitments, that would mean that fewer than 20 surface vessels — possibly 17 — could be committed directly to NATO. The Government will say that the number is larger, but, if it is larger, it is also very much older.

The hon. Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) said that Opposition Members never miss a chance to disparage service men. I very much resent that. It is not a fair way to address Opposition Members, particularly those who regularly take part in defence debates.

Mr. Frank Cook: Some of us served in the forces.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) says that some hon. Members served in the forces, but I am referring to hon. Members of my generation as well.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): My hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) said that the 100 Opposition Members who are members of CND wasted no opportunity to disparage the services.

Mr. Brown: I am not a member of CND, but I do not accept that, because hon. Members are members of CND, they would automatically disparage the armed services. That contention is wholly untrue and unworthy of the Government Front Bench. It is perfectly possible to respect the role of conventional service people and believe in unilateral nuclear disarmament. I am surprised that Government Front Benchers, for reasons of guile, or for whatever reason, should pretend that they cannot grasp that point.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Is it not a fact that in the CND nationally there are many people who served this country in the last world war and have served in subsequent incidents since, giving great service to their country, and who believe that nuclear defence is not defence but pretence? That is what they are opposed to, but they are still very patriotic and wish to see Britain maintain its independence.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I am surprised that the Government feel that they cannot acknowledge that point. Indeed, Government supporters ought to be ashamed of themselves for not acknowledging that important point.

The main theme of my speech is the size of the surface fleet. It is traditional that, in opening a debate such as this, the Minister comes to the Dispatch Box and makes whatever procurement pledges he can. It is very disappointing to those of us who want to see our service men not only properly equipped but equipped with the most modern weapons that our country can provide to find that the Minister has no new procurement statement to make to the House today.

What is the position with regard to the four frigates that many of us feel are needed? Is the Minister going to be able, in his winding-up speech, to say anything at all about frigate procurement? I suspect from what has happened so far that he will be making no definite statement. I hope that he will, but I suspect that he will not, although I certainly hope that he will address the point.

The reason that he will not do so, of course, is that this debate is dominated by the public expenditure debate, and the poor old Royal Navy has been hammered by other commitments, in particular the continuing commitment to the Trident programme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) spoke of the feeling on Tyneside for the Royal Navy and the enormous enthusiasm in our shipbuilding communities — his in Wallsend and mine in Walker, Walkergate, St. Anthony's and St. Lawrence's in east Newcastle — for the services and for the return of our aircraft carriers to the River Tyne. Crowds flocked to the banks of the River Tyne to see those ships come in. The suggestion that our solid Labour-supporting communities would disparage the services or disparage the vessels that they spent their working lives building is a peculiar and unworthy one to come from the Government Front Bench.

Those communities are under assault in just the same way as mining communities are under assault, and that assault comes from the Government, who have run down the procurement programme. For the Government to wave the Union Jack and claim that the Conservative party is the patriotic party, and then to do what they have done to the Royal Navy sticks in many people's throats, particularly those who represent the communities that have such a stake in and commitment to the Royal Navy and the maritime service in general.

Perhaps the Minister, when replying, could also refer to the Government's position on the air support ship. That is something to which the Government have said that they are committed in principle, but there has been no statement on progress and the Minister did not refer to the matter at all in his opening speech, although he had been urged to do so by Government supporters. He is now being urged to do so by me. I do not know if that is a comfort to him or a restraint, but I hope that it is not a restraint.

It would be unusual to have a debate on the Royal Navy or on shipbuilding without reference to the AOR programme, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend quite rightly referred. I seek from the Minister an assurance — I think it is right that the whole House should seek this, because it has been a very controversial matter — that the AOR 1 programme is within its cost target and is on time.

Could the Minister also comment on progress on the Trident submarine programme, particularly with reference to the current investigations at VSEL? There is a fear, as the Minister must know, among other warship yards that the heavy subsidy levels which are currently enjoyed by VSEL, because of the Trident programme, will give it an unfair edge when tendering takes place for what little there is going to be in the Government's procurement programme. Some explanation of what is happening in that area would be very welcome. Obviously, the main cause for concern is the type 23 programme — if there are to be any more type 23 frigates.

The privatisation of the warship yards, according to the Government, would lead to competition and a lowering of prices. The Government's argument in that area has been undermined by two things. One is the substantial reduction in shipbuilding capacity in this country, which has meant that there is only one supplier of submarines and probably now only one supplier of minehunters. If we are not very careful, the Government will find that they have moved into a position in which there is a monopoly supplier of frigates as well. That would most certainly be to the long-term detriment of this country. The Government claim that they support competition, but they have reserved special work for the royal dockyards, work that the private warship yards would certainly like to tender for as well, and I am surprised that the Government do not allow them to do so.

The Government — this is something that dominates this debate — have recognised the special role of Harland and Wolff shipbuilders. It is the only remaining mixed yard; other yards are either merchant or warship. The Government have not yet brought their merchant subsidies at Harland and Wolff into line with the European VI directive on shipbuilding and have given Harland and Wolff military work which many of us feel should have been won in open competition by British yards rather than go to a Government-owned yard which is kept buoyant by state subsidies.

Mr. Ted Garrett: This is a very important point, which gets up the nostrils of a lot of people on the mainland of

the United Kingdom. But the subsidy to Harland and Wolff is not just by the present Government; it has gone on for a decade or more. My hon. Friend will agree that the Government are committed to commercial viability, but they will not institute that commercial viability in Northern Ireland, to the detriment of regions such as the north-east. That is what it is all about.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point. Hon. Members who represent shipbuilding constituencies in the rest of the United Kingdom are saying that the regime that applies to them should be the same as the regime that applies to Harland and Wolff. They are not seeking any special favours from the Government—God knows, they would not get them if they did—but they are saying that Belfast should not get such favours either. If they are forced to be competitive, then that should apply to the people with whom they have to compete. I should have thought that Conservative Members would not find that an unreasonable contention. Either there is open competition or there is not. There cannot be open competition for yards in the private sector and state subsidy for yards with which they have to compete.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) referred to the role of the merchant marine and British seamen. Whatever the military position of the merchant marine 10 years ago, it has now been undermined almost to the point where it has been lost sight of altogether. Many of the ships that still fly under our flag have foreign crews. It is very difficult to hold the line at the officer level. That undermines the position of our fleet in times of conflict, and it is something that the Government have been quite willing to see happen. There have been no effective measures from the Government since 1979 to reverse that trend, and I feel that it is probably now beyond reversal unless some very stark action is undertaken, and I do not see that coming.

My hon. Friend the Member for Attercliffe referred to the fact that 90 per cent. of world trade is carried by sea. The pity of it is that it is not carried in British ships any more, and it is looking increasingly unlikely that those vessels are going to be adequately protected by British ships either.

7.50 pm

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): I never mind listening to Opposition speeches which call for the strengthening of the Royal Navy, and I am delighted to hear the call from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) for more ships to be built. I should like to think that he is motivated by an attempt to ensure that we have proper defences and not solely by the employment that such construction would no doubt bring to his constituency. But when he refers to recruitment, I remember the time when the Labour Government were in power, and when, in the Army, and the Royal Air Force as well as in the Royal Navy, there was a severe recruitment problem and pay was an enormous issue. It was in the 1979 election that the defence vote returned a Conservative Government because we were pledged to do something about pay and about the recruitment problems that stemmed from it. I must remind the hon. Member of that.

I join my hon. Friend the Minister in recording our thanks to and admiration for all the men and women who serve in the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines. They always display immense efficiency and reliability, and no other navy can surpass their expertise.

One of the great ships in the Royal Navy is the royal yacht, which epitomises the highest achievable standards of smartness and seamanship. Undoubtedly a decision will have to be made sooner or later—because she is a very old ship—about her replacement. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will grapple with this problem and that he will decide to lay down a new royal yacht when the time is right. Not only does the royal yacht perform a function of service for the Queen and the members of the royal family; it is a showcase for Britain in all parts of the world and it does a remarkable job in all aspects of commerce and showing the flag.

I welcome the timing of this debate, because we have a preoccupation with the forces on the central front. It is very easy for defence debates to concentrate on the problems of battlefield nuclear weapons in Germany and that part of Europe, and we can easily forget that one of the greatest threats to our security comes from the Russian forces stationed on the Kola peninsula, for instance. They have some 11 bases in the area of Murmansk to supply their navy, and it is crucial that we never lose sight of that threat, which could cause us and the whole of NATO an immense problem if, heaven forbid, a conventional war broke out in Europe and we were unable, because of those forces, to keep the supply routes open.

The forces in the Kola peninsula are estimated to be 126 submarines, 73 principal ships, 47 minor surface ships and 64 mine counter-measure ships. These figures are not necessarily accurate because they can only be estimated, but they give a picture of the size of the forces lurking in that part of Europe.

The role of the Royal Navy and the NATO naval forces is to ensure that we keep the seas open so that we can reinforce Europe with both men, tanks and equipment. The transport of reinforcements is principally done with the use of HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. I welcome the addition to our transportation capability with the conversion and commissioning of HMS Argus. I do not know who dreamed up the name "Argus", but it sounds rather like a supermarket chain to me. In naming our ships, I hope that we can link them to towns. I do not know whether there is a town called Argus, but I would be happy if the name "Harrogate" was chosen because we have connections with naval ships; it helps with recruiting and publicity, and I am pleased that we have an arrangement with HMS Cleopatra.

Argus will be used in a mixed role capability, which is a very important step. It will have aviation training facilities and carry Sea King and Lynx helicopters. By far the most important role, however, will be in the transportation of marines and their heavy equipment, if it were necessary to get those materials into Europe. It is a model of a vessel which could be taken up and expanded because it is a conversion from a container ship, its cost has been low and it has also been put into service in a reasonable time. There is, therefore, this very important role of the quick conversion to military use of merchant ships which was mentioned earlier in the debate.

We have this marvellous word STUFT—ships taken up from trade—but we are stuck with it. What it really means is that we must look closely at our ferries to ensure that their construction is such that it will give greater protection to the transportation not only of personnel in

[Mr. Robert Banks]

the civilian role but especially during times of hostilities when they would need watertight compartments to enable them to withstand attack. At the moment they are vulnerable. They have been used in exercises. I suspect that we have arrived at the point when NATO subsidies should be given to the private sector to ensure that ferries can be converted for military use of the kind that will be sustainable in attack.

The most important thing that has come out of the debate is the question of the number of ships in the Royal Navy. I am not really in the numbers game, because what matters is not the number that we have but our capability, the way in which we use technology, the way in which we are more advanced with our missile systems. Those are the elements which cause a potential enemy to take care. What is most important is that we co-operate within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to develop on a much more cohesive basis new weapons and techniques. That is a grey area: how we can get NATO actually to put these things together so that we can establish the funds, get the research under way and do the development. Of course, there are examples of our succeeding in doing that, but it has been a long, tortuous business and NATO must find a way to do it better.

One issue that I would like to address today is that of mines. I happen to think that mines are every bit as important as any other weapon that we deploy. Their possession alone could provide us with the capability to bottle up Soviet ships in harbour. That in itself means that the Soviet navy would have to enlarge its fleet of mine counter-measure vessels. The Russians themselves have probably the largest stockpile of mines in the world.

It is curious that the Russian character has always looked towards mining as being one of the great tools of the business of defence or hostilities. In 1906, the Imperial Russian navy built a mine-laying submarine which I think was the very first submarine of that sort in use. Germany and Britain together in the last war laid half a million mines, and the United States laid 130,000 mines to starve Japan of her supplies. The assessment of the present situation reveals that there is a deficiency both in NATO's minesweeping capability to deal with the mines that the Soviet Union could so easily lay and in our own capability to lay mines.

There are three types of mine: the ground mine, which is laid on the seabed; the buoyant mine, tethered to the seabed; and now the homing mine, which is an interesting new development. It can be dropped from ship or aircraft and will, to a pre-determined signal, home in on a target.

These are areas where technology, microprocessors and new material can be deployed to ensure that we produce one of the most sophisticated mines which can be found. Here I come back to what I said earlier about the need to fund proper research and development to harness the technology so that we are in a stronger position to bottle up Soviet shipping and to ensure that we have the edge on them in laying mines. The laying of mines is relatively simple. It can be done by aircraft or by ship. Here again merchant ships can be brought into service and used for that purpose.

The mine-hunting method of locating mines and destroying them has been advanced to a highly skilled technique. The number of counter-measure vessels in the 1960s totalled some 800 within NATO. We are now down to 250. That is not necessarily bad because we have perfected the ability to locate and dispose of mines, but it is important that we have sufficient vessels to undertake the task. Of course helicopters are an alternative, but they can be expensive. We are very fortunate that the United States has developed a helicopter which represents a quantum leap forward in quality, but the numbers are small.

Above all, at the end of the day we must be able to secure a free and safe passage for Royal Navy ships and the ships they escort which will carry vital reinforcements. Mining warfare has escalated in importance. Originally it was an impoverished gambler's long shot; now it is of prime technical and offensive importance. This is a key deficiency area, but we must never forget that the men who man the ships are the people who matter most. I pay the warmest possible tribute to the work and the role of the reserves who historically have always taken on this singularly dangerous task.

8.1 pm

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): I shall restrict my remarks because other hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. However, I want to associate myself with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) about the deeply offensive, insulting and libellous equation which has been made consistently by Government Members throughout the debate — that anyone who challenges the nuclear preoccupation of the Government's defence policy is, in the words of the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), an appeaser, or, in the words of the hon. Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend), disparaging the armed forces and the personnnel of the armed forces in particular. That equation is a great insult to the many millions of Labour voters who fought in the last world war and in wars since but who support a political party which questions the preoccupations of the Government's defence policy; we make no apology for that.

It was bad enough that libels should be uttered by Government Back Benchers, but when from the Front Bench the Defence Minister associated himself with the remarks it was a disgrace. Although he is not in the Chamber at the moment, I hope that on reflection before the end of the debate he will have the courage and the grace to withdraw his remarks and to apologise for them.

I wanted to speak in the debate for two main reasons. First, only a few hours ago I returned from a visit with a parliamentary delegation, led by the former Foreign Secretary Lord Pym, to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Having just returned from the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, where part of the Armilla patrol is docked, I want to make some observations about the role which the Royal Navy is playing in the Arabian Gulf.

I want to associate myself with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), our Front Bench spokesman, who paid tribute to the skill, courage and dedication of the Royal Navy in general. I pay particular tribute to the Armilla patrol, which is operating in dangerous waters where it is carrying out sophisticated work for this country and for the international community in the face of wicked aggression by the belligerents in the Iran-Iraq war. In particular, the Iranians are keeping our service men and ships very much on their toes. As the Minister said earlier, not a single ship which has been escorted in the Arabian Gulf by the

Armilla patrol has been hit or damaged in any way. That is a tribute to the Royal Navy and to the service men who are operating there.

The Government should note that the sea war in the Iran-Iraq conflict has faded from the headlines and that the war in the cities, the use of ground-to-ground missiles and the land activities of the two belligerents are very much headline news. However, it is important that no one begins to downgrade the real threat to world peace which exists on the waterways of the Arabian Gulf.

The delegation of which I was a member met many of the most senior statesmen of the Saudi royal family and other Ministers in the last few days. I want to record that they were extremely appreciative of the presence of the Royal Navy in the Gulf and of the Government for sending them there. I pay tribute, too, to the Government.

The Saudi statesmen are also anxious about the extent to which the Armilla patrol has to restrict its role in the area. Many times during our discussions Lord Pym was forced to say, although he was not speaking for the Government or seeking to do so, that we could not do much more because of the size of the Armilla patrol and the range of its work in the Gulf. He pointed out that we do not have the Navy which we used to have and that we are not the power which we used to be. Therefore, he felt that it was unrealistic of the Saudi Government or our other friends and allies in the Gulf to expect more from us.

That theme has come through in the debate. It is obvious that we are no longer the power that we used to be, although I am not crying in my soup about that. However, there is an important role which we could and should be playing in places like the Gulf in defence of our own interests and in association with important friends and allies of the United Kingdom which we cannot do to the extent which is required because of the current size of our surface fleet and because of the public expenditure problems which we have in maintaining a Navy of the size which hon. Members on both sides of the House would like.

I hope that the Government are still aware of the dangers on the waterways of the Gulf and have taken note of the importance of the Armilla patrol to our friends and allies in the area.

In defence debates here and elsewhere we used to hear about the missile gap. There has certainly been a credibility gap in this debate. I am a new Member and until very recently I was not particularly knowledgeable about, and I did not study particularly closely the nuts and bolts of the Royal Navy. I was astonished to discover that, while we talk about verification in defence matters, we do not seem even to be able to verify the size of our own Navy. The figures that have been kicked around show a surprising margin of error.

I came into the Chamber believing that we had a 49-ship surface fleet and that there was some argument about how many of those ships were operational, or could be made operational at short notice. I did not realise the extent of that argument. We have heard from my hon. Friends that as few as 28 ships are available to us at short notice. Other figures given have been 28, 36 and 43. We do not even seem to know how many of those 49 ships we can deploy at any one time. That alarms me. How are we supposed to verify the so-called massive build-up in Soviet naval strength, about which we have heard so much during the debate, if we cannot even get our figures straight when it comes to the number of surface ships in our own Navy?

I represent the area that contains Yarrow shipbuilders, which has plied its trade for the past 120 years making wonderful ships of steel. It is the lead yard in the production of type 23 frigates. I was not encouraged by the Minister's opening remarks to think that we are doing what is necessary to keep our Navy up to strength. I would hope to be encouraged more by his closing speech, but I have been told that that is probably a vain hope and that nothing of substance will be said in the Minister's reply.

The Government are supposed to be committed to four type 23 frigates. In the Minister's opening speech, we heard that the Government are still considering issues relevant to whether the orders will go ahead. Speaking as the hon. Member whose constituency contains the lead yard, I stress that it will be a great crime and a tragedy, both for the Royal Navy and those of us with shipbuilding constituencies, if the orders for those four type 23 frigates are not placed soon. It goes without saying that I hope that the Yarrow yard, which has a proven record of expertise in producing these outstanding ships, will be considered favourably.

I have been puzzled and disappointed by the response this evening and in the correspondence that I have seen through trade union circles to the NFR90. I am not a technical expert, but I cannot understand the Government's reluctance to throw their weight into a joint European project to build the kind of ships that will be required at the turn of the century. It seems extremely short-sighted of them not to understand that such ships will be required and that European co-operation is the best, most economic and most defence-efficient way of proceeding. I hope that we shall hear more in the Minister's reply of the reasons behind the Government's thinking on the NFR project.

I am not a member of CND and I am not a pacifist. I think that it is deeply unworthy of the Government to question the patriotism of Opposition Members. Those remarks should be withdrawn. My hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan and others have made it clear that Labour is strongly committed to a strong defence policy for this country. We are ready to defend this country and we shall support the Government in so far as they are prepared to devote resources to defending this country. We have our questions—in a democracy, we are bound to—but we too pay tribute to the men and women of the Royal Navy and associate ourselves with the salute that the House of Commons traditionally gives to the Royal Navy on Navy day.

8.10 pm

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): First, I shall contribute some thoughts about the present strength of the Royal Navy and, secondly, I shall raise concerns which, while having a national interest, particularly apply to my constituents in Portsmouth.

A debate about the strength of the Royal Navy cannot be divorced from realistic considerations of its role, principally as part of the NATO Alliance concentrating in the English channel and the eastern Atlantic but—tantalisingly for those whose duty it is constantly to assess matters and reach decisions — needing to keep a capability to operate throughout the world in defence of British interests when required. The Armilla patrol in the Gulf, which has been mentioned many times, is the best

[Mr. David Martin]

example of that. I add my tribute to those serving in that patrol. They contribute so much to defending the interests not only of this country but of our allies.

The problem of how to be sufficiently prepared for war while keeping the peace and preserving freedom is an equation whose solution has excited naval theorists and practitioners in endless and seamless succession for centuries, and it continues to do so. There is a symbolism in these matters. Emphasis is placed on parts of our naval strength. Once emphasis was placed on the number of Dreadnoughts, whereas at present the totem pole has "about 50 frigates and destroyers" carved on it. Newspaper correspondents and columnists, the British Maritime League and others — some hon. Members among them — insist that the Government are not keeping to that provision and that, even if that figure is approached, too much reliance is placed on extended life and refits and not enough new is being added or ordered.

I do not want to go into the statistics. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) and the Minister did so, as did many other hon. Members. There is nothing new about relying on a mix of refits and new. The Navy that defeated the Spanish armada 400 years ago did that. Queen Elizabeth I was constantly accused of neglecting the Navy that her father had built up and of being far too mean to pay for the ships. I say that she was constantly accused. In Tudor times critics had to be somewhat restrained and had to use a uncrackable code. Sir John Hawkins, the treasurer of the Navy Board, rebuilt as many old ships under what was called "ordinary expenditure", meaning maintenance and rebuilding, as he built new ships under "extraordinary" expenditure. It is interesting that expenditure for new building was called "extraordinary".

Mr. Frank Cook: Somewhat different technology.

Mr. Martin: There is always somewhat different technology. The hon. Gentleman is right. The secret is to keep up with the technology of the day. There has always had to be a sensible balance, and so it is to this day.

I strongly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) that it is most important to ensure that our ships are equipped with the most modern and up-to-date navigational devices and armaments, both defensive and potentially hostile. Just last month such an example was accepted by the Navy at Portsmouth, which was referred to by the Minister—the latest batch 3 type 22 frigate, HMS Cornwall.

HMS Cornwall is packed with the latest high-technology equipment, incorporating lessons learnt in the Falklands, and her weapons system gives her the most up-to-date self-defence capability in the world. She will lead the new 8th frigate squadron. There are more such ships to come, and I am sure that we would all say, "Thank goodness for that."

I am pleased to see that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is in his place because earlier he mentioned Captain Wreford-Brown, the captain of HMS Cornwall. I deplore the fact that the hon. Gentleman sought to bring the captain's personal reputation into this debate. He did his duty properly when he was called upon to do so, and I wish him every success in his future in the Royal Navy. I am sure that that sentiment is echoed by the vast majority of hon. Members.

Mr. Dalyell: I have never said differently.

Mr. Martin: I understand that we cannot consider our total naval strength — above and below the surface, conventional and nuclear — in isolation from our allies in NATO. We should not be worried about admitting that, because political isolation has been and remains the main foe to our security. Without allied forces, the Royal Navy is not and never has been strong enough to gain lasting victory in a major conflict against a determined enemy. If that causes eyebrows to be raised, one need only consider that Spain was not subdued until long after 1588. Our isolated supremacy did not defeat Napoleon any more than it overcame Hitler. Allies in coalition were needed to bring about final and complete victory in those wars.

It is correct to point out the massive strength of the Russian and Warsaw pact navies. One may consider the hundreds of submarines, their fleet of carriers, the harbours teeming with their frigates and destroyers and their presence in all the world's seas and say that, in comparison, the British navy is not big enough within the navies of NATO. However, there is no way in which the public would back the measureless defence spending required to match Warsaw pact forces. The forces of NATO must at all times be weighed in the balance when judging the level and effectiveness of our armed forces, including the Royal Navy. We must not underestimate the threat, but we must also count our assets.

My judgment is that, if we continue the mix of defence policies that have proved so successful since 1945 and if, above all, we continue to demonstrate, beyond doubt, a united political will to stand up for ourselves and our allies, our prospects will be as fine as ever. Indeed, if we do not shrink from modernising—I am sorry, perhaps I should use the word "updating" so as not to offend the Germans or anyone else — when necessary, both conventional and nuclear forces, our prospects will be fine. That case was eloquently put by my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks). If such a course is followed, it will enable my young children to grow up experiencing peace, the priceless gift given to my generation from those lessons written in the blood of two world wars.

I wish to raise three matters of considerable importance not only to Portsmouth people, but to the nation. The first concerns the future arrangements for HMS Victory — Nelson's flagship — in Portsmouth dockyard. Many people do not realise that she is still in commission and is still a flagship—that of the Commander-in-Chief Naval Home Command. I ask that she should remain in commission. Indeed, if she were decommissioned perhaps there would be one less surface ship in the total given by my hon. Friend the Minister. I accept that, by all means, she should earn her keep more efficiently, but I ask that she should remain in commission and continue to be operated by the Royal Navy both as a naval shrine and as a tourist attraction, attracting about 400,000 visitors a year. The importance of tradition, ceremony and pageantry, particularly in the case of Portsmouth and the Royal Navy, must never be underestimated.

Sir Antony Buck: Has my hon. Friend noted the happy juxtaposition between the Victory and the modern "Know your Navy" exhibition that is close to the McCarthy museum? Therefore, there is a marvellous continuity between the ancient history of the Victory and the superb "Know your Navy" exhibition nearby.

Mr. Martin: I am obliged to my hon. and learned Friend for that intervention.

The importance of tradition, ceremony and pageantry also applies to the future of R company of the Royal Marines. That company is usually known as the display team that is renowned for free-fall parachuting. It is a 50-strong team. It promotes a fine image of the Royal Marines around the country and in particular it is a regular attraction at the Eastney tattoo. It is worth every penny, and I seek an early assurance that that company will continue to operate.

My final concern relates to the fleet maintenance and repair organisation in the Portsmouth dockyard — I believe that we should call it a naval base. Fortunately, the work load is well up and I have had a recent assurance from the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement that the Ministry is planning to carry out the refit of HMS Exeter at Portsmouth. That is excellent news and I hope that that is confirmed as soon as possible.

However, nationwide there is over-capacity in the ship refitting industry. It is correct that there is keen pricing competition because budgetary controls are strict on such work—and that is as it should be. Warship design and technology continually improve, thereby enabling ships to have a longer operational capability with fewer periods of maintenance and repair. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement has kindly forewarned me of a visit to Portsmouth dockyard this month, and I hope to meet him then and to raise these matters with city leaders.

My hon. Friend is well aware that any further rundown of the Portsmouth facilities would be a grievous blow, especially if it was seen to be as a result of propping up Devonport. I am not expecting that to happen and I do not believe that Portsmouth deserves that.

I ask all the Ministers to look positively at what is on offer at Portsmouth. It is providing a first-class and necessary service for a modern Royal Navy. Indeed, Portsmouth is, borrowing a little from Gilbert and Sullivan, "the very model of a modern" Royal Navy repair and maintenance facility.

8.27 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): The last time the House debated the Royal Navy, I devoted the bulk of my remarks to trying to argue the case for an alternative to Trident. I argued that submarine-launched cruise missiles were a far more cost-effective minimum nuclear deterrent and much more appropriate to Britain's needs. I still believe that there is a powerful case that can be made for that approach. That view is reinforced by the extent to which the United States and the Soviet Union are now deploying cruise missiles and researching further sophisticated versions of cruise missile technology.

However, it should be recognised that the opportunity for such a change is no longer with us. The time is gone, to coin a phrase, for such an alteration. By the time we get to the next election, Trident will be so far down the track that reversal would be a massively expensive and wasteful operation. Any opportunity to seek to replace Trident with a different nuclear deterrent would, at that stage, involve a dangerous risk of a gap between the phasing out of Polaris and the introduction of some new system. Therefore, if one takes the view that Britain needs an effective minimum deterrent—the majority of the British public share my view—I accept that that deterrent must now be Trident.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that cruise missiles would not be as satisfactory as Trident, even if it were possible to replace Trident, principally on account of their range, which therefore limits the area of seas in which they can hide? Does he also concede that if, under those circumstances, one chose cruise rather than Trident a larger number of submarines would be needed to present as effective a deterrent system?

Mr. Cartwright: It was always clear that cruise was not a direct alternative to Trident because of the firepower that cruise could deploy. I still argue that Trident is a more powerful system than Britain needs for a minimum effective deterrent. The one advantage that Trident offers is its flexibility. It is possible to reduce the number of missiles on a submarine and it is certainly possible to reduce the number of warheads on a missile. Depending on the progress of arms control negotiations, particularly in the strategic sector, I hope that the Government will ensure that Trident's firepower will not be provocative in the light of possible reductions by the two super-powers.

Other hon. Members have referred to the changed position following the implemention of the INF treaty, and to the NATO Ministers' meeting. There is no case for attempting to compensate for the intermediate nuclear missiles that we have negotiated away through the INF process. I cannot see the point of going through all the trauma that was involved in the 1979 dual-track decision, and all the negotiations that flowed from that, only to try to bring back missiles in some other form. Therefore, the argument for compensation and for trying to circumvent the treaty is pointless.

For as far ahead as we can see, the security of western Europe will depend on a mix of conventional and nuclear deterrents. It is prudent common sense to ensure that the nuclear and conventional elements are kept as effective as possible. Nuclear weapons should not be allowed to decay into impotence. If they do, they no longer represent an effective deterrent.

The excitement about the Montebello decision of 1983 is difficult to understand. What was decided was that NATO should have a smaller nuclear arsenal deployed in Europe, but that the nuclear arsenal should be more effective, that weapons should have an improved range, greater accuracy and better survivability. That seems to be a common-sense view of the matter. The detailed implementation of the Montebello decisions needs to be examined in the light of the INF treaty, but the basic approach that NATO's deterrent must remain effective is one with which it is impossible to argue.

One of the obvious reasons why we must always be on the lookout to maintain the effectiveness of weapons systems concerns the Tornado. At the moment it is an effective system in relation to the Soviet air defences, but it may not remain so for all its planned lifetime. The idea of developing a nuclear or conventional stand-off missile that will enable the Tornado to remain an effective weapon system throughout its lifetime is well worth examining. I am glad that the Government, in collaboration with the French, are considering that possibility.

The issue that has dominated tonight's debate is that of the surface fleet. The Navy has been given major tasks,

[Mr. Cartwright]

such as the direct protection of shipping in the Atlantic that is resupplying western Europe, the forward deployment of vessels to contain Soviet forces in the Norwegian sea and involvement in the amphibious reinforcement of NATO's northern flank. Those are all major tasks, and clearly the Navy needs substantial assets to carry them out.

It is against that background that we must approach the controversy of the "about 50" surface vessel fleet and examine the Government's record on the matter. I can understand the sense of puzzlement about the numbers involved that was evident in the speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway). It is claimed in the 1987 Statement on the Defence Estimates that there are 54 vessels — frigates and destroyers. However, it is clear that that figure does not stand up to close examination.

The figure of 54 vessels is arrived at only by including some that had already been paid off by the time that that document was published and others that had not arrived from the shipbuilders. Thus, that figure clearly had to be revised. The figure that we heard tonight was revised downwards to 49. There is some argument as to how many of those 49 vessels are immediately available. The most persuasive figure is 36 frigates and destroyers immediately available on a 48-hour time scale. It may be that others can be added to that on a longer time scale, but it will be interesting to hear what the Minister has to say on this issue.

An important point was made by the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill)—that total numbers do not reflect the age of the fleet. There are already 12 frigates that are over 20 years old. There are 19 vessels in the Leander class that were laid down between 1961 and 1969, which must be coming to the end of their useful life. Most of them will surely disappear over the next decade. The six type 21 frigates were laid down between 1969 and1974. It must be doubtful whether they will be in service by the 1990s.

Without labouring the issue of re-ordering, which has been dealt with at length, I find it hard to see how the current ordering policy will ensure that enough new vessels will be coming into service to replace those that should be phased out over the next decade. The only way that the gap will be bridged is by running vessels for longer than was originally intended when they first came into service. That has manpower implications, because the older vessels are more manpower-intensive. It also has implications for the morale of the seamen. It has operational implications, because some of the older frigates clearly cannot be used for some of the tasks with which the Navy is now grappling. Only frigates that are equipped with modern anti-missile defences can be deployed on the Armilla patrol in the Gulf. The fact that such work must be undertaken by a limited number of modern vessels means that they are taking a disproportionate share of the burden, with the inevitable strain on vessels and crews.

Much has been said about the threat. There has been general acceptance among hon. Members that the threat posed by Soviet maritime power has expanded over recent years. We may argue about whether it may continue, but it has certainly taken place. It is as the threat has become greater that the numbers of our destroyer frigate force have declined. I would accept that Britain's contribution to NATO in terms of nuclear-powered submarines has certainly improved, but on their own nuclear submarines cannot be the main anti-submarine element in NATO's navies. They must rely on frigates and destroyers for vital functions such as command, control and early warning to enable them to deal with a much larger Soviet submarine force.

The question on which I should like to conclude is whether the current and expected levels of frigates and destroyers are dictated by a calm, sober and rational assessment of the threat or by the economic constraints on defence spending. Are the levels what are needed by the Navy to do the job properly or are they simply the best that we can do in difficult circumstances? The House is entitled to a straight and clear answer to that point when the Minister replies to the debate.

8.39 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), in his remarks about cruise missile submarines, shows the standard alliance tendency of wanting to have his cake and eat it—I am sorry, the SDP tendency; I cannot keep up with the changes. As my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) made clear, it was an absurd idea in the first place that will haunt them in the years ahead. They cannot fudge that much. They cannot try to con people and expect it to stick, because it will not work.

After those robust words, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will excuse me if I do not take up his remarks because he and I are members of the Select Committee on Defence, and we are currently undertaking a detailed investigation into the surface fleet. Therefore, because so much has been said on that issue, it is unnecessary for me to duplicate those words.

I shall concentrate on four areas of concern. The first is our ability to reinforce our northern flank. Secondly, I should like to question the strategy of concentrating our maritime assets in the Norwegian and Barents Seas in times of conflict. Thirdly, I should like to remind the House of the massive maritime capability of the Soviet Union. Fourthly, I want to deal with disarmament, with particular reference to chemical weapons.

On the first question, the ability to reinforce our northern flank, my hon. Friend will know that it is necessary to land two companies simultaneously on Norwegian soil and that is a minimum requirement. That will require 24 helicopters which will need 12 landing spots to be available at the same time. Fearless and Intrepid between them have only four landing spots, so where will the others be found? Fearless and Intrepid are some 20 years old. A ship, however many mid-life and long-life refits it has, cannot last much longer than 25 years as the hull will not take it, however much it is strengthened.

However, to return to the point about landing spots, it has been suggested that they can be provided by aircraft carriers and ships taken up from trade. The public evidence given to the Select Committee on Defence on 24 February by Mr. Mottram, who is the assistant under-secretary of state (programmes), made it clear that the operational priority for aircraft carriers will be their ASW role. That will be an absolute priority and their commando and anti-air roles will be secondary.

A carrier cannot change its role easily. It has at least to return to United Kingdom waters for resupply and refitting to take place. Ships taken out from trade are

unlikely to fulfil such a complicated, time-sensitive function as providing landing spots for helicopters with all the materials and men that they have to move at one time. I therefore ask my hon. Friend to convince me, and possibly the House, how he expects to be able to land the minimum of two companies simultaneously on Norwegian soil.

Mr. Wallace: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if there was an amphibious landing it would need considerable air cover? Does he consider that sufficient resources are available in terms of aircraft carriers to provide that air cover?

Mr. Sayeed: The hon. Gentleman has made a very important point. If one analyses the public information that has been given to the Select Committee, it is clear that our three carriers are expected to fulfil, sometimes at the same time, four roles. As we are told, normally there will be only two carriers available as one will be in for refit. I do not see how they can fulfil four roles at the same time. The hon. Gentleman is quite right, but I must resist his blandishment to start talking about aircraft carriers and Harriers and the numbers that we require.

I turn to my second point about questioning the strategy of concentrating our naval assets in the Norwegian seas. The Royal Navy Broadsheet 1987 states:

"NATO maritime forces are guided by the principles of defence in depth, containment and keeping the initiative."

It goes on to say, in recognition of the massive Soviet maritime capability:

"The only way to contain this threat from becoming a reality is to deploy our forces as far forward as necessary to intercept and contain Soviet forces well away from the SLOCs."

However, the same document states:

"NATO, unlike the Soviet Union, depends for its survival on worldwide trade and its defence posture relies heavily on its ability to reinforce Europe by sea from the United States."

I wonder whether those statements are not incompatible. Clearly, we shall be forced to concentrate our maritime assets to protect the carriers in the Norwegian sea, and we need to protect our surface assets and our sub-surface assets.

There is no such thing as a 100 per cent. effective defence. We must therefore expect that, however many ships we push forward, some submarines will penetrate by running underneath and evading the screen and intercept the convoys from the United States. As NATO strategy is reactive, the Soviet Union will have more time than the Alliance to prepare for war. They will have time to push their submarine forces forward before the frigate and destroyer screens are in place and thus put themselves in a position to straddle the convoy routes between the United States and Europe. Because we put all our assets in Norway and in the Barents sea, those convoy routes will be denuded of defences.

Mr. O'Neill: Is not the real contradiction in NATO's own strategy? The basis of NATO strategy of flexible response is that conventional war in Europe will last eight days and then NATO becomes nuclear. With that strategy, we do not need a navy to escort convoys across the Atlantic as the war will become nuclear before they get here.

Mr. Sayeed: The purpose of an effective Navy is to permit us to react in different ways. I believe that the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) is absolutely right. We should be building up our maritime forces at the expense of our forces in West Germany.

I shall now move on to the maritime capability of the Soviet Union. There is an old German folk tale about two doves watching an archer. The young dove said to the older dove, "What a nice man that archer must be. Look at the smile on his face." But the wise old bird said to the young upstart, "Don't be silly, little boy. Don't look at his face, watch his hands".

Mr. Gorbachev's willingness to be more open and to seek accommodation with the West is to be welcomed, but we must not forget that he is a product of the Soviet system. We cannot ignore the massive build-up of the Soviet fleet, with well over 200 nuclear submarines. We cannot ignore the fact that a new Soviet submarine rolls down the slipway every 37 days. We cannot ignore the fact that its military capability is far beyond that which is necessary for its defence. Nor should we ignore the Soviet economy's massive inertia or the power of its generals and admirals.

No Russian who has lived through the siege of Leningrad or listened to tales of the Nazi invasion would ever allow his nation's defences to slip, and we should understand that. No member of the NATO Alliance who has watched the expansion of the Soviet empire should fail to recognise that to create a power vacuum by letting our guard fall is to invite disaster.

Regrettably, we live in a world of mutual distrust and fear, which will be overcome only as our aggressive abilities mutually decline without leaving gaps which could be exploited. That will happen only when the Soviet Union ceases to spend 17 per cent. of its GDP on its military and reallocates those resources to raising the living standards of its people.

Therefore, it follows that the only policy of disarmament that has any chance of being effective is one that is balanced, verifiable and structured so as not to leave any side with an overwhelming capability in any one area. That is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was right yesterday in her determination to maintain modern weapon systems and to stand against the blandishments of Chancellor Kohl and his short-term political objectives.

Finally, I want to make some suggestions on chemical weapon disarmament. We have no chemical weapons. The United States has a limited capacity for chemical weapon warfare. The Soviet Union has a massive chemical warfare capacity.

Mr. Denzil Davies *rose*——

Mr. Sayeed: If the right hon. Gentleman will restrain himself, he will understand where I am going.

Mr. Davies: How on earth does the hon. Gentleman know the chemical tonnage and capacity of the United States when it has not announced it to anybody, not even to the Geneva talks on chemical weapons? How does he know that it has a limited capacity?

Mr. Sayeed: Because the United States has not built any for many years and chemical weapons deteriorate and degrade as they are not replaced.

An essential ingredient of any disarmament treaty is verification. However, despite what it said in the

[Mr. Saveed]

Supplementary Defence Estimates 1987, volume 1, page 10, chemical weapons cannot be verified by means of production. A petrochemical plant can produce one perfectly proper by-product. It can be next door to a detergent plant producing a perfectly proper by-product. Separate, the two are safe; together, they are lethal.

In addition, verification cannot be by means of delivery systems. We do not know whether chemicals, high explosive, or even nuclear materials are in a shell or a missile. If those two avenues are closed, how can there ever be a treaty on chemical weapons? The only way that I can see is a policy of self-denial where each side decides to deny itself protection against the other side's weapons. That will mean that neither side protects its men or its land-based battlefield weapon systems against chemical weapons. Because a man wearing a protective suit against chemical weapons must practise frequently in order to become effective, it should be easier to check whether chemical weapon protection is being used. In addition, it takes time to fit weapon systems with anti-chemical weapon suits.

There is an additional benefit in that chemical weapon protection for a weapon system or a man is similar to that for nuclear weapons and by denying protection against chemical weapons, and, consequently, nuclear weapons as well, the nuclear threshold would be raised.

However, I recognise that that exercise in lateral thinking has considerable downside risks. Those risks may be so great that on balance we shall have to live with the threat of chemical weapon warfare.

The Royal Navy prayer contains the words:

"The Royal Navy and the Fleet in which we serve".

Everyone here is proud of the Royal Navy and the way in which it serves and defends us.

8.56 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In 16 written questions, the first seven answered on 15 February at columns *448-49*, and the latter nine answered on 26 February at columns *378-80* of the *Official Report*, I have raised the issue of the loss of parts of Trident off the Mull of Galloway and off Walney Island on 5 and 6 February.

In my 25 years as a Member of Parliament, I have never indulged in making trouble for its own sake and I regard this as far too serious and costly an issue to try to tease Ministers. However, one can imagine the fun that some Conservative politicians would have had at the expense of the Government of the day had Labour been in power.

I understand that inquiries are currently being undertaken by the shipbuilders VSEL and by the sub-contractor, Motherwell Bridge Engineering. I gather that the Ministry of Defence is represented at those inquiries. To learn what actually happened, we must await the outcome. However, there is a general point about the management of the Trident contracts that is legitimate before the inquiry reports.

Given that the work is so important that it requires retrieving from the bottom of sea, how is it that such a large cargo was entrusted in the first place to a small Bahamas-registered vessel with an unvetted crew? Like most of my hon. Friends, I am a non-believer in Trident, but it appears frivolous for the Government, the centrepiece of whose defence policy is Trident, to allow a situation in which crucial components can be swept off the deck on 5 February and again on 6 February.

Secondly, I want to ask a question of fact about the Zircon satellite. I recognise that this is not the occasion on which to pursue further the disgraceful scene at Queen Margaret drive in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), when friends of mine, executives of BBC Scotland, were hauled out of their beds at 3 am on the Sabbath morning of 1 February to assist special branch.

We know that in the summer of 1986 Duncan Campbell interviewed, among others, Sir Frank Cooper and Sir Ronald Mason and asked them both about Zircon. I understand that they both got on to the phone, quite properly, to their former Department, post haste, to recount the questions they had been asked about Zircon.

Who was the recipient of the communications from Cooper and Mason? What action did the recipient take? Were Ministers informed? If the former permanent secretary, one of the former great mandarins of Whitehall, and the former chief scientist, a fellow of the Royal Society and professor of chemistry, put through agitated phone calls to the Ministry of Defence, did the Department do nothing about their representations—if national security was involved?

Zircon never was about the security of our country. If it had been, Ministers displayed a dereliction of duty when they received the Cooper-Mason information. It was about political embarrassment. Alan Protheroe has made clear his concern on film.

Thirdly, I refer to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) about the Falklands yesterday. Why does at least Washington not understand our position on the Falklands if it is so watertight?

The final issue I want to raise concerns the log book of the Conqueror. My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) raised this issue in an early-day motion and then in Defence Question Time. Although he has consulted me at each major step and behaved as a exemplary parliamentary colleague to another who has been concerned with the issue in the past, my hon. Friend —not I—has made the running on the log book saga. I do not make judgments on such areas on the basis of the say-so of persons whom I have seen briefly once, although in my judgment this person was possessed of transparent integrity. But one matter I am clear about beyond peradventure: when the shadow Defence Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), a cautious Member of Parliament, asks for an inquiry following the early-day motion of my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen, he is right to do so.

I have always been profoundly suspicious about the log book. Its alleged loss was announced out of the blue to the press late on 6 November 1985. On 7 November 1985, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) was due to give evidence to a difficult meeting of the Select Committee. The loss of the log book was used as a smokescreeen to cover up other political embarrassments. I have never believed that the control-room log book of the only nuclear submarine ever to have seen action for real was lost and that no one can shed light on how it was lost or destroyed or where it might be. I have too high a regard for the Royal Navy to suppose that such carelessness could go unpunished and unremarked.

It was pointed out to me by an ex-petty officer, a regular member of the Bloxwich naval club, that the commander of the Conqueror would hardly have been given the captain's command of a brand-new ship—

HMS Cornwall — two weeks ago if there had been a blemish on his record such as the responsibility for losing a log book. I make no criticism of him — I wish him well. I am assured, and believe, that no document from the Conqueror went missing during the de-briefing or afterwards as a result of the crew's negligence.

I have never been out to cause trouble for the Navy. To give an example of that, when I first read the Sethia diaries in the autumn of 1983, it was all too obvious that HMS Cardiff had inadvertently shot down at least one of our helicopters. I said not a word because I did not want to embarrass people in the Navy who would be full of remorse; neither did I want to hurt next of kin whom I did not know. However, Mrs. Cockton, the mother of the co-pilot involved, told me that she thought I was wrong to keep quiet, and on reflection she may have been right.

Ministers on the Front Bench tonight came to office long after these events, and ministerial prudence and self-preservation will have suggested that they should not become involved. All that is required from them is anodyne words, and they will pass on, and up their careers, unsullied. I have no quarrel with them or desire to embarrass them.

To the Defence Secretary I say something different. I have always found him, as an Under-Secretary of State and then as a long-serving Secretary of State for Scotland, a courteous and obliging Minister, unlike the present incumbent. Either the right hon. Gentleman knows the truth about the log book, or, if he set his mind to it, he could find it out from those who do. I warn him that such curiosity could be dangerous, even for such a long-serving Cabinet Minister. If he were to discover who was in the Downing street equivalent of Bluebeard's forbidden cupboard, Mr. Ingham might make his life as difficult as he did that of the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen). I do not forget that, in the Belgrano debate the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Mr. Stanley) snapped:

"Mr. Ponting did not know all, and Mr. Ponting did not know the most important of all." — [*Official Report*, 18 February 1985; Vol. 73, c. 820.]

I believe a source who told me:

"A copy of the control room log-book of the Conqueror, along with the crucial telegrams, is available to the Defence Secretary, if he wants them."

I concede that, careful politician as he is, the right hon. Gentleman might restrain his curiosity to the point of not wanting them.

I refer to the second paragraph of Mr. Ponting's introduction to the Belgrano action group's "Unnecessary War". He says:

"Key documents have gone missing or not been revealed. The log book of HMS Conqueror, the submarine that sank the 'Belgrano', had been lost in circumstances that have never been explained and even a month's long enquiry by Scotland Yard has found no clues. The crucial diplomatic telegrams over the weekend of the sinking have been concealed. Even when I wrote the Top Secret intelligence report now known as the 'Crown Jewels' I was not allowed to see these telegrams. Similarly the Foreign Affairs Committee was refused access."

If I say to the Secretary of State for Defence that I do not believe that he either does not know what happened to the Conqueror's log book, or cannot find out, he will not think I am unduly offensive, because why, these days, should we put our trust any longer in the word of Ministers?

I suppose that I first realised the extent of wrongdoing and manipulation on that remarkable day in the Old Bailey, when that able civil servant, Richard Mottram, going into the witness box for the right hon. Member for Henley, revealed that the Commander-in-Chief's report had been altered significantly, as to the detection of the Belgrano, behind Sir John Fieldhouse's back.

For the sake of time, I shall not go through the script, which proves the point, of the Ponting trial cross-examination of Richard Mottram by Mr. Laughland, the lawyer. A limp excuse was given by the Prime Minister. I refer to the *Official Report*, 12 February 1985, column 164.

I conclude on a rather sad note. The first service Estimates debate in which I took part was over a quarter of a century ago. I think that this is my 52nd speech in service Estimates debates.

I am one of a dwindling band of Members of Parliament who have the memory of George Wigg sitting on the Front Bench below the Gangway, bobbing up and down, challenging Jack Profumo. The issue was truth to the House of Commons. It seems that I am an old-fashioned Member of Parliament these days, a throwback to less professional, less glitzy days, who thinks that telling the truth to the House of Commons is all-important and central to our system of government.

When I complain about the Prime Minister, and her behaviour in relation to the selectively leaked Law Officer's letter on Westland, I am not met with any kind of rebuttal of what I am saying. Conservatives do not say, "You're wrong." They say, something different. They say "Well, she got away with it, didn't she?", or, "We know you are right—but you'd better blame the Leader of the Opposition for making such a daft speech, and letting her off the hook!" That is the kind of thing they say. I am not passing judgment on the speech of the Leader of the Opposition.

I am just an old-fashioned Member of Parliament, who profoundly believes that we should have the truth about matters such as the log book of the Conqueror, and that Prime Ministers should not protect their own position. After all, if the right hon. Lady had not said on 27 January 1986,

"I did not know about the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry's . . . role . . . until the inquiry had reported." — [*Official Report*, 27 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 657.],

she would have been sending for the removal vans for 10 Downing street.

I do not think that senior Ministers should get away on log books, Westland, or the facts of the Libyan bombing with a brazen sustained lack of candour to the House of Commons.

9.7 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): I should like to thank the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for his obvious efforts to keep his speech brief. I shall try to do the same because I am aware that the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) wishes to follow me.

There are three principal areas of concern. I am worried about the strength of the merchant fleet, about the disposition of weapons between our ships, and about training opportunities for women. Considering the very important role played by the WRNS, I am rather sad that too little attention has been given to them in this lengthy debate and that too little tribute has been paid to the role that they play.

Before turning to those three areas, I should like to touch first and briefly on the issue of the size of the Fleet,

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

because it has tended to dominate some of the arguments of Opposition Members. They have claimed that the Fleet is now much smaller than it used to be, but they have totally ignored the fact that because a ship is now in refit for only 12·5 per cent. of its lifetime, as opposed to 25 per cent. in 1979, it is simply not necessary to have as big a Fleet to keep as many ships at sea. I should have thought that that was a fairly elementary piece of arithmetic that would not have been altogether beyond hon. Members.

Much the same argument applies in terms of the rate at which we should order and replace frigates and destroyers because the "gold standard", if one can term it that, of three frigates a year was conceived in 1982, when we were in a completely different situation. Modernisation has moved apace since then and, if we can guarantee longer lives for the new ships that we order, it is not so necessary to stick rigidly to three a year, even if that remains an ideal standard.

A NATO study, initiated by the Government, to their credit, appears to indicate that, in the event of a major emergency, we would need all 1,642 vessels available across all registers. There is no room for manoeuvre, reserve or emergency. It would need only a geographical conflict or a contractual disagreement to prevent deployment. Furthermore, there is a major deficiency in manning. We could not man those ships, even if we had them. I urge the Minister to address himself, as a matter of urgency, to our merchant fleet.

Secondly, although it is completely unreasonable to expect that all our ships will have the full range of weapon systems, provided that we are working on the basis of a slimmer, leaner fleet, we must make sure that each individual ship has a greater range of functions available to it than at present.

Thirdly, on the training of women, I should like to congratulate the Government on their efforts to encourage engineering training for women in the WRNS and on the encouraging moves that they have made in the employment of medical staff. However, I would draw the Government's attention to the Defence Estimates and to the decline in the number of female service personnel, because those personnel have not commanded any attention this afternoon. They are important and they must be encouraged, as they could help to make up for some of the deficiencies in our recruitment.

9.11 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I wish to thank the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) for her short, sharp speech. She made her points very well and has given me the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

I wish to quote from an excellent pamphlet, recently produced by Greenpeace, about nuclear-free seas, as that should set the tone for tonight's debate. It states:

> "At sea there are no boundaries. The naval forces of the nuclear powers move freely and quietly, unseen by the public and media. In the words of Admiral Carlisle Trost, U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, . . . the Navy operates in international waters, where no government's permission to base and fly aircraft is required . . . the navies of the nuclear powers use the oceans as their global arena. They are in the Norwegian Sea, the Bering Sea, the Sea of Japan, the Arabian Sea, the Mediterranean, underneath the Arctic, lurking off each other's coast and outside each other's ports. Every day they wage an invisible war on the high seas: signalling aggressive intentions to the other side, searching for weaknesses, and demonstrating a readiness to fight. One third of the nuclear weapons in the world, and over 500 nuclear reactors, are now deployed at sea. Virtually all of the ocean going ships and submarines of the superpower navies are nuclear armed. It is increasingly likely that nuclear war will start at sea."

There are

> "numerous 'incidents' and misunderstandings . . . New long range, highly accurate nuclear cruise missiles have also recently joined the naval arsenals. There is a widespread belief among naval planners that nuclear war at sea might not escalate into a global conflagration. A nuclear war at sea is therefore more thinkable. The U.S. Navy, and possibly the other nuclear navies, has more autonomy . . . over the use of its nuclear weapons than the other military services."

The document concludes:

> "None of these operations, strategies or weapons are the subject of current or foreseen arms control negotiations. The navies strenuously resist any attempts to subject their activities to international scrutiny or control. On the high seas it has become, as the U.S. Navy now describes it, an era of 'violent peace'."

That is the basis on which we should hold this debate.

The document referred to nuclear reactors and the 500 nuclear reactors at sea. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) reminded us of the near-meltdown and near-catastrophe involving HMS Resolution. Now we know that HMS Resolution is what the Government mean by the "resolute approach". There must have been a release of radiation from that ship, because one man had to be scrubbed down for over 24 hours. The Government called it a minor electrical malfunction. Presumably, that is what may have started the incidents at Chernobyl or Three Mile Island. I repeat the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton. The Government should answer candidly on that matter because there has been inadequate investigation of radiation health risks and there are inadequate emergency plans.

The Greenpeace report referred to the Royal Navy's involvement in the United States offensive forward maritime strategy. William Arkin described that in his Neptune papers for the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington. He said that forward policy means

> "more aggressive operations close to the Soviet Union in peacetime, increased use of land-based aircraft and facilities in support of offensive maritime operations, crisis surge deployments of attack and ballistic missile submarines from home ports . . . during peacetime exercises . . . deployment of nuclear-powered attack submarines deep in the 'sea control areas' and 'home waters' of the Soviet Union, more aggressive electronic warfare operations".

The report goes on right up to plans for the first use of nuclear weapons at sea.

We are going along with that strategy. It is different from the defensive strategy of the past in which we have protected convoys. It is a more provocative approach. I note that NATO is redrafting its concept of maritime operations in line with that United States strategy. We are going along with it despite the misgivings in Europe. I have some questions for the Minister which I hope that he will answer, now or subsequently.

When and where will the Eurogroup meet to discuss the new concept of maritime operations and what opportunity will there be for prior discussion of the important issues? What role has Britain taken in the redrafting of the CONMAROPS? Who has been representing Britain and who will be presenting the proposals to the Eurogroup? Does the Eurogroup paper advocate what is written in the *Navy International* article of October 87? That article talks of

"early forward deployment into the Norwegian sea of a NATO European battle-group led by Royal Navy Invincible-class carriers, to substitute for American battle-groups which cannot get there early enough."

If the paper does advocate such a policy, will it mean that the most controversial and hazardous part of the United States maritime strategy — the positioning of surface ships as far forward as possible, as early as possible in a crisis—will be carried out for the Americans by the Dutch, British and Germans? That would mean that we would be in the front line. Nelson said that no sailor but a fool would attack a fort. The Government appear to be making us look a fool. We should not be taking that front-line role on behalf of the Americans.

There have already been conventional skirmishes because of that forward offensive maritime strategy. In October 1987 two Royal Navy Lynx helicopters were involved in a dangerous confrontation with two Soviet nuclear weapon-capable Flogger aircraft during the surveillance of a Soviet exercise in the Barents sea. On 13 February there was a report in *The Guardian* about a skirmish in which two United States warships were inside Soviet waters. They were both dangerous, conventional skirmishes. Such skirmishes are increasing in number and could easily escalate into a nuclear fight. The problem is that the threshold is low and in a conventional skirmish the Soviets are faced with a choice about their own nuclear weapons; use them or lose them. That increases the danger of a nuclear fight enormously.

The other matter that I wanted to raise relates to the joint ocean surveillance information centre. We should have more information about that centre from the Ministry of Defence. It was unknown until the Pentagon announced last year the sale to the United Kingdom of $24 million-worth of upgraded items for the system. I understand that it is linked to the United States naval force Europe's headquarters at North Audley street in London, which houses the fleet ocean surveillance information centre Europe. While Britain officially adheres to NATO's maritime strategy, the operational reality is of a much closer integration with a more offensive United States maritime strategy which we have not yet agreed, certainly not in the House.

Why should JOSIC be a bilateral arrangement between Britain and the United States rather than part of NATO? If it is bilateral, why is it apparently funded entirely from the British defence budget? Why is there not a contribution from the United States? What control does the United Kingdom exert over the facility and its operational use in London? Why does the British taxpayer fund a system with a subsidiary role as a United States national intelligence system that is not assigned to NATO? The Minister should answer all of those questions.

Verification is a difficult problem to solve at sea. The Government should be considering how it can be achieved in detail because, without constraint on sea-launched cruise missiles and other nuclear weapons at sea, it will be very difficult for the United States, the Soviet Union or any other nation to assess and monitor the number of each other's nuclear weapons. That problem will complicate negotiations to limit or reduce nuclear weapons.

I conclude my remarks with a comment of retired United States Admiral Eugene Carroll. He said that the Trident missiles that we are buying will be

"a trigger to commit suicide"

and that the major powers are

"addicted to new nuclear weapons. That addiction is as lethal as addiction to heroin or crack. We need a detoxification programme to wean ourselves off them. To live in a world in which safety is dependent on nuclear weapons is no safety at all. Sooner or later, they are going to be used."

9.23 pm

Mr. O'Neill: With the leave of the House, may I say that the debate has given long and thorough treatment to this important subject. It has been a more structured debate than in recent years, with a measure of agreement on the problems. Whether we have reached a consensus is a matter of debate.

Virtually every hon. Member has expressed anxiety about the size of the fleet. I hope that the report of the Select Committee on Defence will be published quickly and that time will be found for debate, perhaps before the Estimates are published. No doubt the business managers of the House are aware of the importance that hon. Members on both sides of the House attach to this issue, and of our concern. An opportunity to debate it again will be appreciated, particularly with information made freely available to all Members.

Those hon. Members who have sat through the Select Committee have the advantage of seeing draft minutes, which puts them in a better position in relation to this debate than the rest of us. I think that we get close to the edge of privilege when hon. Members quote from unapproved minutes. I do not want to carp, but that is all the more reason why this matter should be brought into the open so that we can find out what is happening.

Mr. Churchill *rose*—

Mr. O'Neill: This is the only intervention that I shall allow.

Mr. Churchill: I was quoting not from minutes but from a reply to a parliamentary question that I tabled to the Secretary of State for Defence.

Mr. O'Neill: I am happy and willing to attack the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), but on this occasion he is innocent of any charge that I am making!

The debate has highlighted the anxieties of Opposition Members. Reference was made by the Conservative Benches to the significance of the procurement dimensions for most Opposition Members who have spoken on constituency employment, but the nature of shipbuilding means that the industry is a large and dominant employer, and the cyclical nature of warship orders has acted as a disincentive to private employers. Very few employers have come into the industry in the Tyne, Clyde and Mersey regions, so it is natural that my hon. Friends should be concerned about Royal Navy shipbuilding. My hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) pointed out the pride with which shipbuilding communities view their babies— their ships—and the manner in which they welcome shipbuilding is evidence of the community spirit which is manifest for construction and support services.

I will not go down the road of trying to choose between the competing claims of the Tyne or the Mersey for type 23s. It is not good enough for the shipyard workers, who are skilled men, to have to wait until June to be told who will get the tenders, although we realise that tendering is a lengthy process and it suits the purposes of the Government to delay their acceptance for as long as possible — at least until the next financial year when there will be more room in the Budget to find the £130

[Mr. O'Neill]

million or £140 million needed for a type 23. We would like an indication, before the Estimates, of what the next round of orders will be and when they will start. The Government must give a commitment that they will carry on building type 23s.

Pleas have been made for the auxiliary oil replenishment vessels, and we have heard of the rivalry between Swan Hunter and Harland and Wolff. The Government must give an indication tonight when work will start on the recently ordered AOR 2 and when the four remaining AOR vessels will be ordered, because they are essential to keep type 23s at sea. One of the dangers of the shortsightedness of the Government's make-do-and-mend policy is that one craft is put at a disadvantage because another is not available to assist it and work with it.

Many references have been made to support in Norway and the need for amphibious vessels. The hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) referred to that matter, and we echo what he said. In 1986 the Ministry of Defence announced that it was putting aside £450 million in long-term costings to decide the future shape of the Royal Navy's amphibious capability. That announcement reversed the decision in 1983 to dispose of HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid in the early 1990s without replacement. Then it was announced in 1986 that Swan Hunter had been awarded a £250 million contract for a study on the feasibility of updating the two landing platform docks. In March 1987 the industry was invited to tender for funded feasibility project definitions.

Those are high-falutin' expressions, but it is an expensive way of spelling procrastination or, to put it more simply, putting it off. We recognise that the decisions are important, but we suspect that the continual need for studies and reviews is just an excuse to delay expenditure on already severely stretched budgets. We know also that similar problems can arise in the anti-submarine carriers.

The refit for HMS Illustrious is to be postponed until 1991. This is critical because it could throw into chaos the whole refit cycle for carriers. By the early 1990s the Royal Navy will have only one carrier available for operational deployment.

We have had in the past from previous Ministers of State for Defence Procurement commitments to having two carriers generated at any one time, while the third will usually be in refit. Yet the Government's response to the Defence Committee report on the lessons of the Falklands said:

"two of the INVINCIBLE class carriers would be available for deployment at short notice and that to ensure this, a third carrier would be maintained in refit or reserve. The corollary of this is that two CAGs also need to be available at short notice".

During the recent exercise Purple Warrior, RAF Valley in Anglesey had to pretend to be an aircraft carrier because there were not enough aircraft or helicopter carriers. Probably it was just as well that this was in Anglesey and that they were only invading Scotland. The problems that these exercises indicate highlight the chaos into which we are lapsing and which the numbers aspect has in some respects clouded over tonight, because there are more deep-seated problems in procurement.

I have already spoken of the significance of warship building, but shipbuilding is a seamless garment. The skills that are gained in one yard are often translated, by the movement of individuals, to another. If we are not building merchant ships and we have an insufficient order book for warships, those skills will die.

I do not want to labour this point too much, but in talking about shipbuilding it is incumbent upon the Minister to tell us what has happened in the short fat ship controversy. It is now more than 12 months since Lloyd's was given the job of producing a report. When one goes to any part of the warship building industry and asks about this question, on invariably gets conflicting responses, but this was to be the definitive report. It may be that this is another judgment of Solomon that nobody wants to make or to publish, but I think that we would benefit from some straight talking on the issue.

In the recent past we have had some confirmation of the Government's good intent concerning NFR90. I would hope that we might this evening get a little more in this respect. We have had parliamentary answers, but this is the opportunity for the Minister to spell out the Government's intentions. We have the advantage — or disadvantage; I am not sure, Madam Deputy Speaker — of having a former Treasury Minister as the senior Minister for procurement, because as far as I can see it is the Treasury that is calling the shots on NFR90.

There is an aversion within that Department to any collaborative project. It sees the spectre of the European fighter aircraft looming on the horizon. But we believe that decisions of this nature are necessary, because if the shipbuilding industry in this country is to survive we must ensure that we keep the design teams together. I am speaking in particular about the work that is being done on the Clyde, because there is there a lead capacity that has to be sustained. It was for that reason that I said earlier that we want to know when the next four type 23 orders are to be placed, because nobody in warship building knows what is happening.

Strangely, we have not had any real mention in the debate this evening of the royal dockyards, partly because many of us believe that they are going through a difficult patch and it is better to — I do not want to say let sleeping dogs lie.

It may well be that the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) has other things to preoccupy him at the moment, but certainly Devonport is a cause for concern. It was promised core programme work by the Defence Secretary and predicted redundancies were based on the core programme coming through. Since then the MOD has reneged on those promises and Devonport is not getting the work. Therefore, the redundancies are taking an even greater toll, and it is an area where there is very little in the way of alternative employment because of the sheer scale of the place and the overheads which are a direct consequence of having such a large area in which to work. One of Rosyth's advantages is that it is a compact unit which is fairly well equipped and resourced.

The problem is that Devonport is finding it difficult not only because of overheads but because the scale of operation requires quite high rental fees; these are a burden which it has to bear and which many of the privatised yards do not, especially when privatisation was achieved at a very low cost to the people who purchased the yards. As regards in-house provision, there is also the question of the base at Portsmouth being used for refitting purposes. Work seems to be pushed towards Portsmouth, and the type 42 work which is being done at Portsmouth

naval base is not being put out to tender. I should be interested to know why competitive tendering is not being applied there if it is such a cure for all ills.

To their great credit, the men and women in the yards have got down to the job. Those of us who were part of the long and weary progress of the Bill—I am not sure whether any hon. Members on the Government Benches tonight shared that experience, but a number of my hon. Friends who are here this evening did—were concerned that, although we did not want privatisation of the yards, when the House had had its say and the Bill went through, we were anxious about its consequences for industrial relations. Problems in this area have not been alleviated by the difficulty experienced by many workers in getting their redundancy payments. Some have had to wait as long as five months to get this money. The Ministry of Defence ought to get moving and to see to it that these payments are put into the hands of the work force as quickly as possible.

I will finish as I started, by paying tribute to the Navy and to the men and women who serve in it. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) spoke movingly this evening about his recent trip to Saudi, where he met men who have been serving on the Armilla patrol. These men went out to what is one of the most unpleasant parts of the world in which to be a sailor and to work in craft which are not really suited to the climate there — air conditioning is the most basic problem. Nevertheless, they went there; they did not query it; they did not flinch from it; and they have done their duty with incredible courage in difficult and trying circumstances. They and the rest of the Royal Navy deserve better than they get from the Government. Between now and the next election all hon. Members have a duty to ensure that their conditions will be improved.

I hope that the Minister will be able to deal with some of the many problems raised in the debate, but that is perhaps too much to hope for.

9.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): I agree with the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) on one important point, at least. Indeed, the whole House will agree with us that it has been an excellent debate with interesting contributions from all parts of the House. In the short time available, I shall try to answer as many of the points as possible, but I hope the House will understand that I cannot cover them all. Nor would it be fair to those who have already spoken to give way and thus further reduce the time available for my reply.

The first point to which I should respond was raised by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck), by the hon. Member for Clackmannan and by most other hon. Members who have spoken. It relates to our surface fleet and, in particular, the destroyers and frigates in a variety of contexts. First, I reaffirm, yet again, the commitment of the Government to maintain a force of about 50 escorts. I was glad to hear that figure supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill).

There seems to be some confusion, to say the least, about the present size of the escort fleet. The hon. Member for Clackmannan referred to a figure of 36 escourts which appeared in the press today. The facts are simple. There are currently 49 destroyers and frigates in the Fleet. Of these, six are in refit, a significantly smaller proportion than a few years ago, largely as a result of the improved maintenance cycles that we have introduced. A further seven vessels are preparing for operational service or are engaged in trials or training. Of course, they would be operationally available in case of need within a short time. The other 36 would be available at about 48 hours' notice.

I was also asked about the ordering rate. We are not tied to a rigid order rate. Rather, we aim to place orders at a rate needed to maintain the level of about 50. While for planning purposes we may use ship life figures of, for example, 22 years, the reality is far more complex. Actual ship life is not simply a question of age; it is a trade-off between the material state of the ship and its capability.

As mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks), batch 3 type 22 frigates now coming into service — HMS Cumberland and HMS Campbeltown in the next financial year — are at least twice as effective in their role as the ships which they will replace and are the Navy's most capable frigates. The order rate comes down eventually to what vessels have to offer at a particular stage in their life. Another factor is flexibility arising out of our developing experience in running the new ships.

In this context I was asked about type 23 orders. Tenders for up to four type 23 frigates were received on 12 January. These are being evaluated. The precise size and timing of an order arising from the tenders have not yet been determined. */Interruption./* I do not think hon. Members would expect us to have decided on a tender in such a short time. It is just over a month since tenders were received.

One aspect of NATO's strategy has been mentioned several times by hon. Members who made interesting comments on this important subject. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend), the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) referred to our important role in reinforcing the northern flank and, therefore, the important role of our amphibious capability. The House will recall that my right hon. Friend announced in December 1986 that the Government had decided to retain an amphibious capability in the longer term.

Our two LPDs are a vital element of that capability, as was mentioned. We are therefore now examining two options for the future of that element. One is the procurement of new build vessels, the other a ship life extension programme. A feasibility study has been carried out into the latter option by Swan Hunter, and further feasibility studies into the option of new build vessels are under way. They are being carried out under contract by three consortia, led by Swan Hunter, VSEL and Scott Lithgow. All the studies will be complete by the autumn of this year and the results will then be studied by the Ministry. This time scale means that we will be able to take a decision on the best way forward in good time before HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid reach the end of their current useful lives in the mid-1990s.

In parallel with the work on the replacement of the LPDs we are giving active consideration to how best to accommodate the helicopter support, which was also referred to. I recognise that it is important for the amphibious group, and the concept of an aviation support ship features in this consideration. However, it is not the only option and no decisions have yet been taken.

[Mr. Tim Sainsbury]

Two of the logistic landing ships, also important in our amphibious capability—the rebuilt Sir Tristram and the new Sir Galahad—have only recently joined the Fleet. There are plans to give older LSLs a ship life extension programme.

Last week I had the great pleasure and privilege of visiting the Royal Marine winter deployment in northern Norway, to see at first hand what amphibious operations involve north of the Arctic circle. I had the opportunity to watch 45 Commando deploying ashore, both by helicopter and landing-craft, from HMS Intrepid, and subsequently was able to spend some time with the troops as the exercise developed. It brought home to me vividly the complexity of this sort of operation, and the temperature in which it is carried out. I would like to pay tribute to the high levels of professionalism and skill shown by our service men when operating in these extreme conditions. Their presence is direct evidence of our commitment to the security of NATO's northern flank.

A number of hon. Members referred to Trident. The importance of Trident as a credible deterrent was stressed, understandably, by my hon. Friends the Members for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) and for Bexleyheath. I am glad to confirm that the Trident programme is proceeding satisfactorily and on schedule. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear on 23 February that production of warheads has started. Despite the reported difficulties on some building works at Aldermaston, we assess that deliveries of warheads will be on time to achieve the planned in-service date for the Trident system in the mid-1990s.

Mr. Dalyell: How about the parts that fell off the deck into the Mull of Galloway and off Walney Island?

Mr. Sainsbury: I shall resist the temptation to go down to the bottom of the Mull of Galloway with the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

The hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) raised several matters. First, I assure him that Swan Hunter has already been given the order for the AOR 2, which I announced just before Christmas. I note with interest his comments on the advantages of batch ordering. NFR 90 is now at the stage of project definition and the programme envisages first of class for the Royal Navy towards the end of the century.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North made an interesting point about Holbrook school going co-educational. As my hon. and learned Friend will know, that question has been considered in the past but there are no plans to make any changes at present.

The hon. Members for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) and for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) referred to the HMS Resolution incident. There is no truth whatever in the allegation that there was "a near-disaster" on board HMS Resolution last month. The scrubbing-down story that was mentioned is a complete invention. There was an electrical malfunction which was dealt with by standard operating procedures. At no time was there any danger to the submarine's reactor, its crew or the public. It is not Ministry of Defence deception, but the scaremongering of the hon. Member for Dumbarton that is causing distress and concern to his constituents.

I was glad to hear the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) on the WRNS and I welcome her support for the training in engineering.

The hon. Member for Clackmannan mentioned search and rescue at Lee-on-Solent. It has been our intention for some time to withdraw the Royal Navy Wessex flight from Lee-on-Solent on 1 April 1988. Coverage of the central English channel and Solent areas will be fully adequate—in many respects better—if we use the more capable Sea King aircraft operating mainly from Porton. The hon. Member for Clackmannan also referred to NFR 90, but I cannot add to what I have already said or to what my hon. Friend said in his opening speech.

The hon. Member for Attercliffe referred to increasing Soviet capability, as did other hon. Members. That is true, and it is a cause for concern. However, we should not ignore the fact that we do not need to meet this threat alone because we are part of the NATO Alliance and our own capability is growing.

I have been asked about procurement matters. Put simply, the objective of our policy is the economic procurement of the best equipment for the Fleet and therefore ultimately greater fighting effectiveness.

In recent years a consistent theme has been to bemoan the fact that modern defence material often costs much more in real terms than the previous generation of equipment that it is replacing. I do not accept the long-held view that defence equipment will inevitably become more and more expensive. On the contrary, I believe that we of can often get better defence equipment at a lower price. With improved skill, such opportunities will increase.

With regard to sonar we have made enormous strides in the important technology of software control and signal processing. That means that we can consistently improve our active and passive sonar capability, vital to counter the increasing Soviet submarine threat. At the same time we can also reduce the volume of inboard electronics, which has benefits for submarine design and ship fitting, and allows the production cost of the new equipment to be dramatically reduced. Today, for example, I announced that a competition for the new sonar 2074 has produced a solution, developed by Plessey Naval Systems Ltd., which requires only one sixth of the volume of electronics of its predecessor, and which can be procured for around 30 per cent. of its predecessor's cost. Its estimated through-life support cost is also around one third of the older generation of equipment.

Another area that has witnessed substantial technical progress that has been translated into improved performance by reducing real costs is electronic warfare, and, in particular, passive warning devices, known as electronic support measures. In the past few years we have initiated an extremely cost-effective updating of the fleet's main surface ship ESM, and we have held two competitions for submarine ESM, both of which have resulted in more capable equipments at unit prices some 15 to 20 per cent. less than those for previous ESMs.

With regard to mine warfare, also referred to in the debate, the hunt class mine countermeasures vessels, already among the most capable in the world and currently proving their worth in the Gulf, are to be followed by the new class of single role minehunters. Those ships will be only three quarters of the cost of a Hunt class vessel. However, they will have a number of improvements,

including a far more capable mine hunting and disposal system, which will allow them to find and destroy mines in water three times as deep as the Hunt class ships.

I believe that our policies of competition, batch ordering and improved reliability and maintainability come together in a particularly striking way in the procurement of the type 23 frigate, referred to by a number of hon. Members. That ship will deploy all the major weapons systems of the previous type 22 frigate — helicopter, towed array and hull-mounted sonar, Seawolf point defence missile system, surface-to-surface missiles and a 4·5 in gun—yet it is being procured at around 80 per cent. of the cost of the type 22 frigate. It also has a significantly smaller crew, and we anticipate that it will, in due course, show substantial savings in its through-life operations and support costs as well.

Efficient management of procurement, using the stimulus of competition, has no doubt accounted for some of the price reductions, but we are also witnessing the benefits of technological advances that are allowing costs to fall.

Another area that has witnessed improvements in efficiency and about which I have been asked, especially by the hon. Member for Clackmannan, is the dockyards. The House will be aware that commercial management was introduced into the royal dockyards at Rosyth and Devonport on 6 April 1987. We took the decision to change the way in which the royal dockyards were managed because it had long been accepted that change was necessary.

The simple fact is that the old labour-intensive, uncompetitive, union-troubled set-up, ponderous and inflexible as it was, could not provide the cost-effective and rapid service now required by the Royal Navy. The Public Accounts Committee, commenting on the state of the dockyards in 1984, said that the time had come for more urgent and decisive action to balance efficient management and use of resources against the need to meet the Navy's operational requirements. A radical solution was needed both to improve the output and efficiency of the dockyards and to set in place a commercially-oriented management structure.

The Government decided that commercial management offered the best chance of a secure future for the dockyards, while protecting vital strategic assets by retaining them under Government ownership. Commercial management introduced the disciplines of competition and the best commercial practice into the hitherto protected world of warship refitting. This fulfilled the Government's obligations to obtain maximum value for money for the Royal Navy and the taxpayer, while at the same time giving the dockyards, with their unrivalled assets — which I recognise — work force skills and experience, the chance to ameliorate the worst effects of the decline in the defence ship refitting work load by seeking commercial work outside the defence sector.

The fundamental nature of those changes and the adjustments that have been and will be made in the dockyards — nearly all of whose employees have transferred from the Civil Service — and in the Royal Navy, as the new customer-supplier relationship develops in a commercial environment, cannot be overstated. It has therefore been a difficult time of transition.

Although it is early days, the Navy is already seeing the benefits of that, and the taxpayer is obtaining greater value for money. That is all the more impressive when it is remembered that commercial management was introduced against a background of union opposition — which had hindered the preparations that the incoming contractors were able to make — and after a period of industrial unrest, which was fuelled partly by the understandable apprehension and uncertainty of the employees.

I should therefore like to take this opportunity to congratulate Devonport Management Ltd. and Babcock Thorn Ltd. on the way in which they have approached their tasks and, in particular, on the great importance that they have placed, and continue to place, on good industrial relations. They have built on the spirit and loyalty of their work forces, who have responded very well to the challenge of this new approach.

As a result, there has been no significant disruption through labour relations problems in either yard since the change took place. That is a tribute to the good sense and restraint of all concerned. I should also like to record our appreciation of those within the Ministry of Defence's directorate general of ship refitting and dockyard planning team, who worked hard to make the installation of commercial management as smooth as possible.

We shall continue to keep the capacity of our defence refit capability under review. There is, as I am sure the House will recognise, a delicate balance to be maintained. On the one hand, we need to seek the undoubted benefits that open competition can bring — we have seen the benefits that it can bring—and, on the other, we have a responsibility to safeguard, by means of a core programme, the vital strategic assets in the royal dockyards, which include their ability, through regular experience and by maintaining the proper balance of work force skills, to repair and refit the most complex modern warships.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) referred to the importance of Portsmouth to the Navy.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sainsbury: I should like to respond to as many points as possible in the short time that is available.

As part of our continuing review of the capacity of our defence refit capability, the work done at the fleet maintenance and repair organisation at Portsmouth is being examined. While we value greatly the work that is done by the FMRO, it clearly cannot be immune to efficiency measures and to changes in the volume and make up of its work load. We cannot therefore guarantee that the current levels of employment there will continue indefinitely.

I should stress that Portsmouth, with its naval base and many training establishments, will remain a very important base for the Royal Navy, and the Ministry of Defence will remain a major employer in the area. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South that HMS Victory will remain as a tourist attraction run by the Navy.

We have every reason to be proud of the professionalism and dedication of our sailors and marines. I was glad that those qualities were recognised by all hon. Members. Their performance in the Gulf and elsewhere is evidence of their professionalism. We are determined to ensure that they are properly trained and equipped to carry out their demanding tasks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South rightly drew the attention of the House to the significant

[Mr. Sainsbury]

increases in the capability presented by modern ships and weapons systems. That improvement is well illustrated by our escort force so frequently referred to. In the past five years, the number of towed array frigates has more than doubled. The number of ships fitted with Sea Wolf has increased twofold, and the number equipped with Sea Dart has risen by 25 per cent. Those numbers are increasing all the time.

The improvements stem directly from the Government's major investment in the Royal Navy during the past nine years. Many benefits of that investment are still being realised. Of 60 vessels ordered since 1979, nearly half have still to be delivered. In 1987, in addition to the four ships accepted for service, some six vessels have been ordered and a further seven scheduled.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (ESTIMATES)

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 8th March, paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 53 (Questions on voting of estimates, etc.) shall apply to the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Younger relating to Estimates, 1987-88 (Army), Vote A or Estimates, 1987-88 (Air), Vote A as if the words 'for the coming financial year' in line 22 were omitted. — *[Mr. Maclean.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 10th March, the provisions of paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills) shall apply to proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (No. 3) Bill as if the Second Reading of the Bill stood as the first Order of the day. — *[Mr. Maclean.]*

10.1 pm

PETITION

Turner Memorial Hospital, Keith

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I have the honour to present a petition to the House on behalf of more than 3,200 of my constituents in the communities of Keith and Grange in Banffshire. The petition relates to the desire of my constituents to retain maternity facilities at the Turner Memorial hospital in Keith and states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The humble petition of the people of Keith and district and Grange (Parish), Keith

Sheweth that Grampian Health Board propose to close Keith maternity unit, Turner Memorial hospital, Keith.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will also be against the closure of the Keith maternity unit at the Turner Memorial hospital, Keith, Banffshire.

The number of petitioners represents 65 per cent. of the population in the area over the age of 16. That shows the strength of feeling of my constituents on this issue. I fully support their aims, and hope that the House will take cognisance of their desires.

To lie upon the Table.

Profoundly Mentally Handicapped (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie (Glasgow, Pollok): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to address the House in an Adjournment debate.

I wish to draw the Government's attention to the plight of Scotland's profoundly mentally handicapped, and to the provisions made by local authorities, health boards and voluntary organisations in providing care for that group and respite care for their families.

I should like to begin by defining, as best as I can, what it means to be profoundly mentally handicapped, to outline the problems in caring for that group and, finally, to suggest ways to improve facilities for this most deserving, and all too often forgotten, section of society.

Profoundly mentally handicapped people are very severely disabled, usually as a result of a congenital handicap, brain damage at birth or impaired development before birth. They have poor co-ordination and are often immobile, cannot feed, wash, dress or toilet themselves, are often incontinent, sometimes doubly incontinent, frequently have severe loss of hearing or sight, and do not have full powers of speech. In some cases they suffer acute epilepsy, taking multiple fits in rapid succession.

Profoundly mentally handicapped people therefore need constant round-the-clock care and attention to fulfil their most basic needs. They are totally dependent on those who look after them. That total dependency must never be forgotten. The degree of care that they need makes them different from other handicapped groups in society. There are roughly 5,000 people in Scotland in that category. A cause of great concern is that accurate figures cannot be obtained, which makes it difficult to plan community care programmes.

How then are the profoundly mentally handicapped cared for at the moment? Most of them are cared for at home where, in their natural environment, they are given all the tender, loving care that their parents so selflessly offer. It is generally agreed by parents, carers, the medical profession and, indeed, the Government, that the best care for this group is given when they are living at home in their neighbourhood communities.

But the parents of profoundly mentally handicapped people need support to help them to fulfil the task which, after all, demands all the time, energy and love that they can give. They also need a sign to reassure them that their children can exist and be happy without them in another environment which will also give them love and care.

Recent years have seen an increase in respite care facilities and in the provision of support services which are so vital in allowing parents to renew the great resources of strength that their everyday routine demands. Indeed, such back-up services have proved to be a godsend to such families, offering them the lifeline that they so desperately seek.

I have witnessed the excellent work done in the area of respite care because one such project, Mitre house, is in my constituency of Glasgow, Pollok. Such facilities give parents a breathing space in which to enjoy such luxuries as taking a holiday, going to a wedding, taking their other

children out for the day or attending hospital, all in the knowledge that their profoundly mentally handicapped children are safe and happy.

I have also seen the great benefits that day care facilities can bring to profoundly mentally handicapped people and their families. It is to the credit of Strathclyde regional council that it has increased the number of day care places from zero in 1976 to 200 last year. I have also seen the increase in independence, albeit it in a limited way, that creating specific places for the profoundly mentally handicapped in Strathclyde's adult training centres, such as the one in Priesthill in my constituency, can bring to this group and the accompanying relief that it gives to their families.

But those services, admirable as they are, only tinker with the problem because they are not wide enough to resolve it. The demand for services is far greater than their supply. That is in no way a criticism of the local authorities, health boards or voluntary organisations, because they all do a magnificent job within the limits of their resources. It is rather a plea for additional resources to be given to them to allow them to continue and expand their work.

There are still too many profoundly mentally handicapped people in institutions. Department of Health and Social Security allowances and day care facilities are insufficient and there are not enough community-based back-up services.

The various sectors have combined in recent years to overcome many of those problems. A typical example is the co-operation that exists between regional councils and the voluntary sector in providing residential accommodation in small locally based units. But such co-operation needs funding. Financial support must be given to provide the necessary day care facilities and to top up DHSS allowances.

The health boards are finding it difficult to cope with the demand for community-based specialist services such as speech therapy and physiotherapy. That is due to the general underfunding of the National Health Service, but it is a particularly tragic result since those services are so vital to the needs of the profoundly mentally handicapped and their families.

The Scottish Office statement of January 1987 acknowledged the need for additional local government resources, but it made no commitment to increase resources specifically for the profoundly mentally handicapped. Rather, the Government are waiting until they see the outcome of the Griffiths report for England and Wales.

Scotland's profoundly mentally handicapped cannot wait. Their plight is urgent and desperate. It is the plight of people who cannot speak for themselves. Therefore, it is our duty to plead on their behalf. With the urgency and desperation of that plea in mind, I would consequently ask the House to consider the following proposals.

First, I ask the Government to review their method of collecting information relating to the definition of being profoundly mentally handicapped. That would allow more accurate figures to be obtained, and, as a result, would allow the caring agencies to plan their community care programmes more accurately.

Secondly, I ask for the immediate release of money to local authorities to help them provide care for this group and respite care for their families. I further ask that the health board be given enough funds to allow it to meet the demands for community-based specialist services.

Thirdly, I hope that the Government will seriously consider the suggestion of Strathclyde regional council that the pitifully small DHSS residential care allowances be augmented with special rates for the profoundly mentally handicapped. Alternatively, if the Government decide to pass the full financial cost to local authorities, I ask that assurances be given that those authorities will receive the necessary funding to allow them to meet the needs of the profoundly mentally handicapped.

The way forward lies in the continued co-operation that already exists among the sectors that care for the profoundly mentally handicapped. I have already testified to the good work being done by three sectors in Strathclyde. It is echoed by similar provision being made by local authorities, health boards and voluntary organisations in other parts of Scotland. All these agencies need money to maintain existing services and to develop the new programmes of care that are so desperately needed.

I have already said that the profoundly mentally handicapped cannot speak for themselves. They do not form a powerful pressure group in today's rush-hour society, but their needs are constant, urgent and basic. Their silence is a plea for human understanding and dignity. It is a silence that compels us as a caring, Christian society to listen, to act and to give them the best that we have to offer. So I ask the House to hear the pleas of the profoundly mentally handicapped and I ask the Government to release sufficient funds to allow the continuation and expansion of the services that are so vital to the needs of these people and their families.

10.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie) for raising what is clearly a most important subject. His considerable experience in local government in Strathclyde before entering this House has clearly stood him in good stead in pursuing this matter with such vigour and obvious conviction, and I congratulate him on securing this debate and on his contribution to it.

It is difficult to be precise about the numbers of people who suffer from mental handicap. At one extreme, the handicap may be so slight as to be almost undetectable to others in daily living; at the other extreme there are those who are profoundly mentally handicapped—the group which we are talking about tonight.

It is a cruel fact that people with such handicaps have severe problems, which include difficulty in communicating their wishes and feelings to those who would like to help them. For that reason, they have to rely on other people to act on their behalf, to protect their rights and promote their welfare. The hon. Gentleman makes a plea on their behalf for human dignity and understanding. I am sure no one would dissent from that and I can assure him and this House that, as a Government, we are very much alive to the needs of this group. I hope that I can make that clear tonight.

On the health side, services for the mentally handicapped were of course identified in " Scottish Health Authorities Priorities for the Eighties" as being in the highest category of priority for the provision of services,

[Mr. Michael Forsyth]

and we have made clear to health boards and local authorities the emphasis that the Government wish to be placed on that priority group. It is only right that we should all do what we can to redress the balance in favour of handicapped people, and I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's plea for additional funds.

We have backed up our commitment with real increases in the money available. Since 1979, gross expenditure on the NHS in Scotland has grown by about 28 per cent. in real terms. In 1979, it was £1,053 million. This year it is estimated to be £2,334 million, an increase of more than 120 per cent. in cash terms. It is a similar story for local authority expenditure on social work services, and I shall turn to that later. The profoundly mentally handicapped are receiving benefits from these increases. The hon. Gentleman has acknowledged this, but, if I may say so, in a rather negative way.

Some profoundly mentally handicapped people have particular medical problems which require that they are cared for in specialist mental handicap or general hospitals for most of the time. Others live in residential schools that specialise in education appropriate to their needs. Many profoundly mentally handicapped people live at home all their lives and are cared for by their parents with help from a number of statutory and voluntary agencies.

The hon. Gentleman laid great stress on respite care, and was right to do so. I am pleased that hospitals have also increasingly been providing respite care. Such facilities are now available in most mental handicap hospitals, as well as psychiatric and geriatric hospitals and units, and in units for the younger physically handicapped and in a number of general hospitals. This recognises that it is of the utmost importance that relatives and other carers get a break from the burdens of constant care. Profoundly mentally handicapped people living at home will be supported by the primary care health services and community mental handicap nurses.

We have long recognised a need to move towards less reliance on the long-stay institutions and the evidence is that, even for those with the most severe form of handicap, less and less is hospital seen as the best solution. The numbers of mentally handicapped people in hospital have been decreasing steadily in recent years, from 6,678 in 1979 to 5,459 in 1986. That most welcome trend is due to considerable work in the hospitals to assess, train and discharge patients and to the provision of community facilities both for former patients and for those who, not so long ago, might have been admitted to hospital. The joint planning and support finance arrangements are also making a significant contribution in the controlled move towards greater community care. However, it is important to stress that community care is not the panacea for all ills. Great care is needed to avoid discharging people from hospital before proper facilities are available for them in the community.

For some, the specialist facilities of hospital will remain the most appropriate form of care and we accept that conditions in hospitals must be improved. We have committed substantial sums to achieve that in recent years. For example, at Lennox Castle two new 12-bed intensive care wards, when fully commissioned within the next few months, will allow for the provision of care and treatment on a concentrated basis for groups of mentally handicapped people including those with profound mental handicap. Since 1979, we have provided in excess of 2,000 new and replacement mental handicap and mental illness beds, at a cost of over £60 million.

Nowhere is that provision more evident than in two of Scotland's largest mental handicap hospitals. At Lennox Castle, against a falling patient population, the Greater Glasgow health board last year opened four new 30-bed wards to replace unsatisfactory accommodation, at a cost of £2·5 million with a 20 per cent. increase in nursing staff. At the Royal Scottish national hospital over the past two years, the Government have provided the Forth Valley health board with capital resources of £2 million to carry out significant improvements in the fabric of the buildings, once more against the background of a falling patient population. Around 300 of the population live in new or upgraded accommodation, providing higher amenities and more privacy. Further improvements are under way. The health board has been successful in recruiting around 140 nurses—an increase of 25 per cent. and there have been a number of other staffing improvements at the hospital. The Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland, which had been critical of conditions at both these hospitals, has now publicly acknowledged the improvements which have been made.

The improving levels of care and services which profoundly mentally handicapped people are receiving in hospital or otherwise under the NHS are only part of the story. Happily, many handicapped people are able to remain in the familiar surroundings of their own homes. The hon. Gentleman has paid tribute to those carers and I too have the greatest admiration for the dedication of families and other carers in looking after seriously handicapped people.

In looking at the care of the mentally handicapped in the community, perhaps I could turn first to education. Though not mentioned in detail by the hon. Gentleman it has long been recognised that even profoundly mentally handicapped children are capable of benefiting from education.

It is clearly important that special needs should be discovered and addressed as early in the child's life as possible. Education authorities may therefore start making appropriate provision for a handicapped child, even when he or she is below school age. A contribution in helping to identify such children whose difficulties may not always be immediately apparent will commonly be made by doctors, health visitors and social workers. That is typical of the co-operative and collaborative effort that is encompassed throughout community care.

There were, at the last count, 1,070 profoundly intellectually impaired children or young persons at school, of whom 808 attend special schools. That represents just over 10 per cent. of those children recorded as having special educational needs. The money provided for special education needs in 1987-88 amounted to £59·5 million. Next year it will be increased substantially, by some 18·5 per cent., to £70 million.

While many parents of profoundly mentally handicapped children may wish to have their children living with them at home once they leave school, there will be some for whom that will not be possible. In the past, admission to hospital has been the only available choice in most cases, but the position has changed in recent years as the "Balance of Care" study published a year ago shows.

The move towards care in the community is being brought about in a number of different ways. Local authorities themselves are devoting a larger proportion of their budgets to services for the mentally handicapped—5·5 per cent. in 1979-80 as against 7·8 per cent. in 1986-87 — but the budgets themselves are larger, as overall resources which we have made available have grown substantially in the past eight years. The planning figure for social work current expenditure in 1988-89 is 36 per cent. greater in real terms than in 1979-80 and 5·5 per cent. above authorities' own budgets for social work services in 1987-88.

Although there has been a substantial move away from the provision of fully staffed residential accommodation for those who are mildly or moderately mentally handicapped, some residential facilities are still being developed on a more traditional model. Those are undoubtedly serving a purpose for more severely mentally handicapped persons by allowing them to sustain their lives in the community in an environment which is fully supportive of their needs.

However, it is in the expanding field of day care that significant strides are being made in the development of community services for the care of mentally handicapped people. Day care, as well as allowing some respite, can provide much- needed scope for mentally handicapped people to develop skills and gain a sense of achievement in a variety of activities. In 1986, local authorities provided 6,542 day care places as against 4,387 in 1979, an increase of some 50 per cent. The voluntary sector also makes a valuable contribution as the hon. Gentleman said, providing a further 450 places.

Local authorities have increased the amount of residential provision for mentally handicapped persons which they make at their own hand, from 594 places in March 1979 to 865 places in 1986. There has also been a marked increase in the amount of accommodation provided by the voluntary sector. The number of places in voluntary establishments registered by the local authority has increased from 493 to 712 in the same period, but the range of accommodation which can meet needs extends to group homes and a variety of supported accommodation, including many schemes provided by housing associations. Together they make a sizeable contribution to housing in the community for the handicapped with over 460 units as at December 1987.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): If the Minister is so concerned—I am sure he is—about the care of the mentally handicapped, can he tell us why he and his colleagues insist that the mentally handicapped should pay the poll tax? Does he not think that it runs contrary to the philosophy he is espousing? It has been confirmed in written answers to me that as soon as the mentally handicapped are released into care in the community they will be liable for the poll tax. How on earth can that be justified? Will it not be a severe deterrent to people who are trying to rehabilitate the mentally handicapped in the community to find that they will be hammered by the poll tax on top of everything else?

Mr. Forsyth: I regret having given way to the hon. Gentleman. He will know that the proposed community charge is subject to a rebate scheme. He will also know that the severely mentally handicapped are exempt from the community charge. It is another example of the hon. Gentleman's attacks on the community charge, which seem to be based on a lack of information about what we propose.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Forsyth: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman again.

Not all the schemes to which I referred are designed to cater for the profoundly mentally handicapped, and there is still a need for additional residential accommodation. In that connection, I welcome the opening recently of a number of voluntary sector establishments. For example, the Fred Martin project for multiple and profoundly handicapped people is an inter-agency venture run by Barnardo's which has enabled some 16 people to be removed from hospital and accommodated in ordinary domestic-sized premises. Another, run by the Scottish Society for Autistic Children, is Balmyre house in Alloa —a residential hostel providing 24 places for young adults suffering from autism.

I very much agree with the positive things that have been said by the hon. Member for Pollock tonight about respite care. It is an area of growing interest in social work, not just for the mentally handicapped but for the whole range of clients whose care is provided in their own homes or elsewhere in the community. The role of residential accommodation in meeting respite care needs is recognised and the voluntary sector has a major role, as witnessed by such organisations as Crossroads, in the care of the physically handicapped.

While the main funding responsibility for local social work services rests with local authorities, developments in respite care have been made possible in some cases such as Mitre house run by the archdiocese of Glasgow to which the hon. Member for Pollock referred, with financial support from the Government through the urban programme.

Other bodies have been helped through a special programme of grants recently provided by us. Of the various projects which received grant aid for three years through the care in the community initiative commenced in 1985, four were for the mentally handicapped. Over the three years, the projects will have received some £165,000. In practical terms they have brought short-term respite care to 15 families in Dunfermline; helped extend day care in Skye; provided the opportunity for mentally handicapped people in Glasgow to live away from their families for short periods; and helped a number of people in Edinburgh into supported accommodation.

I should also mention the action taken within the past few weeks to help another five projects get under way by offering capital grants totalling about £150,000. Much of this relates to the cost of converting and fitting out accommodation. Some of the projects will provide residential accommodation in the community, and others —the hon. Gentleman will be delighted to hear this— will provide respite care facilities.

We have had an interesting and, I hope, useful debate this evening on this important area of the National Health Service and local authority activity. We have heard also of provision outwith these areas by families and the voluntary sector. It is to the hon. Gentleman's credit that he has chosen to highlight the needs of these disadvantaged people and their carers. In my response, while I was, perhaps, not able entirely to satisfy the hon.

[Mr. Forsyth]

Gentleman's questions, I hope that I have demonstrated that care and services for the profoundly mentally handicapped are generally being provided at an appropriate level, and that where improvements can be made these are being addressed. I have noted the hon. Gentleman's view that planning would be facilitated by better statistical information. There are difficulties, but I shall certainly look at this matter to see whether any improvements might be practicable and I am grateful to him for making the suggestion.

I have also noted the hon. Gentleman's reference to difficulties with regard to provision of speech therapists and physiotherapists. As recently as 22 February I met COSLA to discuss this very matter, and I agreed at that meeting to take up the matter with health board chairmen. I shall be doing so when I meet them on 18 March. Perhaps I could mention that in the NHS we have managed to increase the numbers of speech therapists by 32 per cent., and physiotherapists by 28 per cent. since 1979.

We continue to pursue the move from hospital care to community care, where proper facilities are available. To those who say, "Do more," I point to the considerable improvements that have already been made, and to the substantial increases in funding that we have given to the NHS and to local authorities so that services can be maintained and further improved for this important group of people and their carers.

Mr. Dunnachie: May I thank the Minister for his reply to me, but say that he leaves me somewhat baffled. The group that I am talking about are the Cinderellas, those with mental illness. They have little or no help. I am surprised when you tell me this, as I know for a fact that when we talk about——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 4 March 1988

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Enterprise Initiative

9.35 am

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I beg to move,

That this House recognises the importance of design, quality, marketing and manufacturing systems among the key issues which influence the competitiveness of British industry, and welcomes the policies of the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department for Enterprise, to promote greater attention to these factors in businesses both through the Enterprise Initiative and other measures.

It is my purpose to give hon. Members an opportunity to debate the enterprise initiative of this Government, especially those aspects of it that are intended to encourage better design, quality, marketing and manufacturing systems. The imperative for doing that is to be found in the need for our firms to compete in increasingly competitive national and international markets. Happily, the best firms in this country know that and have made great strides in recent years, which have been demonstrated by what has been achieved so far in improved performance, productivity and competitiveness.

However, there is still some way to go, by international standards, before all our firms, large and small, join these welcome improvements. For example, I am sure that the House is pleased to hear that manufacturing productivity in the fourth quarter of 1987 was more than 6 per cent. up on a year before, and up by more than 40 per cent. since 1979. Manufacturing profitability has risen every year since 1981, and in 1986 was at its highest level since 1973. Manufacturing output per head has grown faster in the United Kingdom since 1980 than in all other major countries, and even unit labour costs, which for so long were one of our principal problems in maintaining our international competitiveness, are now thought to be rising at a lower rate than those of our competitors.

All this is satisfactory evidence of movement in the right direction. In the future, we shall be able to maintain and improve our competitive edge only if we continue to improve our competitiveness in both price and non-price factors. A recent Design Council publication reported two pieces of interesting evidence in support of that assertion. The first was that an analysis of the different factors affecting the export of West German goods to the United States revealed that 47 per cent. were design-related, as compared with 28 per cent. that were price-related. So the design factor was by far the most important.

Another study of the reasons why British manufacturers bought foreign machine tools rather than British ones attributed 51 per cent. of the cause to design-related factors and only 5 per cent. to price-related ones. I therefore want to turn my attention to the crucial area of design.

The Design Council states in one of its excellent documents, entitled "Profit by Design":

"Good design is not an optional extra — it is a vital ingredient in the success of any firm. To grow or even to survive British industry must offer products which can compete in quality, performance, cost and appearance in increasingly competitive world markets."

Our foreign competitors have known and practised that gospel for some time. For example, the Danish electronics firm Bang and Olufsen manufactures and sells beautiful hi-fi equipment in this country and other parts of the world. The German motor manufacturers Porsche, BMW and Audi in their various ways have made their products into quality, even cult, items through their excellent design. We have all heard the famous advertising slogan "Vorsprung durch Technik". That slogan brings a wry smile to people's lips, but it also makes a statement about the product and the way it is perceived. Such statements can be convincing in the eyes of the public only if they are based on good design and sound performance.

We should also consider the Japanese camera and optical equipment firm Canon which happens to have its United Kingdom headquarters in my constituency. Canon has led the world with its SLR and compact cameras and now leads the world with its small tabletop photocopiers and other business equipment. Those are a few examples of firms whose success in the international market has been based on good design, among other vital factors.

Fortunately, the need for better design in British products has been recognised at the highest level in this country. Long before the latest enterprise initiative which my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry was so right to launch earlier this year, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, doubtless as a result of the tireless efforts of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs, gave the lead by chairing a seminar on design at 10 Downing street in January 1982. Many hon. Members will be aware that it was followed by another seminar in January 1987 to monitor the progress and give further impetus.

The Design Council, first as the Council of Industrial Design from 1944 to 1972, and latterly in its present role, has played a valuable part in keeping the flag flying for the improvement of British design in all its forms. I submit that we need to do still more in every way to spread the best design practices throughout our industrial sector and especially among small firms which, if we define them as companies with 500 or fewer employees, constitute roughly 95 per cent. of firms in this country.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the definition of a small firm should be one with 500 or fewer employees? Is he aware that many people regard even the Bolton definition of 200 employees as being vastly in excess of what it ought to be?

Mr. Forman: I am aware of that. I thought that my comments might take the hon. Gentleman by surprise. However, a cut-off point of 500 employees is used in relation to enterprise counselling and other services available from the Department of Trade and Industry. That is why I used that figure. However, I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that a layman's definition of a small firm may be considerably smaller than one employing 500 employees.

Much that is happening in this area is being stimulated by the Government. I welcome the assistance available

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from the DTI for consultancy arrangements on the design and development of new products and the redesigning of existing products to meet market, financial or production needs. It is important that firms should constantly assess and renew the quality of design, even when they believe that they have a market lead. These things do not remain static. I particularly welcome the fact that, since its inception in 1982, the support for design scheme has attracted nearly 7,000 applications for assistance, and 3,000 projects have been completed. I suggest that we need to generalise the best practice to ensure that it is taken on board throughout British industry among both large and small firms.

Perhaps one simple example will do more than anything else to illustrate my case. It is all too easy for arguments to become a little too abstract. As I recently bought a new jug kettle, I speak from experience in this matter. Indeed, I am well aware that my example illustrates the benefits of good design and I can vouch for the aesthetic appeal and effectiveness of the design. My example concerns a jug kettle, which, Mr. Speaker, you may have in your home or in your Apartment in the Palace of Westminster. The kettle is manufactured by GEC Redring. Approximately 65 per cent. of British households own a plastic jug kettle yet 15 years ago they did not exist. That shows the importance of innovation and design. According to a Design Council document "Profit by Design",

"Redring supplied elements to kettle manufacturers and did not manufacture complete kettles. But the company decided to buy a conventionally shaped kettle made out of plastics and developed it to a satisfactory level of reliability. Being non-automatic, the profits were small and it was stopped after a year in which much valuable experience of plastic kettles had been gained. However, a London industrial designer"—

and here comes the element of design—

"David Harris, was working independently on a design for a plastic jug kettle and had approached all the potential manufacturers to try to interest them in producing the new kettle design.

Redring Managing Director, Mike Johnson and Max Byrd, Development Manager, saw the advantages—a jug kettle can be filled with less than half an inch of water which can save up to £40 a year in electricity bills; it handles and pours better; plastic is much lighter and does not burn the user; perhaps most importantly, in the long run, the plastic jug kettle costs less to produce.

So Redring bought the rights to the design. Said Byrd, 'it was frightening and exciting at the same time—we had to start from scratch because there was no other kettle like it.' Development took about a year—no complete prototypes were able to be made so tooling took place straight off the drawing board.

The Redring kettle was launched in 1980. Within two years the company had 15 per cent. of the kettle market."

I quote that example at some length to show what can be done through a combination of imagination and determination with a simple product. Often the simple products most need the benefits of good modern design.

However, if we are to succeed in changing attitudes towards design throughout British industry, we will need to ensure that more managers understand that good design must be an integral part of the whole manufacturing process and that well-designed products sell better and can also be cheaper to produce.

That underlines the need to educate existing managers about the importance and value of good design and to ensure that design forms an important part of school and business management education. We must ensure that design is included in the national curriculum being developed by the Department of Education and Science and that it is more widely accepted as a subject for A-level examinations.

The educational aspect of the problem poses a triple challenge. First, more design studies should be incorporated into business management courses, beyond the six schemes now funded by the DTI at five polytechnics and one college of further education. Secondly, we must increase business awareness among design students at degree level. Finally, we must plug the most serious gap in our educational provision in this area—the shortage of multidisciplinary product designers and design managers of the kind now being produced in only woefully small numbers in this country by Imperial College and the Royal College of Art in their pioneering course on industrial design engineering.

Happily, I believe that I am pushing at an open door. I take great comfort from the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he opened a recent exhibition at the Design Centre in London. He made clear the direction in which the Government intend to raise the awareness of design in education still further. He drew attention to a £1·5 million initiative for pilot courses in engineering design in polytechnics and colleges and referred to the preparation of a consultative document on design in schools and mentioned action to improve the supply of craft design and technology teachers in schools. He said that recruitment to CDT teacher training courses—for which a new Government bursary is available—increased, I am glad to say, by 65 per cent. last year and 382 students enrolled on courses in the autumn of 1986, compared with only 231 in 1985. Clearly, we are making good progress in that direction, but we need to move further and faster, because it is vital to our competitive success.

It is a most welcome development that British industry is now putting much greater emphasis on quality. That is an increasingly important factor in maintaining and improving our international competitiveness and it should be an integral part of all manufacturing. As a chapter of the White Paper on the enterprise initiative points out, it is vital to encourage and improve quality and ensure that this is done through British standards and, increasingly, through international standards institutions as well. The fundamental insistence on quality must become part of the ethos of all firms. It must be built into their design and components and into the attitudes of their work force, from top to bottom. For many German and Japanese firms it is a corporate philosophy—almost a way of life. It would be good to see British firms following that lead.

I welcome the fact that the Government are playing their part with the national quality campaign, which has been going since 1983. I entirely agree with the Secretary of State's remarks in a recent document entitled "The Case for Quality":

"The inescapable message from all this is that if you want your customers to come back, you need to ensure that your products don't."

Once again, we can learn from the Japanese and the Germans, who often achieve companywide commitment to quality and manage to involve all their employees in their quality campaigns.

An excellent example of what can be achieved by the application of quality cost management is provided by Mullard, part of the Philips group, which has factories in Blackburn and, incidentally, in my constituency. Mullard

has concentrated effectively on the application of quality cost management and applied it in producing tungsten filaments, picture tube cathodes and video discs. For the expenditure of small sums—the timely investment of not more than tens of thousands of pounds in each case—Mullard has managed to achieve terrific results, which prove absolutely that attention to quality and the upgrading of quality in existing products is the right answer for modern firms in a competitive environment. It pays off handsomely in terms of reduced costs, extra business and improved job satisfaction for employees, which also should not be underestimated. If one involves all employees in the upgrading of quality, they will become more fully committed to the standard of the product that they produce.

In better marketing, too, there are great opportunities for British industry to increase its competitiveness and market share both at home and in the export markets. Indeed, improved marketing is the next logical stage in the improvement of company performance, now that the necessary manning reductions, efficiency improvements and better industrial relations have been achieved in many cases. I therefore warmly welcome the marketing initiative, which is managed for the Department of Trade and Industry by the Institute of Marketing and which provides expert consultants to help firms to develop a more effective marketing strategy especially in export markets.

I understand that so far the financial support for the marketing initiative has trebled over the space of a few years to £6·25 million a year and that 1,400 companies have already taken advantage of the scheme. That is good news and my hon. Friend the Minister and his Department are to be commended for their contribution to our commercial success.

Schemes such as the marketing initiative can help companies with better presentation of their products, bring home to them the advantages of greater product differentiation and emphasise to management and all who work in British companies that, ultimately, the customer must be king. The success stories of companies that have adopted that approach—without any need for external stimulus—include some examples well known to the House, such as Amstrad computers and Clark's shoes, and we must encourage more of the same. One of the most important common denominators in all marketing success is firms' ability to look ahead and make full use of well-informed market projections such as those produced by the Henley Centre for Forecasting.

In the modern world in which the customer is king, it is vital for companies to have a clearer idea of new processes as well as new products and to spot the fact that consumer markets are increasingly defined in terms of community of interest rather than community in the geographical or class sense. Examples include the hi-fi community, the water sports community and the personal computer community. How many firms fully realise the potential for financial services and financial counselling now that as many as 75 per cent. of the population have a bank account? It is estimated by the Henley Centre that over the next 10 years real personal disposable incomes may increase by a further 20 per cent. The opportunities for the management of those new income flows will be considerable.

In such a rapidly changing commercial environment the firms that look ahead will stay ahead, while those that fail to do so will decline and may even go under. Let me give a few examples to illustrate that. McCarthy and Stone saw the opportunities to provide for the aging population much more effectively and has benefited accordingly. Securicor saw opportunities to provide better security in times, alas, of increasing crime. Black and Decker saw the enormous opportunities provided by the DIY revolution and Beechams saw the possibility of turning Lucozade and Ribena—with the help of Daley Thompson—into drinks for the rapidly expanding health market.

Those examples show the importance of identifying and taking market opportunities and also how much can be done even without Government help, let alone with the backing of the schemes about which I am sure the Minister will tell the House later.

Finally, we need new manufacturing systems such as computer-aided design, robotics and other new methods of production management, which can all help to produce significant improvements in the competitive performance of British industry. As computers become relatively cheaper and better understood, it should be possible to encourage their wider application, especially in smaller companies. That will not only enhance the efficiency of production processes, but will encourage management to think through the challenges of businesses in a more systematic way. It should also have a beneficial effect on the suppliers and components manufacturers for large firms that have already computerised and automated their processes. The White Paper makes it clear that the adoption of such techniques is not simply a matter of buying in the technology; it is at least as much about changing management systems to integrate production, marketing and design and to improve quality.

In a sense, I have come full circle. Since the central message of the White Paper and all the Government's excellent efforts to foster enterprise and competitiveness in British industry is that we have now entered an era in which quality and the skills of management, acting in fruitful co-operation with fellow employees, will, more than anything else, determine the economic success of firms in this country. I commend my hon. Friend the Minister and his Department for all that they are doing, but I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that, in the end, it is up to British industry to do more of what must be done.

9.58 am

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I apologise to the House and to the Labour and Government Front Benches for the fact that I may have to leave rather earlier than I had hoped and therefore may not hear the winding-up speeches.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Is the new party coming apart already?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman will know that we all have constituency duties outside the House and have to drag ourselves away from time to time, much as we might prefer to be here.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) on having secured the debate and chosen an extremely important subject. In the early part of his speech, he gave the official Government view and painted a rosy picture of the British economy. He talked about increasing competitiveness and unit labour costs. He failed—I understand why—to ascribe those

[Mr. Ashdown]

developments in large measure to their real cause, which is the enormous exercise in the removal of manpower and growing unemployment in Britain. Nevertheless, I admit that efficiency in unit output has improved, but not enough to make Britain more competitive compared with our key European competitors, who have improved even faster. That is shown too clearly in the falling level of our share of world trade and, more than that, in our enormous and burgeoning trade deficits. I shall certainly touch on those matters, although the hon. Gentleman did not, because they are the underlying problems of the British economy. Many external commentators agree with me that those problems will come home to roost in short order.

To start on an optimistic note, the Government have done one or two things that needed to be done. I am not prepared to say that they have done nothing useful for Britain. That would be ludicrous. Their greatest achievement has been the democratisation of the trade union movement, ensuring that the government of Britain is returned to the democratically elected Parliament. That should not be reversed. Their second greatest achievement has been to set Britain on the road towards a much more enterprise-oriented economy, which will depend more on small business men, the self-employed, initiative and enterprise. Indeed, they have not been radical enough in pursuit of that aim.

One of the Government's great faults was apparent in the hon. Gentleman's speech when he defined small businesses as those with 500 employees or fewer. That is ludicrous. The Government have too readily understood the problems of large businesses and have been too ignorant of the genuine problems of extremely small businesses of one, two or three people, where assistance has always been provided to help with the initial set-up — that is commendable in itself — but where real assistance is required at the point of expansion when a business decides to double the number of its employees. That is the point when the prosperity that the business can generate and the jobs that it can provide receive a quantum leap, and at that point there is nothing except the business expansion scheme, welcome though it is. Far too much emphasis is put elsewhere.

The move towards an enterprise economy is to be welcomed, although it has not gone far enough, and for that reason this document, so far as it addresses that problem, is welcome. The rhetoric and hype are unexceptionable, but one must ask whether it is all that Britain needs now. One comes ineluctably to the conclusion that it is much more about public relations and hype than about tackling the underlying problems of the United Kingdom economy. Except for the stimulation of enterprise, the improvement in design, and new technologies, the underlying problems are not addressed.

What are those problems? We look at the rosy picture of the British economy of the hon. Gentleman and of the Government and we begin to see a picture of a wholly different hue. Since 1979 one fifth of our industrial base has been wiped away. It will not come back; it has been destroyed from the face of the map. Obviously, the world economy has passed through a period of restructuring, and no one would doubt that. I do not lay all the blame on the Government. But a Government with any kind of industrial strategy for the future have a medium-term financial strategy, so why not an industrial strategy? I am suggesting not an indicative plan, such as the Labour party would have put forward in the 1970s and may even put forward now, but one that will point the way to the future and help us to overcome that period of restructuring as other western European industrial democracies have. In the free market system with its hands-off, know-nothing and do-not-care-less approach we have lost one fifth of the industrial base on which our industry will always depend. However great the growth in the service sector, the service industries depend in large measure on an industrial base and feed off it, as United States' experience shows clearly. Whatever shift in growth there may be, the decline of our industrial base is deeply damaging.

Mr. Forman: To put his case in perspective, will the hon. Gentleman concede that the problems of industrial adjustment and restructuring, which involve the decline of some parts of the traditional manufacturing sector and the arrival of other new manufacturing processes, has been going on in all western industrial countries?

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Not at this pace.

Mr. Ashdown: Indeed so, but, as the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) says, not at this pace. The regrowth of a new industrial base has not been assisted, and I am thinking of the new technologies. The hon. Gentleman and I will agree that we must move to a low resource use and high value added economic base. That means using new technologies. But we have seen the deficit in new technology trade grow to astronomical proportions in the past eight years. It is now running at about £3 billion a year. There is no evidence that those key strategic new technologies which we shall need to make the shift that the hon. Gentleman suggests are growing. The deficit shows that only too clearly. One of the brave statements in the document is:

> "The starting point of our strategy—one which I have called our enterprise strategy in the White Paper—is the need for business to succeed against world competition."

We are doing appallingly badly. Our trade deficit must cause serious anxiety, even to the Government whose predilection is these matters is to close their eyes and pretend that problems are not there. In 1980, we had a £1,361 billion surplus in trade; last year we were heading towards a £9·5 billion deficit. That is a shift of £11 billion in the past six years. Even in the new technologies, where we must do well to succeed, that deficit is as bad, if not worse.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, nevertheless, our official reserves are at their highest level ever?

Mr. Ashdown: Of course, I am not saying that. Indeed, Britain has invested huge sums overseas. The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I that that has much more to do with the happenstance and luck of North sea oil and its effect on the British economy than any other underlying strength of our industrial and economic base outside the oil sector.

We should be seeing some action from the Government which will stimulate the long-term investment, which Britain lacks so badly, of patient money, such as occurs in Japan. Of course, it does not produce a return inside the year that the City operates, nor does it unhinge stocks and shares because it causes a temporary downturn in accounts

produced at the end of the year. We need to think about the strategic new technologies and about producing some stability in our exchange rate by joining the EMS.

The second major problem not addressed in the document is the terrible imbalance between the prosperous and pampered south-east, which is undoubtedly doing extremely well, and the other areas, which have largely been left out in the cold. The Government have unstitched and unpicked any concept of a regional policy. These factors come out clearly. Yesterday from the Library I got the figures for investment in venture capital to see what the regional disparities were. They are startling. I discovered that on the latest figures available 63·7 per cent. of all venture capital is now invested in the south-east. There is not a region, save only the north, which even gets into double figures. Actually, the north is just over double figures. About 11 per cent. of all venture capital is invested in the north. Obviously, that is welcome. However, in Wales the figure is 2·6 per cent.; in the south-west it is 4·9 per cent.; and only 5 per cent. of all venture capital has been invested in the midlands—an area that has been more devastated than any other by the economic and industrial restructuring to which the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington referred.

There is nothing in the document to begin to redress that. One cannot see signs of any effort by the Government to begin to have a programme to encourage industry and to give economic strength to other areas of Britain. The south-east of our nation is doing very well, but the rest of our nation is not. That imbalance cannot be continued without serious damage to our economy and perhaps to our social cohesion as well.

I turn next to what the Government say is their underlying strategy—their rhetoric about competition. I agree with that rhetoric and believe strongly that competition in the market place is absolutely vital. I believe that market forces should run the economy rather than the Government control it in minute detail. Indeed, the general view could be, "The market where possible, the state where necessary."

However, do we see that rhetoric of competition in the Government's actions? One can find it in the words in the document, but what actually happens? Let us take, for example, a public sector corporation such as British Telecom. Did the Government privatise that in a way that would encourage competition? Of course not. They converted a public monopoly into a private monopoly to assist their friends. When we consider what the Government have been doing about British Airways and British Caledonian, do we see that they have opted for a competitive approach? Of course not. We see a conglomeration of large elements in the market place, and that is anti-competitive. One finds the same with the privatisation of British Gas and in the Government's approach to the British Petroleum-Britoil affair.

Time and again, when the Government are given the opportunity to encourage competition, they opt for the larger semi-monopolistic forces in the market place, instead of generating real competition. Even in the case of the larger corporations——

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Ashdown: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman later.

Even in the case of the larger corporations, where one can see that in the interests of the consumers, the setting up of watchdog bodies might be able to control the huge insensitive corporations, such as the privatised BT, the watchdog bodies are created in a manner which makes them almost totally toothless. However I agree with the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington that the consumer is a vital element and I should like the market place to be run by the individual choice of the consumer rather than by the power of the monopoly producer, of the mass producer and supplier.

Mr. Riddick: Can I assume, from what the hon. Gentleman has said, that he wholeheartedly welcomes the way in which the Government propose to privatise electricity in this country?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman asks a question, so I shall give him a straight answer. No, I do not wholeheartedly welcome it. Just because I expound a principle, that does not mean that I therefore ascribe to the total detail of what the Government do in any particular case. The hon. Gentleman might have asked me the same question about BT, and my answer to him would have been no, because the privatisation was not competitive. However, if one intended to privatise the electricity industry, there could be a case for keeping the grid in national hands and then having privatisation of suppliers feeding into the grid. If we are to achieve competition, I believe that that is the way we shall do so. Creating a situation where one body has 70 per cent. of the market, and the rest 30 per cent., is not competitive. Indeed, that is creating sharks and minnows in the market place, which is exactly the opposite to what I believe should happen, and to what it seemed to me that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington might have been proposing.

I move on to a subject on which I have already touched briefly——

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): The House should not allow the hon. Gentleman to get away with his comments about toothless watchdogs, because we recently had a prime example of Oftel drawing the attention of British Telecom to its chat lines and abuses of them. If being bitten by a toothless dog results in one taking pretty prompt action, I think that such watchdogs are effective.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman has chosen the one area in which they have been effective. I shall be more generous to Oftel because it has tried hard to do a good job within the constraints. Over the issues of Talkabout programmes and telephone boxes, on which it has recently done a good job, that watchdog has been effective. However, there are many other areas. I suggest that we would not have got into this powerless situation with regard to the inefficiencies and inadequacies of BT if Oftel had had the power to operate much earlier. The fact that it has now been able to operate does not mean that the organisation is perfect. Indeed, in different circumstances that situation may not have occurred. Anybody, including those inside Oftel, would agree that some of its powers are inadequate to the task of controlling what is a huge private monopoly.

I move on to another besetting problem on which I have touched previously. I refer to the short-termism which runs the British economy and which certainly runs the investment sector. One sees, hears and reads about that time and again in the City of London—a place where young men earn £120,000 or £130,000 per year when they

[Mr. Ashdown]

are not yet 30, on the basis of a turnaround and profits shown in the portfolio of their stocks, measured over a week. In that situation, Britain is manifestly not making what I have already described as those patient money investments to bring on the new technologies in a manner that would return investment to the nation in the years to come. Instead there is a candyfloss, hamburger-style economy in which, if one cannot make a profit inside a year, one had better not continue the operation. In such a situation, the stocks and shares of any given company will fall according to what the published accounts say because people are making snapshot decisions instead of looking underneath to discover whether the company is making long-term investments. Indeed, all too frequently, a company that makes a long-term investment in technology becomes prey to a raider because the price of its stocks falls and it gets snapped up. There is a degree of technology buy-out in the same way as there was asset and property acquisition in the 1960s and 1970s.

It is not surprising that the City of London behaves in that fashion because it is set that model by the Government who also behave in that fashion. The short-termism that runs through the Government at present is deeply unpleasant, unwelcome and unhealthy for our future economy.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John Butcher) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Ashdown: The Minister is shaking his head, so I shall give him an example. When the Government privatised British Telecom or British Gas — I do not doubt for a second that there was a case for privatisation, and although I believe that British Gas should not have been privatised, I saw no reason why Rolls-Royce should not have been privatised and put in the market place if it was done in a reasonable fashion — if they had been taking a long-term view, they would have used that money to invest in the British economy, and not to pay off that year's bills or to balance the books. No sensible business man would dispose of assets in that fashion. The Government use money in a short-term way, and that affects others who make investment decisions.

None of those problems are addressed in the document although they should be, because they are the besetting, underlying difficulties and problems of the British economy. Instead we have what I can only describe as a degree of public relations hype. One need only consider the advertising budget for the initiative, which is now bigger than the budget for the small firms unit, as I think the Minister knows, in Lord Young's previous Department, the Department of Employment. The advertising budget is huge, and in some ways it is a waste. If the document seeks to give a profile to enterprise, that is useful, but why not tackle the real problems of the British economy? Sam Brittan in the *Financial Times* said that he thought it was a

"sender up of Thatcherism by a hostile satirist."

Perhaps one can understand those comments because the way in which this matter has been handled is ludicrous to the point of being farcical. Chapter 7, for instance, states:

"In all our work we will take account of the differing circumstances of the regions and of the Inner Cities to enable those who live there to help themselves."

The document tells us that we are about to become aware of the problems of Britain's regions. However, if one picks up the popular version of the document, one finds that there is not much evidence that the DTI knows about the regions outside London. Having looked at it the other day, I noticed that, on the map, Cardiff has been put where Swansea is, Poole where Weymouth is, Reading where Oxford is and Coventry where Worcester is. There is not much evidence that the Department knows its way around anywhere outside the City of London.

Is that the kind of efficiency that we would expect the Department of Trade and Industry to set as an example for others? I am told that the calendar that it has produced had one week that contained three Tuesdays. The Department does not seem to know its way round Britain, or even what time it is. That is not a good example to set for industry. If that is what the Department of Trade and Industry means by showing concern for efficiency and a knowledge of the regions of Britain, I am not impressed. I do not suppose that other people will be impressed either, except those who are impressed by the candy floss of the PR man.

I accept the need for the move towards an enterprise economy. There is a need to go faster, to be more radical and to encourage small businesses and enterprise, but the document is a triumph of public relations over hard policy. There is nothing in it that will tackle the balance of payments problems which are inexorably approaching Britain. There is nothing in it to tackle the growing trade chasm which is opening up. There is nothing in it to end the tragic divisions between the pampered, prosperous and, in many ways, profligate south-east and the dog-eared dereliction that one finds all too frequently elsewhere in the old industrial bases of the nation.

There is nothing in the document to remedy the devastated industrial base of Britian. There is nothing for that consuming short-termism which is mortgaging the future for a quick buck today, stimulated by a Government who have set the pace by flogging off public assets, not for investment, but to squander on this year's bills. There is nothing to solve the deep-seated, underlying problems which have caused Britain to fall behind her industrial competitors, both in their effectiveness and in their share of world trade. If the Government turned their attention to those problems, we should sit up and listen, but this is, frankly, fiddling while Britain's industrial base is in severe danger of decaying in a way which will damage our future economy and perhaps the social cohesion of our nation.

10.21 am

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): The Liberal spokesman, the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), made an interesting speech and I agree with many of his arguments. Everyone who listened to his speech will regard it as a balanced contribution to the debate.

There is a surprised expression on the face of my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), the Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household. It is sometimes possible to refer to a speech by a member of another party and to say that there are some points worthy of attention or agreement, without it being regarded as heretical. The notion that one must never agree with anyone in another party strikes me as very strange, but perhaps I am being unfair to my hon. Friend, because he

cannot speak in the House. Nevertheless, he can speak outside the House where he no doubt makes robust speeches on the policies that we are debating today.

I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) on his personal enterprise initiative in selecting this subject for debate. He will not misunderstand me when I say that the acceptability and blandness of his motion means that everybody can agree with it, but that is good sense in itself and a traditional Conservative approach to policy matters. It contains some good points which need wholehearted support.

I apologise for having missed my hon. Friend's initial remarks, but he is right in saying that, whatever ideas come from other parties, the Government and the Conservative party have a strong monopoly of ideas in this area. I also add my support and commendation for what the Government have achieved, very remarkably, since 1979 in respect of some aspects of the long-term transformation of the economy.

However, there are considerable problems that still need tackling. The fact that they have not yet been tackled reflects, to some extent, the excessive divisiveness of our political system which has become more pronounced in recent years and has prevented us from reaching the consensus solutions which are required urgently by Parliament and by any Government to overcome those problems.

The old curate's egg description of the Government's achievements would be right. When I say that, I do not wish to alarm my hon. Friend the Member for Watford by seeming to be churlish, as I am most enthusiastic about some key elements of the Government's achievements. Although it is an intangible and ethereal factor and, to some extent, an emotional and psychological point, one of the most important factors has been the change of attitudes. A great friend of mine, who is a peer in the other place, has a reputation for getting up at 11 o'clock in the morning in the traditional style of peers. I was rather amused when he said that one of the most marvellous things that the Government have done is to bring in a new work ethic. I shall not name him, as it was an accidental remark, although, if he reads *Hansard*, he will know that I am referring to him. He was correct about all the other citizens of this country, but not about himself, as he still gets up at ll o'clock.

There has been a great change in attitude and a reinculcation of the work ethic. I am a City person and admit that the City is often justly criticised. However, people in the City come into work early, not just the ordinary employees in any organisation, but the people who run that organisation. We also see that in industry. The attitude to work, for those who are fortunate to have it, has improved enormously from top to bottom. For example, directors and employees in factories are now on first name terms, but, in some traditional establishments, that used to be regarded as wicked only a few years ago. Such points may be considered trivial, but they are important factors in that change.

When the hon. Member for Yeovil referred to the Government's achievements in respect of trade unions, he was supporting an aspect of Government policy. Those are definite, unshakeable achievements which are admitted by all trade unionists, not simply Right-wing trade unionists. They will represent a tangible, monumental achievement for this country if their effects are lasting.

I pay tribute to the Government Departments, particularly the Department of Trade and Industry. I do not believe that the recent changes are superficial and merely PR hype. They are real and deep expressions of the change of attitude and behaviour within those Departments. I pay tribute to the Departments because I hear so many business men speak of the way in which Department officials assist them and put forward ideas.

I reject the old-fashioned notion — it might be supported by Professor Patrick Minford, for example, although I must not misquote him as he has never said this to me — that a civil servant cannot be as heroic as a private business man. Civil servants are just as good as private business men. The fact that they work in the public sector does not matter. There are many entrepreneurial officials in the Department of Trade and Industry, and I warmly congratulate the Secretary of State on creating a Department that works positively for industry, rather than a bureaucracy that holds industry back. Perhaps that encapsulates the best of all the subtle changes of the past few years.

Unfortunately, the picture is not entirely rosy. The balance of payment figures represent a severe problem. I am very much concerned about our problem of low output. I chide the Government with reluctance and with my customary sadness for allowing their propaganda to skate over the awkward truth. I used to enjoy reading *The Economist*, which I regarded as essential reading, but I now regard it as an increasingly silly magazine, partly because it has started to pursue a particular line. That is a great mistake. The *Financial Times* is an excellent newspaper because it does not pursue a particular line.

Recently, *The Economist* contained an article whose theme was the comparison between the West German and British motor car industries. It referred to the doldrums in the German motor industry and the triumph of the British motor industry. I am delighted that the British motor industry is now experiencing an upswing and is going through a better phase. It has done much to improve itself, although it has some problems at present. The article stated that the total German output of private motor cars was 4.4 million, about two thirds of which were for export. But it conveniently left out the British output figure, which was about 1.7 million following the recent increase — it used to be about 1.4 million. Those figures may not be entirely accurate, but I hope that they are a near approximation.

To leave out that was absurd. Although Germany is, as we know, a high-cost, high-quality, high-reliability economy, it is manifestly the most successful, the premier capitalist economy of Europe. The hon. Member for Yeovil mentioned all the depredations that we have suffered, paricularly since 1980 and 1981. We were the only country that became recessionary in physical manufacturing output — the only one of the OECD-classified list of economies of our size of 50 million or 60 million — to suffer a backwardation in real manufactured output. The German economy is much bigger than ours. It is absurd to say that it is not as successful, and for the Government to concentrate on productivity increase figures that come from units of output per employee. That is misleading, unless the total output figures are also included.

Mr. Ashdown: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has noticed, as I have, that the Government go a stage

[Mr. Ashdown]

further in massaging the figures by always producing those that measure the position from the lowest point of the depression in 1981, rather than those from when they came to power in 1979, which would look entirely different. I understand that the total manufacturing output in Britain today is only a blip above its 1979 level.

Mr. Dykes: I think that it is more than a blip above. In the past six months, it has started to rise significantly. As the hon. Gentleman says, however, it is up for the first time.

I think that the Government would pursue a better line if they stopped avoiding the total output figures. Some people support the idea of the cathartic policy for the British economy; they feel that a rude shock was necessary. I do not agree. I believe that an advanced economy needs a blend of industrial manufacturing activities, as well as services and so forth. It is a great mistake for aspects of manufacturing industry to be wilfully neglected or allowed to be eliminated, just because of a decision to concentrate on such matters as computers and financial services. Be that as it may, development ought to come out of the many millions of decisions made in the open market. Obviously, some manufacturers went out of business against their will, and might have survived had they received the necessary support, which would have been forthcoming in other countries.

I do not wish to go on for too long, and I acknowledge the presence of my hon. Friends who are trying to contribute——

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Both my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) have said things which, if the debate had taken place about three years ago, would have received my strong support and assent. In my previous guise, before I came to the House, I helped to publish papers that were very critical of the decline in British manufacturing industry, and the contribution that it made to our national strength and balance of payments.

I would like to draw my hon. Friend out a little. He has touched only slightly on the dramatic improvement in our manufacturing output in the past three years, and I feel that he should pay tribute to that. The hon. Member for Yeovil, I fear, also ignored that point.

Mr. Dykes: Unfortunately, I do not have the index on me, but I think that it is only a couple of index points above the 1979 level, which was, I believe, 109.

I was making a comparative point. Other countries have had their recessions—a bit later, indeed—and, as their output was higher in any case, the effects were severe. But the effects were proportionately much more severe in this country, whose economy was already limited in its output. Perhaps my censure was not as severe as my hon. Friend imagines.

Germany, then, is the premier capitalist economy, with no fixation with ideological nostrums so abstruse as to be almost invisible to the naked eye. There is an idea here that everything in the private sector is wonderful and everything in the public sector is wrong. In Germany, some regard the public sector as something that should be limited and kept small; nevertheless, there is an attitude of co-operation between the two sectors that we seem to have lost in recent years. I feel that an excess of ideology—rather than common sense, wisdom and a pragmatic observation of the scene—is guiding our business and economic practice.

Another problem is the complacency that still affects British management, despite the success that we have achieved. I pay tribute to the Government's attempts to overcome that, and, indeed, to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the enormously important work that he personally has done.

I must declare an interest in retailing: I am involved as a non-executive director in a large retailing group. I do not exaggerate when I say—as I did in a debate last year—that we have frequently been on our knees pleading with British manufacturers to supply the products that we so urgently need for our customers. Sadly, however, we have ended up again and again having to obtain them from overseas suppliers. We are now encouraging the latter to invest here more and more, thank goodness.

The attitude of certain large corporations in this country—I shall mention no names—has often been very complacent. They have refused to supply the products that we need. I do not refer to the odd one-off example; it has happened far too frequently. We now have no large British-owned television set manufacturers. I suppose that Ferguson is an exception: it is owned by Thomson Brand, and perhaps a change of ownership does not matter. Incidentally, Thomson Brand is a nationalised company.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): And it is European.

Mr. Dykes: Indeed it is. But, whatever the ownership, television sets, electronic products and so on have a history of decline. Government action is not the sole cause of that, although it may have been partly responsible. Manufacturing complacency, giving up and not bothering mean losing the market and any productive capacity.

After that cathartic period has been achieved, we need a much more open and pragmatic attitude. We need to get away from the ideology, and take common sense as a basis for our actions. We should accept the mixture of public and private sector, the need for them to work harmoniously together.

I do not wish to anticipate Monday's debate, which would be out of order. However, electricity privatisation is a case in point. I am not at all enthusiastic about the Government's plans; I state that quite openly. Parts of them are good, but has the proposal really been triggered by a genuine problem that needs tackling, or did the ideological motor start it off somewhere in the recesses of the Centre for Policy Studies—which itself should be privatised? [HON. MEMBERS: "It is."] I mean that it should be nationalised.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: It should be closed down.

Mr. Dykes: That would be a bit unfair. The Centre for Policy Studies has done some excellent work.

Did it all start with someone sitting in a cupboard, having food pushed through twice a day and being asked, "Are you ready with that memo on privatising the Army yet, George? You are late." Or did it begin in the Department of Energy, as a genuine modernising policy? I am simple-minded, and I cannot understand the idea of increasing electricity charges now so that they can be lowered later. I would not, therefore, have tackled the C E G B in the way that is proposed in the White Paper. The

problems of the electricity industry are hugely complex, and to comment so briefly on them will inevitably appear superficial. Surely, however, the main problem is at the distribution end, which the Government are leaving more or less intact; indeed, they are increasing its scope of activity.

Of the three segments of the industry, distribution surely provides the main problem of geographical monopoly. There is enormous complacency in its operations, including — I say this with heartfelt enthusiasm, as a retailer—the use of showrooms, which is monumentally inefficient in many respects. No wonder all the area boards are, according to the Government, so enthusiastic about electricity privatisation. Their geographical monopoly will remain intact and they will be able to secure generational activity at the margin and increase their work. As I understand it, those boards will collectively own the middle segment of the proposed privatised industry—the transmission company.

I believe that the problems of the electricity industry lie with distribution rather than generation. To tamper with an enormously successful, carefully built up, huge entity, the CEGB, so lightly — the White Paper is a short document for such a complex matter—is a pity.

If I were involved in deciding Government policy—obviously they would be acting much more wisely as a result — I should agree that they have done a lot of extremely successful privatisation. We are all aware that the main reason for privatisation has been to make the people shareholders and, as a member of the London stock exchange, how can I say that that is a bad idea? However, all Governments must discontinue certain policies after they have been a success—they cannot go on and on. I believe that, after the last privatisation, that should have been it. I hope that that attitude may be shown vis-à-vis the water companies. The problems of that industry will not be solved by the fairly simple approach that has been adopted by the Government to such a complex matter.

Enterprise is vital and I wholeheartedly commend the Government for having been the enterprise Government and the DTI for being, par excellence, the enterprise Department. However, such work must be tempered with social restraint and a sense of responsibility. Every sound business man would surely agree that there is no contradiction between the maximisation of profits and an acute social conscience and responsibility. They should plough back resources into the community not only through taxation, but as a result of autonomous action by companies and individuals — company directors and shareholders.

My contribution to the debate is somewhat paradoxical because I am talking against my own interests in the Bill that is second in the list for consideration later, the Planning Permission (Demolition of Houses) Bill. That Bill is an excellent representation of the ideas that I have sought to put forward. As a Conservative I naturally support property development and the beneficial positive aspects of such development. However, in the outer London suburbs we are witnessing rampant, excessive property development. Therefore, I am glad that many of my colleagues are present to support my Bill when it comes up for Second Reading.

Property developers must also recognise the need for restraint and recognise their social obligations not to overdo development. I would be out of order if I described my Bill in detail, but it provides that property developers must apply for permission to demolish dwellings at the same time as they apply for planning permission to build a new block of houses or flats. The merits of such an approach would be obvious. The size of the file that I have with me demonstrates the number of letters of support that I have received. There is also tremendous support for the measure within the House.

My approach to my Bill is somewhat paradoxical because I have spoken in this debate and there are two other private Members' motions after this one. However, I have acted thus because it is rumoured that the Department of the Environment will, once again, object to my Bill. Recently I had a meeting with the Minister for Housing and Planning and he was as helpful as he could be. However, I would describe the Department's attitude as sympathetic, but unclear how to proceed. I believe that the Department of the Environment always prefers to change planning laws as a result of Government instruments rather than through Private Bills.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. Gentleman has been extremely ingenious, but I am sure he would recognise that he has gone far enough on that line.

Mr. Dykes: I thank you for your great patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and if the House gives me time to debate the Bill today I shall then go into more detail.

10.43 am

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): May I apologise to the House because, owing to a long-standing constituency engagement, I may be unable to stay to hear the concluding speeches in the debate?

I believe that it is appropriate, given that today is the parliamentary eve of Monday's debate and certain journalists outside may be busy scribbling away, to say that there are some on the Conservative Benches who see opportunities and benefits to the nation as the result of the privatisation of electricity. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) was correct to consider that privatisation in this debate. From other privatisations that have taken place, it is clear that quality control, design of the product and the financial control, management and discipline in those businesses have improved as a result. My hon. Friend has discussed whether the pursuit of privatisation is a good policy. It is clear that it has been successful and that current business practices contrast totally with the attitudes that prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s. During that time Britain's international position was falling rapidly.

I believe that the White Paper on enterprise is extremely important because it is a further step away from the attitudes of the 1960s and 1970s. Today things are completely different. An important contrast is that the White Paper is not about putting vast sums of money on the table, and it is not about vast grants to British industry. It is about encouraging support and improving skills within industry and business.

Reference has been made to manufacturing output and the fact that it is only just above the level reached in 1979. However, those people who say that forget that the service sector has expanded enormously. We now have a larger manufacturing industry than in 1979 plus a much larger service sector.

When one compares the current position to the 1970s, it is important to recognise that putting money on the table

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was not the answer. In the 1970s money was grabbed by unsuccessful businesses and, as a result, those businesses were made more unsuccessful. They became less competitive as a result of receiving too much money to produce out-of-date and badly designed products.

The Government recognised that failure. Certainly, the famous "British disease" known throughout the world is now recognised as having been cured. Foreign competitors stand up when a British business man walks into the room because they recognise him as a true competitor. We had to change our attitudes and improve our skills in marketing, design and finance. If we had not done that, we would have lost out in competition to Japanese, German and American business men.

One of the best business lessons that I ever received occurred when I was flying back to this country across the Atlantic—I hasten to add on a British Airways plane—with a Japanese business man sitting next to me. Every time the conversation turned towards business, that business man discussed market share and how to increase it, the competitive position and how to compete more effectively and efficiently. I often contrast that conversation with the lessons that I had to learn when I visited various sectors of British industry in the 1970s. At that time I saw much old-fashioned industry and old-fashioned attitudes. In the 1960s and 1970s there was little understanding among middle management about international competition and increasing the market share.

The evidence of changed attitudes is demonstrated by a new sector that has developed, the British venture capital industry. The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) mentioned that industry and I share his concern that it is not as regional as we would like. It has been too concentrated on the south and the south-east. However, the business venture in which I was involved attempted to set up some operations in the north and the north-west. In a small and modest way, we managed to achieve one or two successes, but they were not as plentiful as we would have liked because we were trying to overcome in a matter of months attitudes that had been built up over many years. The regions lacked skills, training, investment and business knowledge, and there had been a loss of capital markets to London. Even the local professionals, the solicitors and the accountants were uncertain as to what venture capital was all about.

I am pleased to say that the British venture capital industry is admired by the United States for being competitive with their own industry. It is also admired by the Germans, the French and the Italians, all of whom want to copy our industry and develop their own venture capital industries. Certainly we have the opportunity for many new companies to start as a result of venture capital initiatives in Britain. I pay tribute to the work of the British Venture Capital Association.

One important aspect of the debate which I touched upon at the beginning of my speech is the British approach to business. In the 1960s and 1970s our attitude was totally wrong and we lost markets. In the Commonwealth countries and throughout Africa the British car industry has been in retreat and many foreign competitors' cars are now sold in those countries. We lost products, and we lost a television industry that is down to only about one company manufacturing in Britain apart from some Japanese companies now assembling over here.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that we lost all those industries at the time when they were all privatised? The managements refused to get off their bottoms and get around the world and fight for markets, and allowed the television industry, the motor cycle industry—indeed industry after industry—to go to the wall. The Government tried to stop them going to the wall. The private enterprise people could have done what they wanted to do, but they did not and they failed the country.

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Gentleman did not listen to the point that I made earlier. My key point was that all those industries that failed during the late 1960s and the 1970s received vast amounts of Government money. The Government subsidised businesses that had failure within them. However much money one puts on the table, one cannot turn a business round when the work force does not want success. *[Interruption.]* Management—and I criticise British management—in the 1960s and 1970s did not understand the requirements of success. That was a very significant point. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Will the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) please contain himself? He has only just walked into the Chamber and has taken no part in the debate.

Mr. Shaw: Nevertheless, it is welcome that a few Opposition Members have turned up. During the debate on the coal industry the other day they were notable by their absence.

Not only did Britain lose products and opportunities; it lost new products. It lost the opportunity to develop the video equipment industry, and many new areas of business. There were problems with both the management and the work force. In some British companies there were five or six canteens. I used to go round some of those companies and compare them with the American subsidiaries operating in Britain which had only one canteen and in which the management were on the shop floor. The management were interested in what was going on. There was a complete contrast in attitudes between British companies and American subsidiaries operating over here. Fortunately, however, much of that is changing.

We now do not have management and work force problems to the same degree, except when they are raised by Opposition Members. We have staff and personnel problems because management is beginning to recognise, and has recognised for some time, that management and work force in Britain have the same objective — to produce more goods.

It is important that in this interesting debate we recognise that throughout Britain there is a lack of training. The Government have done quite a lot to encourage training in business. However, we still have problems which are highlighted by Mr. Robb Wilmot, former chief executive of ICL, who pointed out that one Korean company has more management graduates in it than there are in the whole of the United Kingdom. That means that we do not have the management skills or the background of management training that we need. I know that the Government will do much to develop that.

I should like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs who has advocated the cause of British industry, and improvements in design and quality control. I am

pleased that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has joined us. It is only appropriate that I should say that one of my friends recently attended a conference where my hon. Friend the Minister was speaking. He said to me, "Who is this man Butcher? The Government should wheel him out more often as he is a really good speaker."

In clothing design and other industries, Britain excels. At one time I acted as financial adviser to one business lady in the design sector. She constantly said to me that she had never been trained at design school to understand business, but she built up a business that employs some 50 people. We can imagine how large that business could have been if she had been trained in business skills.

I conclude by drawing attention to the fact that the Government are encouraging the improvement of design manufacturing skills. Productivity has increased rapidly. The Government, through the enterprise initiative White Paper, will help further to develop the quality and marketing skills of British industry. We have come a long way since the problems of the 1970s. We have proved that it is not vast sums of money being put on the table in investment grants that improve British industry. We have proved that it is improved by the right economy, by reducing taxation, by encouraging our business men to succeed and by being more competitive against foreign competitors.

All those skills that we are encouraging and all the improvements that we are trying to achieve in British industry are no good unless British industry earns profits. Opposition Members fail to understand the importance of profits. Profits are important because today's profits, this year's profits, provide the cash for next year's investment, and investment in plant and machinery is extremely important for the country. Without more investment in plant and machinery, we cannot succeed and we cannot compete against overseas companies.

I hope that the Government will continue doing what they have done to date so that there will be more improvement and investment in the people who are important in British industry and in new plant and equipment. I know that we will continue to achieve new production records as a result of the Government's initiatives.

10.59 am

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn and Hatfield): This morning, I have been under a misapprehension. We have heard about the electricity authority and about national and multinational companies. I should like to bring the debate back to the enterprise initiative.

I welcome the regional grant system being taken over by the Government's initiative. I hope that the initiative will be developed by the regions. Design is important. British Aerospace, which is in my constituency, is well-equipped in respect of design. That is why I hope that the proposed negotiations between the Rover Group and British Aerospace are successful. Design is important in business.

I should like to bring the debate back to the small business man. The country's future depends on him. The small business man needs the help that the initiative will provide.

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday sittings).*

NATO Summit (Brussels)

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement about the meeting of Heads of State and Government of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us get off to a good start with the statement.

The Prime Minister: With permission I shall make a statement about the meeting of Heads of State and Government of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, held in Brussels on 2 and 3 March, which I attended with my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary.

The summit agreed a main declaration and a statement entitled "Conventional Arms Control: The Way Ahead". Copies of both documents have been placed in the Library of the House.

Since NATO's last summit in 1982, there have been important changes affecting the Alliance. First, we have seen developments in the arms control field, above all the successful INF agreement, achieved as a result of NATO's resolve.

Secondly, we look forward to President Reagan's forthcoming visit to Moscow and hope that—then or later—we shall see agreement to reduce the strategic nuclear weapons of the United States and the Soviet Union by 50 per cent.

Thirdly, we have seen bold reforms introduced by Mr. Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. These hold out the prospect of more responsibility and more choice for the Soviet people.

Fourthly, we have begun to see some signs of change in the Soviet Union's external policies, above all the very welcome decision to withdraw from Afghanistan.

At the same time, there has been no let-up in the Soviet Union's extensive military modernisation programmes. Indeed, they are going ahead as fast as ever. For example, first, by the mid-1990s, virtually the entire Soviet strategic force in place in the mid-1980s will have been replaced by new or modernised systems, including the world's only rail-mobile ICBM system. Secondly, one new submarine is deployed every 37 days. Thirdly, they are actively modernising their shorter-range missiles, where they already enjoy a major advantage, with more accurate longer-range SS21s. Fourthly, the Soviet Union made over 90 space launches last year for military purposes.

As a result, the Soviet Union has the world's largest nuclear and chemical arsenals, and the Warsaw pact enjoys substantial superiority over NATO in conventional forces.

Against this background, it was important for the leaders of the NATO countries to come together, take stock and to set guidelines for future action. The United Kingdom approached the meeting with a number of clear objectives. First, to underline the continuing importance of the NATO Alliance to the defence of the West. It is as vital now for protecting our freedom as when it was formed in 1949. Second, to confirm the unity and the resolve of NATO in the face of Soviet attempts to separate Europe from the United States and to denuclearise Europe. Third, to reaffirm the validity of NATO's strategy of flexible response and the consequent need to keep all NATO's weapons—nuclear as well as conventional—up

[The Prime Minister]

to date. Fourth to discuss President Reagan's forthcoming visit to Moscow for a United States-Soviet summit, and to confirm NATO's priorities in arms control.

These objectives were very fully and satisfactorily achieved, as will be clear from the texts of the declaration and the statement to which I have referred. They contain: first, a strong reaffirmation of the vital link between the security of Europe and that of North America. It is particularly important to remind people of this in a presidential election year in the United States. President Reagan assured the summit that NATO enjoyed a bipartisan support in the United States and that American troops would remain in Europe as long as the common defence of the democratic way of life required. We are all, of course, very grateful to the United States and Canada for the susbtantial forces which they keep in Europe.

Second, in the two documents we reaffirmed our determination that NATO's defences should remain strong, recognising the crucial role of the nuclear deterrence provided not just by the United States strategic deterrent but also by the presence of effective and up-to-date nuclear weapons in Europe. I am particularly pleased that all Heads of Government agreed on

"a strategy of deterrence based on an appropriate mix of adequate and effective nuclear and conventional forces which will continue to be kept up to date where necessary".

Third, based on confidence in our sure defence, a willingness to seek dialogue with the countries of the Warsaw pact and a desire for further arms control agreements, particularly on chemical and conventional weapons. Any further reductions in nuclear weapons after START would come about only in conjunction with the establishment of conventional balance and the global elimination of chemical weapons. It is quite clear that NATO is determined to avoid a third nuclear zero.

Heads of Government also took the opportunity to thank Lord Carrington, who retires in June, for his outstanding work as Secretary-General of NATO.

This summit meeting, which was convened as a result of a British initiative, successfully reinforced NATO's basic message of defence, deterrence and dialogue. It reaffirmed the strategy that has kept the peace in Europe for over 40 years. It underlined NATO's commitment to keep all our weapons, both conventional and nuclear, up-to-date in order to ensure that deterrence remains effective and that our defences are strong enough to convince any aggressor that he could not prevail. It is on the basis of such a sure defence that we are able to welcome the reforms that are taking place in the Soviet Union and to enter into further negotiations to reduce the level of weaponry on both sides.

Taken with the recent successful European summit, we have created a platform from which Europe can look with confidence to the future.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I am grateful to the Prime Minister for her statement.

Is it not a fact that the statement that we heard this Friday morning is evidence of the Prime Minister's success in having the summit and of her failure to get what she wanted out of it? Is it not also clear that, in the week before she met allies in Brussels, Chancellor Helmut Kohl had already concluded the summit during his visit to Washington by agreeing not to press for the third zero on tactical weapons in return for the United States' reassurance that nuclear modernisation would receive no priority? Therefore, is it not obvious that the Prime Minister was effectively sidelined by the manoeuvre before she even got to Brussels?

Yesterday the Prime Minister said that the conclusion of the summit was that conventional weapons had to be brought down to parity and chemical weapons eliminated before any further negotiations on nuclear weapons took place. Was the Prime Minister reflecting the position of our allies? The communiqué states that the NATO disarmament goal includes,

"in conjunction with the establishment of a conventional balance, the global elimination of chemical weapons, tangible and verifiable reductions of American and Soviet land-based nuclear missile systems of shorter range, leading to equal ceilings".

Therefore, was not Lord Carrington more accurate than the Prime Minister? He said:

"nobody is saying that you cannot start one set of negotiations before another has ended."

Is it not the case that the West German Government take the view that negotiations to reduce battlefield and short-range nuclear weapons on their soil should be commenced as soon as possible and that separate and simultaneous negotiations can proceed without waiting for the completion of one agreement before others are pursued?

There has been a certain amount of semantic anarchy between our various allies since the summit ended. As words are actions in communiqués like that — *[Interruption.]* I suppose I made the mistake of quoting *The Wall Street Journal* on that issue. As words are actions in communiqués such as those coming out of Brussels, are the Parliaments and forces of allied nations to act upon the objective of keeping forces maintained in proper condition where that is desirable, which is the German version, kept up-to-date where necessary, which is the English version, or, as the Prime Minister says that that version is a euphemism for modernisation, should modernisation, as she interprets it, be the objective? Could she tell us whether, in her view, the act of modernisation should include the installation of new weapons systems, whether sea, air or ground launched, and whether they are regarded as being tactical, intermediate or strategic in range?

The Prime Minister says that she strongly favours the bold changes in the Soviet Union, both for the sake of the Soviet people and to increase international stability, and one cannot but concur with her there. But does she not realise that the pressures that she wishes to impose by the rearmament that would come from the form of modernisation that she wants would insert the greatest possible impediment to the changes that we all want to see in the Soviet Union?

The Prime Minister has previously spoken of the continual renovation and innovation in Soviet arms, and she did so again this morning. Is she aware that she can stop and reverse such a build up by fostering agreements which secure arms build down? However, is it not clear that she wants to pursue the contrary course and, under the guise of modernisation, bring about a multiplication of armaments? Therefore, does she not appreciate that, to put it at its most polite, there is a significant inconsistency in her approach?

There is much justifiable concern about the numerical superiority of Warsaw pact forces in Europe, and a clear need rigorously to pursue the asymmetrical reductions in conventional forces offered by the Soviets and considered

by our allies. However, does the Prime Minister share the view of many experts, including the United States chiefs of staff report to Congress last year, that the imbalance of forces, if considered in terms of quality as well as in terms of quantity, is less in reality than is sometimes argued by many, including the Prime Minister? If she does, will she be pursuing force reductions on that basis rather than on the basis of what is sometimes called the "bean count" view of force disparities between the Soviet Union and the Western allies?

The Prime Minister: I sat for nearly two days in the NATO summit listening to many speeches, including many from Socialist Heads of Government, and I never heard such claptrap as I have heard from the Opposition Front Bench today. This country's Socialist party is out of step with every other one in Europe. That is no wonder, because it is virtually a CND Socialist party.

The Government got precisely what we wanted out of the summit in modernising nuclear forces, and that was endorsed by 16 nations, including the United States. Many of those countries supported us, and others agreed with the communiqué — *[Interruption.]* Yes, because some countries neither make nor deploy nuclear weapons, but they support the rest of us in doing so, unlike the Labour party.

There was a clear declaration in the conventional statement that we have to continue to keep conventional weapons up to date, and we thought it absolutely right that we should put it also in the bigger declaration, which says:

"This is a strategy of deterrence based upon an appropriate mix of adequate and effective nuclear and conventional forces which will continue to be kept up to date where necessary."

The right hon. Gentleman has difficulty with that sentence, he might try the next one for size. The first sentence of paragraph 6 says:

"While seeking security and stability at lower levels of armaments, we are determined to sustain the requisite efforts to ensure the continued viablity, credibility and effectiveness of our conventional and nuclear forces, including the nuclear forces in Europe, which together provide the guarantee of our common security."

How does the right hon. Gentleman think that one can possibily do that without keeping nuclear forces in Europe up to date? That is precisely what this NATO summit agreed. The right hon. Gentleman is out of step with each and every country in NATO.

The Soviet Union is, as I said, and as we all know, continuing to modernise all its weapons, whether conventional or nuclear. I set out some of the changes this morning, and there are many more. It is absolutely vital that we negotiate from a basis of strength because that tactic got the intermediate nuclear weapons treaty. It is because of that continued strength that we are able to deter. One does not deter with obsolete weapons, whether conventional or nuclear, and one has to keep them up to date.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the American chiefs of staff. General Galvin needed the decision which we were instrumental in getting. America was prominent in supporting us all the way in securing this form of wording. The actual text was negotiated in English, so it is English which is the clear version.

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are two most encouraging features about this summit? The first is the total reaffirmation of the American position, and its commitment to NATO as the sheet anchor of NATO. The second important feature that is emerging is the improved relationship between France and NATO. Many of us would like France to return to being a fully integrated member of NATO but realise that that is not likely. Nevertheless, it is good that there has been a closing of relationships and so much interservice co-operation.

The Prime Minister: Yes, the total reaffirmation of American forces to Europe was welcome, particularly during an election year in the United States. I agree with my hon. and learned Friend that another encouraging factor was the presence of President Mitterrand and the way in which France is, voluntarily because it does not belong to the integrated military structure of NATO, exercising its forces, bearing in mind the NATO exercises. I put several proposals to President Mitterrand regarding, for example, being able to practise reinforcements through French Channel ports and airfields of any forces that would be needed, should there ever be an alert. So far, we have not been able to practise through those Channel ports, and I hope that we should be able to. Again, that is evidence of further close co-operation between French forces and the NATO structure.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Will the Prime Minister recognise how welcome it is that wiser heads in NATO have forced her away from unilateralism in seeking to raise the number of nuclear weapons? Since both the Warsaw pact and NATO have the capacity to destroy each other 50 times over, why does she want more? Is not enough enough?

The Prime Minister: As we know from the last election, only one party in this country is willing to keep a sure defence and to deter an aggressor. The Soviet Union is modernising her nuclear weapons. She has, for example, the only strategic ballistic missile which can be moved around by rail, and, as we know, can be brought into areas that are being vacated by the SS20s. We do not expect the hon. Gentleman and his party to be strong — they do not have a policy.

We are determined to keep defence and deterrent sure. That means modernising nuclear weapons. Ministers when they meet in their next nuclear planning group meeting, which takes place in April, will have to make decisions. They have on their agenda a proposal to make deployments in connection with the pulling out of Europe of the intermediate nuclear weapons.

Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Marshals Yazov and Akhromeyev are already saying that they will have to take this matter into account and compensating moves will have to be made? Marshal Akhromeyev said that in the ratification hearings for the intermediate treaty. We have the guts to keep this country properly defended, and so does NATO.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Will my right hon. Friend accept that the outcome of the Brussels meeting is sensible, realistic and greatly reassuring to the future peace of Europe? However, is she satisfied about the verification regime which will be needed for the proposed strategic missile negotiations? Will it be the same regime as the one that is in place for the INF treaty, or does she think that a much deeper and more comprehensive verification regime will be needed for the START negotiations?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is correct. A much deeper and more detailed regime is necessary for the START proposals than for the intermediate nuclear forces. The intermediate nuclear forces regime became easier when the Soviet Union agreed to a global ban, whereas my right hon. Friend is aware that at first it was proposed that the Soviet Union and the United States should each keep 100. That would have been almost impossible to verify. It will be much more difficult with START than with a global ban because there will be a mix of weapons. The establishment of a proper verification procedure is one of the reasons why it is taking a considerable time to get a START agreement. We think that it is more important to get the right and sure agreement than it is to get one quickly.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Does not the Prime Minister appreciate that many other countries apart from those represented in NATO are greatly interested in nuclear and other forms of disarmament? Does she not understand that her perpetual, indeed paranoid, insistence on building up nuclear weapons is a barefaced breach of Britain's commitments under the non-proliferation treaty? How does she imagine that we will get other countries to abide by that treaty? Dos she propose to tear it up? If she continues to say that we must have nuclear weapons, many other countries will say the same.

The Prime Minister: First, the Soviet Union probably has more nuclear warheads than any other country. Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman went to the root of the communiqué because he does not believe that nuclear weapons are necessary for deterrence. The communiqué clearly says that nuclear weapons alone give the requisite degree of deterrence to the enemy. The right hon. Gentleman does not agree. Thirdly, this was agreed by the whole of NATO. Fourthly, the first nuclear arms control agreement that reduced the number of nuclear weapons was achieved under a Conservative Government through firm resolve and strength and by deploying cruise missiles. We played a big part in that. We were the first to deploy the cruise missiles and the Labour party would never have done that. We would never have had an agreement and the Russians would still have all their SS20s up. Had a Labour Government been in power there would have been no similar weapons on the Western side. We had a great influence over that agreement, and the Opposition do not like the fact that it was strength that achieved proper and balanced arms reductions.

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her robust leadership of the NATO nations. It has been confirmed within NATO that the twin-track policy that we have been following is the correct one—a policy of firm deterrence while seeking reductions. Will she now take every step that she and her Ministers can to explain to the people of Britain, who do not understand some of the nuances and who will be concerned at the thought of upgrading nuclear weapons, that modernisation and bringing up to date is not rearmament or escalation but simply the maintenance of that deterrent shield without which we would not have obtained any of the concessions that we have got from the Soviet Union?

The Prime Minister: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. We have to make certain that we have a sure defence and that the deterrence deters. To do that, weapons must be up to date. Then we must have dialogue on arms control agreements. That is what we are doing, and in those arms control agreements we are making certain that at no stage do they unbalance our defence effort or call it into question.

The Opposition policy of no nuclear weapons was defeated very surely in a phone-in during the general election campaign—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister must be given a chance to answer.

The Prime Minister: During that phone-in, Lance Corporal Ragman questioned the Labour spokesman on defence about Labour's non-nuclear policy. He said:

"Now you're telling me to go into this battle knowing that if we do succeed in pushing them back"—

that is the enemy—

"we're gonna get nuked and if we don't succeed in pushing them back we're gonna get invaded."

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): The Prime Minister knows that the SDP has consistently supported the updating of Britain's nuclear deterrent and NATO's nuclear deterrent. What is more, it will continue to do so. Does the Prime Minister agree that there are many in NATO who think that some categories of battlefield nuclear weapons could be completely removed with advantage to both sides? I am speaking especially of very short-range battlefield nuclear weapons such as nuclear artillery. However, aircraft will continue to need to be nuclear armed. Can the Prime Minister say whether she would consider a battlefield nuclear-free corridor as a confidence building measure while at the same time going ahead with a stand-off air-launched missile for the Tornado aircraft?

The Prime Minister: I know that the right hon. Gentleman has consistently supported the updating of nuclear weapons except for Polaris, which he did not seem to agree should be updated. I know that he is not associated with the new party, and I notice that it does not have a policy. In its document that party says:

"The new party will, therefore, need to decide how to reconcile these changing realities with the manifesto commitment to 'maintain our capability in the sense of freezing our capacity at a level no greater than that of the Polaris system'."

If the party has a policy, it seems to be not to modernise in order to deter but to freeze in order to be obsolete compared with the threat that faces us.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about battlefield nuclear weapons. He will be aware that since the Montebello decision the number taken out of the field in Europe has been considerable. He will also be aware that the artillery shells are being updated. That decision was taken and is in process of being implemented.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Is the Prime Minister aware that the last opinion poll on this matter showed that 75 per cent. of the British people think that further increases and improvements in nuclear weapons would not bring any real advantage or benefit to the United States or the Soviet Union? Why is the Prime Minister pursuing such a hard line in this costly and unproductive nuclear rearmament? Is it not the case that her policy of rearmament, of wanting to turn Britain into a nuclear battle station, was not put to the electorate at the last election?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman forgets that we have an arms control agreement that reduces intermediate land-based nuclear weapons to zero, and that we are going for a START agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union to reduce the strategic ballistic missiles of the two nations to 50 per cent. Such a reduction of weapons was never achieved under the defence policy of the Labour party when it was in power and certainly would not be achieved now if it was in power.

In an article in *The Daily Telegraph* of 3 November the Labour Chief Whip was reported as saying:

"We have over 100 members of the Parliamentary CND in the Parliamentary Labour Party, including of course the Leader of the Party, Neil Kinnock."

Therefore, Labour party policy is to have no nuclear weapons at all. That is no deterrent.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I express my appreciation to my right hon. Friend for the fact that this communiqué presents starkly to the peoples of the Alliance the fact that under Gorbachev, as under his predecessors, the steady modernisation and enhancement of Soviet military power has proceeded apace? In the face of that reality, is it not completely irresponsible for the Labour party to advocate modernisation and improvement of neither our conventional forces nor our nuclear forces?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. Most people in this country expect us to have a sure defence and know that that requires a nuclear deterrent. That was reaffirmed by NATO this week, which said in the communiqué:

"Only the nuclear element can confront a potential aggressor with an unacceptable risk. Therefore, for the foreseeable future deterrence will continue to require an adequate mix of nuclear as well as conventional forces."

Governments of all sorts in Europe, including Socialist Governments, fully endorsed that communiqué. The Labour party is totally out of step with every other Government in Europe, including Socialist Governments, as well as with the United States.

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): Does my right hon. Friend recall St. Augustine's observation that memory is the stomach of the mind? The fact that the Labour party has no stomach for maintaining a proper balance in our effective defence, including a nuclear balance, is merely a reflection of the fact that it has no memory of the holocaust that followed pre-war appeasement and one-sided military weakness.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct: no memory, no stomach, no spine, no guts.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Although I welcome the progress made towards multilateral nuclear disarmament through the INF treaty and the START talks, and although I accept that the emphasis must now be on rectifying the conventional imbalance in Western Europe, does the Prime Minister believe that it is possible to make much progress towards reductions of conventional weapons in Europe without embarking upon parallel negotiations to limit and reduce the number of battlefield nuclear weapons in the European theatre?

The Prime Minister stated her strong objection to the third zero, as she called it. What can be the objection to the achievement of such a goal if—but only if—we have reached agreement with the Soviet Union to reduce its overwhelming supremacy in conventional weapons?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, a third nuclear zero in Europe would unbalance the forces, which is why we do not wish to enter that sort of negotiation now. That is why the communiqué talks about doing this "in conjunction with" a conventional balance and the elimination of chemical weapons. Most of us believe that it can be done only when that is complete. Chancellor Kohl accepts that there should be no third nuclear zero in Europe, so he is absolutely with us.

The phrase in the communiqué,

"in conjunction with . . . a conventional balance and the global elimination of chemical weapons",

came from the ministerial communiqué at Reykjavik, and has come forward into this communiqué. Most, indeed, all of us agree that the next priority is an asymmetrical reduction in conventional weapons because the Soviet union has such a great superiority and, if possible, a global ban on chemical weapons, although the verification problems would be enormous.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): My right hon. Friend must be warmly congratulated on the major role that she played in securing an agreement in which no one got exactly what he wanted and everyone got much more than he expected. Does she accept that the presence of President Mitterrand at the meeting suggested the possibility of closer Franco-British co-operation, which might lead to closer co-operation in defence equipment procurement and manufacture and, in due course, to closer consultation about the use of our independent nuclear deterrent?

The Prime Minister: I agree that it was very good that President Mitterrand was present at the nuclear summit. He is a staunch believer in nuclear deterrence, and France is updating its nuclear weapons. We have had a good deal of bilateral discussion with France, trying all the time to get greater practical co-operation between the military forces of France and the military forces of NATO. That seems to be forthcoming. Although France will not rejoin NATO, it will, nevertheless, co-operate closely with its conventional and possibly its nuclear forces, although the latter would be much more difficult.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Why does the Prime Minister suppose that she was unable to persuade even the Americans to support us on Exercise Fire Focus? Secondly, did she have any discussions with Chancellor Kohl or Secretary Shultz about the case of Christina Endrigkeit, which undermines the whole basis on which the Libyan bombing took place? Why is it that the evidence of Major Ruth La Fontaine, the acting officer in charge in Berlin, contradicts what the British and the American Governments said?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that Libya was not discussed at this NATO summit, not even in bilateral talks between the United States and ourselves. I note that the hon. Gentleman has no complaint about the NATO communiqué, for which I am grateful.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, unlike the Labour party, many millions—if not hundreds of millions—of people throughout the free world thank her for rejuvenating NATO and urging

[Mr. John Browne]

our NATO allies to concentrate upon not merely the words of the Soviet Union but the actions of the Soviet Union projected into the long term? Does she accept that arms control must be balanced, integrated in terms of nuclear, chemical and conventional and, above all, prudent? As for the funding of NATO, does she accept that vast alternative sources of funds are available if only NATO would co-ordinate its procurement programme effectively?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. It was a vigorous communiqué by a vigorous NATO carrying into the future the strategy that has kept the peace in Europe for 40 years. Next year, NATO will celebrate 40 years of existence. The communiqué stands for everything that the Labour party rejects.

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): What precisely does the Prime Minister mean by "necessary modernisation"? Does it include replacing free-fall bombs on Tornado with cruise missiles? Does it include extending the range of the Lance missile? Does it include the so-called updating of the field artillery? How does she think the latter will be received in West Germany, where the people bitterly resent being told that they should be the firebreak for Europe? If she believes that the modernisation of Soviet short-range missiles is undesirable, how does she think all this updating and modernisation will help? It is substitution, it goes against the spirit of the present disarmament agreements and it cannot be in the interests of our people.

The Prime Minister: The communiqué recognised that we cannot deter with outdated weapons, whether conventional or nuclear. The Soviet Union knows that, which is why it is already updating its short-range as well as its longer-range weapons. Indeed, it is ahead of us in updating some long-range weapons

Since the INF agreement was signed, the Soviet Defence Minister, Mr. Yazov, has said:

"We shall exert all efforts to make the military alliance of Socialist countries, the Warsaw Pact organisation, even more powerful."

In the ratification hearings before the Supreme Soviet, Marshal Akhromeyev has said that the Soviet Union

"has other nuclear weapons in the European area which to a certain extent compensate for these"

INF

"missiles."

That is the threat which we have to deter. I think that peace is extremely important. We shall continue to have peace only if we continue the strategy of NATO, which is to have nuclear weapons and to update them. If our free-fall nuclear bombs are absolutely incapable of delivery, there is no point in thinking that they would deter. Yes, in due course it will be necessary to update them.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Will my right hon. Friend dismiss with total derision the shambling defence policy strictures of the Opposition, which are pure Mickey Mouse with a couple of bullets in the pocket? In accepting the congratulations of the House on her successful participation in the summit, will my right hon. Friend say a little more about the interesting partial French return to NATO, despite what she said about them not being members of it, and that, with British encouragement, they can overcome their inhibitions about the United States aspect of the policy? Will my right hon. Friend particularly say whether the French have now begun to reconcile themselves on the shorter-range missiles with the German inhibitions about the presence and location of the French missiles?

The Prime Minister: I think that there is no possibility of our French friends returning to the military structure of NATO. They were present as part of the political structure of the Western Alliance. I think that there is no possibility at present of their returning to the military structure. They are always extremely helpful in their approach to nuclear weapons. They know full well that there is no deterrence without them. They know full well that one must keep them modern and up to date. They are doing that with their own long range weapons, and they are in fact modernising their own short range. I believe that the fact that a Socialist President of France is taking such a strong view has had a very strong effect on Socialists also in West Germany, and has been helpful to the NATO Alliance as a whole.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): While, at times, fear and deterrence are necessary, in this case through NATO, does not the Prime Minister agree that sure defence—the phrase that she used—and abiding security and stability are obtained only through knowledge that leads to that elusive political commodity, justified confidence?

In that respect, has not the United Kingdom two incomparable assets? First, we are the cultural and institutional centre of a language that is now a major world language — English. Secondly, we have through history, endowment and performance a major world news agency, the BBC World Service, which serves the ends that I have just described. Cannot the £3 million that is now necessary for a world television service be made available, particularly bearing in mind the fact that it is the cost of about 20 modern war planes? Does not that make only good sense in our contribution to confidence, which alone separates us from nuclear holocaust and, from the Prime Minister's point of view, is very good value for money? Should not the government therefore invest in that news service that we all want to see?

The Prime Minister: Sometimes it seems to me that we need to aim more knowledge and more facts towards the Opposition to achieve their agreement to a NATO comuniqué. So far, the BBC does not seem to have been able to do that. Yes, the BBC external services are broadcast in many countries. The hon. Gentleman is aware that the Independent Television News already has an international television service, which does not cost the taxpayer a penny.

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): Has my right hon. Friend considered that her sadly realistic view that conventional warfare will be deterred only by nuclear weapons will strike a chord not only in our own constituencies, but throughout the length and breadth of Europe in working men's clubs, and particularly in the Soviet Union, where the Soviets' experience of invasion by conventional warfare was so horrific during the second world war? Does not my right hon. Friend feel that opinions engendered by such an experience and such a memory are likely to be worth a few more beans than the vacuous opinions expressed by Opposition Members?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I have always found that in this country people understand, because memories are still vivid, that one must have a strong defence. They understand that one needs nuclear weapons for defence. The Army—all our armed forces—understands that this Government at least would never put our young men in the field inadequately equipped and with equipment that was not sufficient to deter the threat. That was their worry in the piece that I read out. Therefore, they support the policy, and the people generally support the policy. They would prefer us to have a sound defence. They know that it is necessary and they have a certain amount of pride in the part that this country plays as a staunch ally in NATO, and also more worldwide even than NATO.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): In view of the statement that the Prime Minister has just made about the BBC, is she aware that many of us are absolutely delighted that she has come back from the NATO summit without getting entirely her own way? It is about time that the nations of the world decided that Mrs. Thatcher does not run everything. If she did, we should be involved in a nuclear war in no time.

Is the right hon. Lady further aware that she speaks with two voices? On the one hand, she says how delighted she is to work with Mr. Gorbachev and, on the other hand, she does everything possible to strengthen the military forces in the Soviet Union that want to undermine Mr. Gorbachev and are in fact undermining Mr. Gorbachev. Is it not clear that the Russians want to get rid of nuclear weapons over a period, to carry out the reforms that Mr. Gorbachev wants, and she more than anyone else in the Western world, even more than Reagan, is undermining those efforts?

The Prime Minister: It will come as no surprise to the hon. Gentleman to hear that I disagree with him. Perhaps he can say where one did not get the British way in NATO. One did. It was our job. We fought to get the modernisation in. There was no debate about whether or not nuclear forces needed to be modernised. Everyone accepted that they did. In the ministerial groups and the high-level groups, everyone accepts that they do. They make provision for future action. The only question was whether we said that in the communiqué. I believed in being open in the communiqué and, supported and backed by many others, we agreed that not only should we modernise our nuclear forces, but that we should say so in the communiqué. That is clear. There is no doubt about it. Everyone knows that we have to do it. It was what we said in the communiqué. I hope that the hon. Gentleman thinks that it was right to be open-minded.

We welcome the reforms in the Soviet Union. I have said many times that it is only on the basis of a sure defence and a sure deterrence that we can encourage openly the reforms that are taking place. We know that it is not easy. If they fell apart, if trouble is caused in the satellite countries, or if the Soviets return to a much more Stalinist figure, we know that, whatever happens, our defence continues to be sure because we take the necessary decisions in time. The hon. Gentleman will know that the lead times for modern equipment are very long, and one mistake now in refusing to make decisions could undermine the defence of the whole country. That is our fully consistent position.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we speak with one voice, and that that voice is for unity and security in Europe and the rest of the world? Does she agree also that the Opposition speak with one voice in matters relating to disarmament, and that that is a voice of surrender and sellout? Does she further agree that the results of this summit will do an enormous amount to enhance respect for this country in the world as a result of her efforts in initiating it and carrying it through?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree. Conservative Members speak with one voice: that we should have a sure defence and deterrence. We are always ready to enter dialogue on effective arms control agreements. I agree with my hon. Friend that the Opposition speak with one voice. The Leader of the Opposition used that voice clearly when he spoke, during the election campaign, of using all the resources that one has to make any occupation completely untenable.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must have regard for the fact that this is private Members' time. I shall allow questions to continue until noon and then we must move on.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): The Prime Minister was free with her advice to Mr. Gorbachev as to how he might deal with dissidents in his Politburo—and she should know. Was she so free with her advice to her protagonist, Chancellor Kohl, as to how to deal with elements in his Cabinet and country who, under no circumstances, will accept one of her modernised Lance missiles, or any other missiles, on West German territory?

The Prime Minister: Chancellor Kohl has been one of the staunchest members of NATO. It was he who agreed to deploy cruise and Pershing missiles. We deployed cruise first; West Germany was second. Those were new nuclear weapons that were necessary to deter the Soviet Union. It was necessary to demonstrate our strength, and Chancellor Kohl was the second to deploy. West Germany has also taken modernised nuclear artillery shells, so the hon. Gentleman is completely wrong.

How do I give Chancellor Kohl advice? I say that I do not believe in coalition Governments — Liberals are weak everywhere.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Despite the mental meanderings of the Opposition, there is overwhelming evidence to show that the people of this country have not forgotten the lesons of the inter-war years. The memory has not been dulled that war came about because of weakness, not strength. My right hon. Friend's statement today will be welcomed throughout the country, particularly in the north of England, because we can now look forward to the modernisation of our defence programme. I hope that this will not be the last time that my right hon. Friend comes to the Dispatch Box to say that we shall remain strong in this country.

Bearing in mind all the work that my right hon. Friend must do, may I ask her to reflect for a few moments on the BBC before doing out more money to it, and look at the play that it put on this week, which was a travesty of justice for NATO and the defence of the western world?

The Prime Minister: It is six years since we have had this sort of NATO summit of Heads of State and Government taking stock and considering guidelines for future action. It was therefoe vital that we secured the agreement

[The Prime Minister]

publicly that nuclear forces must be modernised as necessary. The detailed decisions, as my hon. Friend knows, are taken in the ministerial nuclear planning group, which meets in April. It will first have to consider any dispositions consequent upon the intermediate nuclear forces agreement, and, later, which weapons should be updated as necessary. My hon. Friend is aware that the lead times are long, which is why we had to get the guidelines clear for Ministers who take these detailed decisions. However, it is clear from the NATO communiqué that our defence will continue to be sure; so will our deterrence, and all members of NATO agree with that conclusion.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Prime Minister accept that anyone looking objectively at what she has done this week would conclude that she has gone completely mad? The world is racked by debt, hunger and poverty. The National Health Service is collapsing in her own country for lack of funding, and she goes to a NATO Council of Ministers with the deliberate intention of scuppering the possibility of a future disarmament treaty with the Soviet Union by agreeing to upgrade and spend a great deal of money on nuclear weapons. Does she not think it is time to stop increasing expenditure on nuclear weapons and to start spending money on the vital social needs of this country and the rest of the world? Is it not time seriously to promote disarmament, on which the Soviet Union is clearly keen, even if she and her friends in Europe are not?

The Prime Minister: Sixteen NATO Heads of Government and Heads of State agreed this effective statement. Of course, I do not expect the hon. Gentleman to like it. He does not agree with NATO or nuclear deterrence. He does not, therefore, agree with deterrence. One gets disarmament agreements only by negotiating from strength, in detail and toughly. One can then be very certain that there is verification. Those agreements will stick. When one agreement is completed, we move to another knowing that defence is sure and that the treaties that have been signed will stick and be honoured meticulously. Therefore, the intermediate nuclear agreement was reached and the United States and the Soviet Union move on to the START agreement, which I believe will be made. The hon. Gentleman wants arms control agreements and they are happening under this Government and other NATO Governments because we have acted from strength.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Opposition, in trying to destroy our defences, overlooked one key political fact — that, despite being willing to give up some nuclear weapons, the Warsaw pact countries still show no sign of giving up their Communist creed or their desire to spread their revolution wherever they can?

The Prime Minister: Of course, it is part of the Communist creed that it should be extended by one means or another the world over. That has been part of the Communist creed from the beginning. That is why we watch their actions throughout the world very carefully. The Communist creed is spread by military might, by subversion or by proxy. At the moment there are hopeful signs, and we welcome the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. We have been demanding that withdrawal for a long time. That withdrawal is welcome and we will watch its implementation carefully. We also note that more world aid is provided by NATO countries than by Communist countries.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Is not the Prime Minister's obsession with nuclear weapons undermining the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty signed by 133 nations stating that they will not have nuclear weapons manufactured or deployed on their territory? Is not her obsession also undermining the INF agreement, which she claims that she had something to do with—and that is not true—because many nations will believe that she is cheating on that agreement because of the increase in nuclear weapons? Will she consider an alternative other than the threat of mass extermination if she thinks that the Russsians are coming? Why will she not commit suicide if she is frightened of the Russians and allow the rest of us to continue to negotiate with Mr. Gorbachev, who she called "that boldly courageous leader"?

The Prime Minister: No. Disarmament was hoped for after the last world war and the West began to disarm. Shortly afterwards, the Berlin airlift occurred, and we will all remember that. As was said at the NATO summit, we did not choose to make the Soviet Union an enemy; the Soviet Union chose to be one. NATO was formed after the Berlin airlift and after the Soviet Union chose to embark on a heavy programme of rearmament. That NATO agreement and the action following it have kept the peace in Europe for 40 years and enabled us to continue to produce this kind of statement and debate in the House. The hon. Gentleman is the first to take advantage of that but the last to defend the means that achieved it.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we did not reach today's negotiating table by dangling obsolete weaponry before the Soviet policy makers? Does she also agree that the people in this country who seek genuine peace and security will be more reassured by this Government's policies than by the Labour party's policies which at best will leave our defence capabilities rusting in the cupboard, and at worst will abolish them tomorrow, and, according to the Leader of the Opposition, will involve us "taking to the hills"?

The Prime Minister: Obsolete weapons do not deter. Conventional weapons alone do not deter, and two world wars in Europe have already proved that. We want a war-free Europe, and we need to keep nuclear weapons to achieve that.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Was the Prime Minister implying in her earlier replies that Chancellor Kohl is enthusiastic about the immediate deployment of modernised Lance missiles on German soil?

The Prime Minister: No, Sir, I said modernised artillery weapons. They have already been modernised. A decision has yet to be made about Lance. That will be one of the decisions. It is a United States weapon; it will have to be designed. The point about making the present decision is that we will be prepared as necessary to make decisions to deploy modernised nuclear weapons.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Can my right hon. Friend give the House more details of how NATO is to

persuade the Soviet Union to eliminate its massive stockpile of chemical weapons? Does she not agree that the process has been made much more difficult by Britain's decision in the 1950s unilaterally to get rid of its chemical weapons? Does she not think that there is a lesson to be learnt from that in relation to nuclear weapons?

The Prime Minister: Yes; my hon. Friend is right. I have frequently said that Opposition Members should really criticise the Soviet Union for not following our example in unilaterally getting rid of chemical weapons. It proves that unilateral disarmament is useless. One's opponent merely increases his stockpile and modernises and updates his weapons. I think that a change of view came about in the Soviet Union when the United States, which has only a very small stockpile of older chemical weapons, decided to go ahead with work that would update that stockpile if necessary. It was following that decision that the Soviet Union changed its mind about wanting to negotiate a global plan for the reduction of chemical weapons. Again, we have to watch verification because these weapons are very easy to make and therefore very difficult to verify.

Mr. Speaker: We now return to the debate on the enterprise initiative.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Will the hon. Gentleman please resume his seat?

Enterprise Initiative

Question again proposed.

12.1 pm

Mr. David Evans: I take this opportunity to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on her success in the NATO discussions and to say how much I agree with everything that she said.

The enterprise initiative is about small businesses. The small business man has an idea, and he knows perfectly well what he wants to do with that idea but unfortunately it sometimes takes a long time to develop the idea successfully. The initiative will help the small business man in that respect. I like to think that, through his ingenuity and entrepreneurialism, the small business man will find ways to develop his business—even when bureaucracy, local authorities and property owners seem to stand in his way at every turn. Bankers need security. They need all sorts of assurances if they are to help the very small business to develop. Nevertheless, in my experience the small business man usually manages to get the business off the ground one way or another.

I was glad to see from the White Paper that there will be more regional offices to help the small business man whose business has become a reasonable success. To begin with, small business men do not understand what a business plan is or even what cash flow is. They find that out by overtrading and suddenly finding that they need the bank manager's help yet again. That is why I welcome the regional offices. There comes a time, after the business has eventually got itself off the ground, when it needs to take on further responsibilities—in terms of management, expertise, new premises, products, capital investment or banking facilities. Enterprise counselling could greatly benefit the business that is just about to expand beyond all that its owners originally dreamt of. Most business men start by wanting to run a small business, and only in the development of that business do they begin to realise their potential and ability.

I welcome the consultancy process, but, contrary to what has been said, I have not met many civil servants or Government officers with entrepreneurial flair. My experience is the reverse. Unless they are carefully chosen and are prepared to be trained, we may find that we have a typical bank manager type who will deter the entrepreneur from developing his business if it is not copper bottomed, instead of helping him. Can those counsellors who are supposed to direct up and coming entrepreneurs be trained, monitored and reported on yearly or two-yearly?

When a civil servant decides that an entrepreneur can attract capital and the proper quality of staff, it is time for consultancy. Consultants are not what one expects them to be. Indeed, the first consultant I met I quickly head-hunted into my business, and I am not the only one to have done that. If one goes through the boards of multi-national companies one finds that their members often start as a consultant to the business. Will the Government reconsider carefully the most important step of helping a small business to become an international company which contributes to employment?

When a small business grows into a big business the business man has to decide whether to attract outside capital into it. That can be a frightening process. Again, a counsellor or consultant could help the business to

[Mr. David Evans]

become a public company. The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) said that yuppies were earning £120,000 a year. I am not worried about that. I hope that they earn £120,000 a year, not £20,000. I hope that some of those whom I am talking about become yuppies. I am keen that we should have many millionaires and I do not believe that the public are fooled by yuppies earning £120,000. The public who have invested in BP and so on are sound and intelligent. They have made a long-term investment. They are not worried whether the shares go up and down; they are interested in the dividend, whether the company is making profits and providing employment, and whether they can leave their shares to their grandchildren. I refute what was said about the public being gullible; they are not.

The enterprise initiative will help enormously businesses which need capital and need to plug into the opportunities of the EEC, the European Investment Bank and merchant banks. Businesses do not know how to become public companies. They need independent advice, not from bankers and solicitors but from an independent consultant whom they can trust. That is important for their growth.

The next important stage concerns design. Products need to be designed attractively. In the past some of the goods produced in this kingdom have not attracted people, but now there is a tremendous improvement in the design of all the products on the shelf. If we do not design products and fix prices properly, Japan and other countries will continue to attract our buying public. After all, it is up to the public to decide what they want and do not want. Therefore, I welcome this initiative on design because design, manufacturing and selling are at one.

I like to believe that we are now a nation of house owners and of shareholders. I should like us to be known not as a nation of shopkeepers but as a nation of small and medium-sized businesses, because they underlie the prosperity of this kingdom.

12.10 pm

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): I very much welcome the enterprise initiative and its thrust towards further deregulation of our economy. It is an excellent move. However, I wonder whether it will affect the book trade. I have had several complaints from constituents about the possible imposition of VAT on books. The kind of thing that they say to me is, "Isn't that a tax on something special? Wouldn't it penalise schools and libraries and be a tax on knowledge?" To a large extent, I agree with them.

However, behind those criticisms, I believe that there is an impulse from the book trade itself, which is being rather hypocritical because of the existence of the net book agreement. Through the procedures of that agreement, which is probably the sole remaining instance of resale price maintenance, books have a price greater than the market would bear. Schools, libraries and ordinary people suffer because they are paying higher prices for books than they should. I hope that the Government will consider that distortion of the free market in their enterprise initiative.

I welcome the proposals that teachers should have experience of business world. In the House,we try to achieve the same objective—at least some of us do—through the Industry and Parliament Trust. We go out from these green Benches into the real world outside. I am not asking somebody else to do what I would not be prepared to do myself.

I regret that in the election not all teachers voted Conservative. When I was canvassing, some who were against us harangued me on the doorstep. It was rather like being back in school and being told off for being naughty. It struck me that that may be something to do with the fact that teachers go to school, then to teacher training college or perhaps to university, and then back to school, so they are thoroughly imbued in the school culture, rather than in the culture of the world outside schools and universities. I hope that through the enterprise initiative teachers will gain greater experience of the wider world, just as we do through the Industry and Parliament Trust.

I noted the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) on the qualifications of counsellors and whether they would have had enough experience of the real world. I should be surprised if they were civil servants. They should be people who have been in business or marketing. Interestingly, although when I was special adviser to the Minister for the Civil Service I was very much in favour of increasing the secondment of civil servants to the world outside, I nevertheless believe that counsellors should come from the business world.

I am glad to report the success of enterprise in the north-west. As one local paper put it:

"The march toward Warrington/Runcorn by North American companies goes on . . . There are now some 75 North American companies in Warrington/Runcorn".

That is an example of the confidence that the United States has in our economy and in our continuing membership of the European Community.

In October last year the *Warrington Guardian* reported the intention of Enterprize North West to:

"build upon the area's booming business success".

Mr. Andre Winter of 3i said

"Warrington really does seem to be thriving and we are giving new and established companies the opportunity to grow further . . . People in the area certainly seem special".

I certainly agree with that. He said:

"They have entrepreneurial spirit and the ability to start up new businesses."

In January, the *Warrington Midweek Guardian* reported that

"Booming Warrington New Town continues to break records for attracting new companies . . . Half year statistics show that 120 companies signed leases to move into Warrington sites, bringing 1,042 jobs."

I have never met Eileen Bilton who is very much associated with the advertising for Warrington new town, but she certainly weaves some magic for the area. The general manager of the new town commented that Warrington-Runcorn was meeting

"greater success than ever before. We are particularly pleased at the number of jobs created and the high percentage of expansions."

In February, the *Warrington Guardian* reported an investment of £43 million in the town, bringing a further 1,500 jobs. The president of the Manchester chamber of commerce and industry, Mr. Lester George, said that the

"North-West had talked itself into despair and it was only recently that the region had recognised its economic strength . . . The North-West is poised for expansion and nothing will stop it . . . The only question is whether business will be permitted to grow to its maximum capability."

I draw great inspiration from that new-found confidence in the north-west. The north-west has realised

that retailing stories of doom and gloom will not increase takings. It has also realised that the difference between north and south is not a handicap, but an advantage. After all, in the past, it was enterprise that threw up the great cities of Liverpool and Manchester and beat the south-east into a cocked hat. I am sure that it could do so again. We even have some yuppies in Altrincham.

I think that Mr. George's question whether the north-west would be permitted to go up to its maximum capacity was a sage question. We are already meeting problems of the availability and mobility of skills. In Manchester, surveys show that a quarter of all manufacturers and those in service industries lack skilled labour and find it hard to recruit. That shows the importance of training for jobs and of the enterprise initiative.

I hope that the enterprise initiative will push hard against bureaucracy, as it promises. I know that we have abolished 500 quangos and reduced the number of Government forms to the height of Big Ben, but, small business men, repeatedly tell me that there are still too many chiefs and not enough Indians in our bureaucracy, and that there is still too much red tape.

I have been contacted by a company called Econoloft, which is the largest loft installation company in the United Kingdom. Sadly, it has met the kind of obstructionism about which I am complaining. Its success has been built upon its product of space-saver stairs, which provide access to lofts that would not be possible through the use of traditional stairs. The company has gone through a lengthy process of obtaining 40 determinations from the Department of the Environment on its safety and specifications and has had personal ratification from the Secretary of State for the Environment. However, because of some quirk of the law, individual building control officers can still take objection to that product and say that, in their opinion—only their opinion appears to count—the specifications conflict with the 1985 building regulations.

Some local authorities now have the bit between their teeth and have engaged in criminal prosecutions of that company with all the bad publicity that attaches to such a criminal prosecution. For example, there was a prosecution in Chippenham. I am glad to say that it was dismissed, but, undeterred after the case was heard, the local authority in Saffron Walden has now given notice to the company that it intends to prosecute it for its product. That is expensive, vexatious, time-consuming and harassing for a company that is ambitious to do its best for itself, its region and the United Kingdom. If given its head, it could install its own manufacturing capability for the space-saver stairs, and bring extra employment to the region.

It is precisely that kind of nonsense that the enterprise initiative should snuff out, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider the matter with despatch.

Whether the north-west will be permitted to develop to its full capacity will also depend to some extent on what happens in the run-up to, and after the winding-up of Warrington-Runcorn new town. I hope that the Government will take a flexible approach to the receipts of the new town prior to its wind-up, and that those receipts will not simply disappear into the maw of the Exchequer. Those assets are considerable, and are being realised with some despatch. I hope that some of them will be reinvested, so that the industrial parks in the north-west can be completed. That would chime in well with the Government's general policy of building in incentives for all.

12.20 pm

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): I am bound to say that it is extremely difficult to refocus the mind on the subject that we are supposed to be debating—not only because this has been an unusually exciting morning, but because an hon. Member's spirits do not exactly lift when he rises to speak surrounded by serried ranks of empty Benches. Nevertheless, I am not deterred.

Mr. Butler: Labour Members made a big fuss earlier this week about an article in *The Guardian* by Andrew Rawnsley, which accused them of being either drunk, incompetent or lazy. Yet only one of them is here today.

Mr. Cran: My hon. Friend has made an eloquent point, to which I do not think I need add. The facts speak for themselves.

I am an enthusiast for the enterprise initiative. I say that having had considerable dealings with the Department of Trade and Industry for some years. In the years before this Government and the White Paper of which the enterprise initiative is part, all that we had from the DTI was interventionism of one sort or another. We looked at certain sectors and decided how they could be improved. We spent £20 billion for 20 years on regional policy, and in the end I do not believe that any of us received the value for money that we wanted.

That is why I consider the White Paper quite revolutionary. This is the first time that I can remember that the DTI has been so strongly associated with the word that was used by my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans)—entrepreneurship. I am delighted at that, because I well remember trying to tell the CBI a few years ago that it should sponsor a crusade for entrepreneurship. I believe that this was the way to strengthen the regions of the United Kingdom, make more successful the businesses that were already there, and, indeed, to encourage more new businesses.

I could not interest the CBI in that proposition, for reasons that I need not go into here. In addition, the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), who is no longer in his place, spent a long time telling us that the practice of past Governments was right, and that we needed a formalised industrial strategy. What he did not tell us was that it is clear from consulting the business community, the CBI and the Association of British Chambers of Commerce that not a man jack of them wants that sort of industrial strategy.

What the business community wants and what it has got from the Government are the conditions in which it can take the marketing and strategic and other decisions necessary to decide the future of its businesses. I was disappointed that the hon. Member for Yeovil did not give a balanced picture and admit that there are many people who do not want his concept of an industrial strategy. What we want—it is on offer in the White Paper—is the encouragement of enterprise.

Before the Government were elected to office one began to wonder whether the spark of enterprise had been extinguished from the British public. I almost believed that it had, but, my goodness, look at what has happened in the past 10 years. One can hardly believe that such a transformation was possible.

[Mr. Cran]

In the 1950s and 1960s many talented youngsters were not prepared to go into industry and business. I well remember conducting a survey with some sixth formers at the beginning of my career in industry. I asked them whether they would go into business and industry and whether, in due course, they would form their own businesses. I will never forget that 80 per cent. of them said that they were not prepared to go into business and industry, but wanted a nice, easy, cushy number in the Civil Service, the professions or whatever. The reasons for their choice were simple. They regarded employment in industry as dirty, not well paid and, more important, uncertain.

Against this background I congratulate the Government because they have wrought a cultural revolution in the outlook of youngsters and others in this country. The hon. Member for Yeovil did not mention that this revolution is reflected in the fact that since 1980 some 180,000 net new businesses have been established. That is an enormous achievement in comparison to the past.

No doubt some hon. Members would argue that such new businesses are all in the south-east, but that is seen not to be the case if one checks the record. Between 1984 and 1986, 20,000 new businesses were set up in the north of England. Therefore it is clear that this Government's approach is the correct way to proceed because we will not solve the problems of the regions by drafting in unwilling companies by way of regional policy. We will rejuvenate the regions by the "bottom up" approach, by encouraging existing businesses and encouraging people to establish new businesses.

I am aware that the Minister is not complacent about encouraging business. However, when one makes international comparisons — he and I appreciate that there are difficulties with such comparisons—it is clear that the Netherlands has four times our number of small businesses, France and Japan twice that number, and the United States and Germany one and a half times that number. Therefore, we have a fair way to go to make up the leeway, but that is not the Government's fault—it is the fault of previous Governments. I believe that the philosophy contained in the enterprise initiative will go a long way to enable us to catch up with those countries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn, Hatfield asked how the Government can encourage business. I believe that few previous Governments have known how to encourage business. Let us consider the problem of deregulation. We are all aware that business men resent having to comply with the onerous requirements that the Government and others place upon them. We are aware that the Government are unable to abolish all such requirements completely, but they must reduce them. Therefore, I was delighted to learn from the White Paper —tucked away in one or two lines—that we will receive a deregulation White Paper some time in the summer. That is first-class news, but, for goodness sake, let it not be a recitation of what the Government have already done.

I pay tribute to the Government for what they have done, but I want to see a radical approach in that White Paper. I wish that I had time to outline my proposals, but I must press on.

The White Paper on deregulation states:

> "All new proposals for requirements on business are examined".

Obviously, that is to ensure that compliance requirements are minimised. That seems to be first-class. The document continues:

> "Gradually,"—

that is a word that always worries me—

> "all existing requirements are being examined in the same way."

Full marks to the Government for starting the process of gradually examining existing requirements. The problem is that all the difficulties stem from those existing requirements. Therefore, can the Minister tell us how gradually is "gradually" and whether he has a time frame within which the Government expect to go through existing legislation. We are all waiting with bated breath.

The White Paper also states:

> "The system of assessing the compliance costs . . . is being further developed and departments are being encouraged"—

another word which worries me—

> "to identify more targets for regulatory reform."

That approach is absolutely right. There is no doubt about that. However, that is passive language. Will the Minister and the Government tell us what it means? The Government's heart is in the right place, but will they move quickly enough? That is what the small business community wants to know.

Another aspect of the White Paper which appends to the initiative is the transfer of technology and co-operative research. We all agree that that is vital. When I represented the CBI — to make it clear to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) that I am not ashamed of that — I was always amazed at the unwillingness of many companies — not all companies fall into that category — to innovate. That seems extraordinary because the future of industry is that it should innovate.

I was also worried about the unwillingness of many companies to spend on research and development. Many companies preferred to go to the Government cap in hand, saying that they would spend on research and development if the Government would pay part of the cost. That was excusable when industrial profits were at low levels, but that could not be said now when industrial profits are at the highest levels for many years.

Therefore, this atrocious situation, whereby United Kingdom industrially-funded research and development is lower than that of most of our competitors, should be reversed. That really has to be rectified. The onus is not on the Government; it is on the industrial community to be rather more aggressive. I welcome the innovation proposals. The mere stating of a solution — and it is stated most eloquently in the White Paper — is one thing; it is quite another to implement it.

In this regard I remember spending a lot of time trying to get industry and industrialists to go to universities so that the latter could tell the former what they had to offer. I can assure the very few hon. Members who are present that it was an uphill business. I could get them along only if I could say that there was money on the table. I could not simply say that they should go along and see how much they could get out of universities in terms of technological developments that occur in universities and elsewhere. At some point I should like to hear from the Minister what details he has to catalyse industry to make use of the enormous residue of facilities in universities and polytechnics. We must not forget polytechnics. In the

country at large there are a number of first-class polytechnics that companies should also look to for advice and guidance.

Moving on to the core of what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), I should like to talk about the enterprise initiative itself. I have enormous respect for small business men. Even though politicians stand for election every five years, we do not take the same risks. Small business men mortgage everything. Some even second mortgage their homes. The companies that they establish do not, however, have strength and depth. That is why the approach that is set out in the White Paper is correct. If a company has no spare resources, it is the Government's role to ask, "How can we help a small and, in some cases, weak business to transform itself into a stronger business that, in 20 or 30 years, may employ many people?" That is why the White Paper is correct.

We should recognise that many companies worry about consultants. They always consider that they are too costly and that, in any case, once they are let in through the front door, one cannot get them out through the back door. The approach of the White Paper will assuage such fears. The Government have generously contributed £50 million to fund the scheme. Some may say that they are not generous, but it should be noted that the Government are prepared to make more funds available in the following two years. Such funds will be welcomed and used by business men who recognise that, these days, the market place is extremely complex and is becoming more complex.

I was slightly worried when I read the section relating to design, marketing, and so on, because I did not see the word "communications". That surprised me. I have no doubt that that does not mean that it is not the Government's intention to encourage communications but rather that the document was written by somebody with a more academic approach than we have. Design is not academic or abstract. It means communicating with customers to ascertain what the customers want. That was not clear in the document. The same applies to marketing. Marketing is not just a sales force; it is a whole company, from top to bottom, being orientated towards selling what it produces. That means upward and downward communication. I hope that, when the initiative gets off the ground, this point will be understood.

In the past few years, my hon. Friend the Minister has played a great part in encouraging industry's awareness of the need for better quality. He knows more about quality than I do, but he and I know that it is not just a matter of computer-aided design and manufacturing but of management communicating with the work force. If one is building a car, one does not just shove on an ill-fitting component so that one can get another unit out of one's factory. Therefore, there is a tremendous need for communication at all levels within British industry.

The enterprise initiative is a solid, revolutionary concept, but many other things are needed to make it work. For example, it is much easier than it was, but it is still difficult for a small or growing business to get finance, particularly loan and equity finance between £50,000 and £100,000. The hon. Member for Yeovil correctly said that there is a shortage of patient money—that is, having to wait five years for one's return. The trouble is, however, that the hon. Gentleman was long on analyses of and short on solutions to the problems. That was fairly typical of the approach that we had from the Opposition Benches. One solution is the formation of local investment companies, which would take in equity and make long-term loans. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is not listening today, and may not even read on Monday what I am saying. Therefore, I might have to write to him about this. That said, I am reminded that my hon. Friend the member for Carshalton and Wallington is parliamentary private secretary to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, so perhaps I can rely on him to tell my right hon. Friend what is required. In fact, what is needed to make the idea possible are fiscal incentives for investors in local investment companies.

Taxation is always an irritant—even to Members of Parliament—but it will always be with us. However, an increase in the threshold of corporation tax to £250,000 would be welcomed by the small and middle-sized business community.

Another great problem is inheritance tax. If there were more than one Opposition Member present, there would no doubt be a great hue and cry about my suggestion that there should be 100 per cent. relief for business assets. Far too many business men who build up a business over many years then find that it is taxed from under them, and that is quite wrong.

I congratulate the Government on a first-class document.

12.41 pm

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): I begin by apologising to the House and to my hon. Friend the Minister because I shall not be able to stay for the winding-up speeches, as I have a constituency engagement this afternoon.

Property is the basic raw material for trade, commerce and industry. In Victorian times and during the industrial revolution, no obstacles were put in people's way by, for example, planning laws. When that great man, Brunel, was laying out the Great Western Railway, he did not have to trot off to his local council offices and apply for planning permission to build Paddington station. He did not have to deal with inspectors and all the majestic panoply of Government interference. He got on his horse—not on his bike; I do not think they were around then—and went out and surveyed the line of the Great Western Railway himself. Those were the days of great enterprise and initiative.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: And slums.

Mr. Summerson: I remind the hon. Gentleman that it was Conservatives who brought in the Factories Acts.

Our people have not lost enterprise and initiative. We remain an innovative, resourceful and inventive people but, to a great extent, that is being stifled by red tape. Today, we have to labour under the town and country planning legislation. The first such Act passed in 1948, and since that date, those responsible for administering the legislation have worked out a jargon all their own, as I know from my experience. They give such reasons for refusing applications as, "There is a certain rhythm about the roof scale along this stretch of London road and this should not be disturbed" or, "Such an item would not be a welcome addition to the street scene." I do not know where they get this jargon from—perhaps they learn it at planning school—but it is of no help to the small business man who is trying to expand his factory.

[Mr. Summerson]

I congratulate the Government on revising the use classes order. This is excellent, but I urge them to go further. They have not really started. I can give another example of obstructionism—that by local authorities. To this day, 43 years after the second world war ended, there are still empty bomb sites in our cities. There is such an empty site only 100 yd from where I live, and such sites can be found in many parts of our great cities. The one near my home was owned by the Greater London council.

Those of us who take an interest in property matters are keeping a careful eye on property auction catalogues. In those we see properties that were formerly owned by the GLC being sold at auction. In many instances the leases on those properties expired years ago. The rents being paid today are at levels that obtained 10, 15 or 20 years ago. Many properties owned by local authorities should be given over for use by business. However, many local authorities do not even know what properties they own. They have no idea and are not interested.

In my area, the London borough of Waltham Forest is controlled by Labour and the council imposed a 62 per cent. rate increase last year and decided to set up an economic development unit. How very helpful to local businesses to know that they can go and discuss that 62 per cent. rate increase with friendly officials at the town hall!

Page 31 of the White Paper says under the heading "Inner Cities":

> "The identification of Urban Programme Areas for particular help is a new policy for DTI and recognises the particular difficulties of such areas. A number of inner cities will similarly benefit from the new measures for Development Areas as well as Regional Selective Assistance. DTI is also responsible for coordinating the work of the City Action Teams in major cities and running 16 Inner City Task Forces."

That is greatly welcomed. I urge my hon. Friends in the Department of Trade and Industry to confer with the Department of the Environment so that we may have some co-operation between those two Departments. It is fine for the DTI to bring forward this sort of programme. However, obstruction by the local authorities that rule in inner city areas will tend to cancel the benefits of such programmes. We must make full use of all the resources in our inner cities.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: What about people?

Mr. Summerson: We must also make full use of people, but, as I have said, people need places in which to work. If some local authorities deny businesses the right to use certain areas and buildings, those people have nowhere to work and will go elsewhere. In its turn, that will put more pressure on rural areas.

I urge the DTI and the D o E to get together and overhaul the planning system. I am sure that hon. Members will have seen the report from the Audit Commission. That sets out local authority property holdings and what little use is made of them. That matter needs to be looked at urgently. Enterprise initiative cannot flourish if it is denied the premises that it needs. It is all very well to talk about trade and industry and about initiative and enterprise, but people need places in which to work and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to look at that.

12.49 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): My first pleasant task is to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) on his success in the ballot, his choice of subject and the vigorous way in which he put his case. This is the second time in three weeks that I have attended a debate on a motion introduced by a Conservative Member during which the Opposition Benches have been almost empty, save for the token presence of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). We all sympathise with him in his lonely vigil.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman probably realises that, on Fridays, Labour Members go to their constituents and attend to the disastrous consequences of the Government's economic policies.

Mr. Nicholson: Conservative Members, too, have constituents to look after.

I was interested to hear the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) and his reflections on the planning system, although I do not necessarily follow him to all his logical conclusions. I have just returned from a parliamentary delegation visit to Saudi Arabia, where planning regulations are somewhat in their infancy. What impressed me, especially in the capital city of Riyadh, which is not in the most delightful of spots—it is in the middle of a desert plateau—was the dignity and splendour of modern buildings that have been put up during the past five years.

It is relevant to our debate on enterprise that we should not consider such matters simply in terms of utilitarian financial incentives. Especially in the inner cities, an immense amount depends on environmental considerations and the type of buildings, public or private, that are erected. Indeed, for the past 10 years, Saudi Arabia has been working on a new industrial city on the shores of the Gulf at Dubai. It is a most impressive achievement.

I contrast those achievements with Britain where we have planning laws to an excess, the Department of the Environment building at No. 2 Marsham street—that great tribute to architectural splendour.

It is a pleasure to take part in a debate with my next door neighbour, the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). My sorrow at his flitting from the scene must be counterbalanced by the fact that I shall have to leave in three quarters of an hour and will be unable to hear the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and my hon. Friend the Minister.

The hon. Member for Yeovil made an interesting point about venture capital in the regions, and I hope that it will be picked up, if not in this debate, in the Government's approach to such matters. I do not question the statistics that he mentioned, but my impression is that we are beginning to get substantial new life in the regions, especially in the west midlands and my native north-west, which suffered greatly in the recession. As my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) said, new businesses are being created in the north-east at a rate of 6,000 a year and the number of businesses setting up under the enterprise allowance scheme has increased by an average of 30 per cent. each year since 1983.

Manchester is now the second biggest financial centre outside London, with more than 50 banks located in the city. Last year, Japanese, German and Australian banks

set up in Manchester. In the west midlands, which has suffered greatly from the industrial recession, tourism contributes more than £500 million to the economy. Since 1976, employment in that industry has increased threefold to 70,000. One might not think of the west midlands as a typical tourist area, so that is an achievement.

I had some sympathy with the hon. Member for Yeovil when he warned about the new publicity mechanism and the semi-change of name of the Department diverting attention away from its essential tasks. We should not dwell too much on enterprise and lose our essential concern with the rather more mundane matters of trade and industry. The Department of Trade and Industry, or whatever it is called, will be judged by how it assists, encourages and facilitates British industry to export and to regenerate our domestic market.

I inject a note of soberness into our discussion. The latest balance of payments figures from the DTI show, in 1986, a deficit on visible manufactures of £5,307 million, rising in 1987 to £6,542 million. The non-oil visible trade deficit rose from £12,519 million in 1986 to £13,809 million in 1987. Those are large, disturbing figures. The trend, while not savagely upwards, is still upwards. Those are deficits. We must be concerned with those figures.

I mentioned that I have recently returned from Saudi Arabia. Many of the conclusions that I reached on that visit would be the subject of a foreign affairs debate. We visited British expatriates and the embassy's trade offices there. We got the message from those who live, trade and work out there that not enough British companies were showing an interest in that extremely rich market, despite the fall of oil revenue. Saudi Arabia is trying, understandably, to diversify its economy. It is looking for partners in the industrialised world to help in that.

British companies are doing a certain amount, but we were told that more could be done. They wished that more companies would come out — that more smaller and medium-sized businesses would show an interest. They contrasted that with the success of French companies, for example. The point was also made that British companies and perhaps some British expatriates needed to improve their ability to deal with the Arab market. That is an important task for the DTI.

Everyone, including Opposition Members, took the view that Britain has an immense opportunity in a country such as Saudi Arabia at the moment. Last September an offset programme to the substantial Tornado sales from Britain to Saudi Arabia was concluded. That gives British firms a considerable opportunity for joint ventures.

There is another reason why Britain has an immense opportunity in Saudi Arabia. We took on board the impatience of many Saudis with the United States. For many decades, Saudi Arabia has had a close political and economic partnership with the United States, but the people were considerably affronted by the restriction that the United States placed some years ago on the sales of spare parts to aircraft that it had supplied. There was concern in the United States that those planes could be used in Israel. That affront was felt by all the people whom we visited. They are frustrated with the United States' policy on the west bank and the Israeli conflict. They look to what Britain can achieve. That is a matter for a foreign affairs debate, but be not surprised, it gives considerable export opportunities, which can benefit us.

One way in which the DTI can help is mentioned in the White Paper, which states in paragraph 9:

> "One possibility is to make more use of Chambers of Commerce and other regional bodies to deliver services to exporters where they can offer a network of contacts which is close to small and medium-sized businesses with the potential to export."

Perhaps I should declare an interest because I am a parliamentary consultant to the British chambers of commerce. They are discussing with the DTI the use of chambers of commerce to identify firms in the £1 million to £10 million turnover bracket, which could export more but do not, and to help to lead them to the point of entry in export markets.

Moving away from the export side of the discussion, that paragraph in the White Paper went on:

> "One other possibility is to use outside agencies such as Local Enterprise Agencies, Chambers of Commerce and firms of management consultants to provide an information and signposting service for the business development initiatives. The advantage of operating in this way would be to extend the range of DTI contacts with industry at a relatively small cost and to use wider networks of contacts with small and medium-sized businesses than is possible even through the extended Regional Office network."

My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) welcomed the extension of DTI offices but said that it was important that there should be an entrepreneurial flavour to them. I hope that by using the premises and personnel of chambers of commerce and local enterprise agencies the entrepreneurial element will come in. I am happy to say that a number of chambers of commerce are involved in housing DTI personnel. They include Norwich, south-east Hampshire, Coventry—the Minister will be pleased to hear that; I am sure he played a major part in achieving it — north Staffordshire, Sheffield, central and west Lancashire, Chesterfield, Derby and Nottinghamshire. We hope that there will be more.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) referred to the opportunities for enterprise resulting from the privatisation of major industries. I do not want to enter a great argument now about the rights and wrongs of privatisation and what it achieves. But constituents have told me that merely transferring a major enterprise or utility from the public to the private sector does not, on the whole, change the people who work—as managers, or whatever—in that organisation. Many of them, it is said, still maintain the attitudes of the nationalised industry in which they worked before and in which their careers developed. I put that point to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy at a meeting last night. I know that, in the privatisation of electricity, he intends to encourage the input of entrepreneurs from outside. It is important not to lose sight of that opportunity in the discussions and developments that ensue from the White Paper.

In view of the time of year I want to give the House one or two reflections on the Budget of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. It should help to encourage certain activities that are relevant to enterprise—for example, increasing companies' training and R and D activities, and providing incentives to smaller and medium-sized firms to contribute to collaborative research through research associations. The possibility of contributions by local industry to specific non-profit making bodies charged with undertaking activity beneficial to the local community would also be helpful.

There is a consensus among Conservative Members that the high rates of personal taxation need to come

[Mr. Nicholson]

down. The figure generally mentioned is 50 per cent. and I go along with that. The coming Budget is a good opportunity to achieve it. Last week I read in *The Times* —the Treasury sometimes allows these options to emerge in the public domain to test reaction—that the higher rates might come down to 35 or 40 per cent. We should approach that with care. We are not Saudi Arabia, and cannot afford no income tax or a return to 1939 rates of tax. We still have considerable difficulties and we must consider the political and social realities and pressures in society. I have substantial reservations about that course of action. I urge my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to try to do much more to make it worthwhile to work at the lowest end of the income scale.

We have done a certain amount about the poverty or unemployment trap through benefits and we got into some trouble over that with regard to housing benefit and other matters. We are approaching the end of that road. We can significantly help and give incentives to those on lower incomes by expanding an idea initiated by my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry three or four years ago—a lower employee national insurance deduction for those on low incomes. We should do that rather than assist through a reduced rate tax band. The advantage is that that national insurance reduction would not need to be transferred right up the line. It is a relatively cheap way to help a specific group of people. Employers and chambers of commerce have made that point over many years and I reiterate it today.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor should also consider giving more incentives to middle management and younger professionals—and I am referring not to the yuppies in the City, but to the professionals in the private and public sectors who pay very high marginal rates of tax. The rise from the present 27 per cent. basic rate to 40 per cent. is extremely steep. I hope that the Chancellor will make that an objective when he presents his Budget.

I hope that the Budget will reinforce and encourage the enterprise initiative that my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington has so fortunately brought to our attention. That enterprise initiative must be related to the important tasks performed by the Department of Trade and Industry, dating back many decades to the days when it was the Board of Trade, to help Britain's trade and industry.

1.6 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): As a Member representing a northern constituency, I often hear it said that there is an appalling gap between the north of England and the south of England—the so-called north-south divide. I have always regarded that idea as somewhat simplistic and misleading. It is wrong to imagine that there is nothing north of Watford, but whippets and welfare scroungers, Labour Members, dark satanic mills, Arthur Scargill and squabbling cricketers and brass bands.

Some of Britain's most beautiful countryside is north of Watford. Some of Britain's most inventive and wealthiest people are to be found north of Watford. Indeed, some of Britain's most thriving industries are in the north. It is too simplistic by half to say that there is a north-south divide. The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) made that mistake earlier. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is not in the Chamber now. This is the second debate this week in which I have taken part when the hon. Member for Yeovil, having spoken earlier, disappeared to further his leadership ambitions in other areas.

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) has gone to look for a party.

Mr. Riddick: That is most interesting.

I believe that the real divide is not so much between the regions, but within the regions. There exists an enormous divide of attitude in the regions. I cannot agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) that everyone has undergone a change of attitude. I fear that that is not yet the case. The real divide exists between the people in the regions who understand the enterprise economy and those who do not understand it. It exists between those who have grasped the opportunities provided by this country's increasing emphasis on enterprise and those who have not grasped those opportunities or are even aware that they exist.

The social divide is between those who have taken the opportunity to buy their council houses and those who have not or, indeed, those who have taken the opportunity to buy shares in the industries that we have privatised and those who have not. The great divide is between those who have started their own businesses and are playing their part in Britain's flourishing private enterprise and those who do not understand or recognise the opportunities and rewards available from that enterprise.

Since the Government came to power in 1979 they have enormously improved the conditions in which private enterprise has to work, as we all know. I see that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) is laughing. He should remember that we have reduced direct taxation and reformed the capital taxation system to provide proper incentives for individuals to work hard to produce the wealth that is so vital to this country's well-being. We have reduced the tax burden on small and large companies alike to encourage them to make decent profits. We have reduced the amount of red tape to free more time for the entrepreneur and manager to do what he is best at doing —designing, producing, marketing and selling. We have designed various schemes to help the budding entrepreneur to get off the ground, and the enterprise initiative is probably the best of these. In short, we have improved the overall economic climate so that enterprise can flourish and hard work and talent are rewarded.

As we all know, there is more work to be done; there are more battles to be won and more individuals to be convinced. I return to the question of attitude. Private enterprise, and Britain, will never flourish or achieve its maximum potential until all the people of this country believe in the enterprise culture—until they understand that competition is much healthier than corporatism, and that the ambition to improve the lot of oneself and one's family is nothing to be ashamed of and is much more laudable than relying on someone or something else. It is the age-old battle between those who believe in independence and those who believe in reliance. The real divide is between those who believe in freedom, choice, responsibility, and enterprise, which are the values that

Conservative Members hold dear, and those who believe in dependence and servility to the state—the values in which Opposition Members believe.

It is depressing that no Labour Members are present apart from the hon. Member for Great Grimsby. The hon Gentleman said that that they were all in their constituencies. However, if we were discussing a motion about state support for, or investment in, industry, many Opposition Members would be present — and many Conservative Members would be here to argue against the idea. Conservative Members have won the battle of ideas in many parts of the country, particularly in the south of England but also in the west midlands and in many parts of the north. Many thousands of people in my constituency of Colne Valley understand that success and wealth creation come as a result of hard work and enterprise and not Socialism or what Lord Young called the nanny state. That is perhaps why the good folk of Colne Valley elected me — their first Conservative Member in 102 years. However, the battle of ideas has not been won completely and that is why we have no choice but to continue to give more power back to the people and allow them to run their own lives without for ever having to look over their shoulders to see whether the state, in whatever guise, approves.

The Government must address themselves to several areas to ensure that the enterprise initiative and private enterprise fully succeed. Education is the most important aspect of the whole process and the Government clearly agree. The DTI's excellent White Paper states:

> "The competitiveness of industry and commerce depends on our ability to harness the energy, develop the intelligence and promote the enterprise of our people, especially amongst the young."

I could not have put that better myself and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on those excellent words.

I applaud wholeheartedly the Government's objectives to provide teachers and pupils with a greater exposure to the world of commerce, business and industry, but, most important, we must ensure that each individual has a first-class education. That is why the Education Reform Bill, which is now in Committee, is so vital to our well-being. What is so depressing is the way in which the battalions of education producers line up one after another and effectively say to the Government, "How dare you interfere with our God-given right to, and knowledge of how to, educate the children of this country." It grieves me to say this, but often it seems to be opposition for the sake of it. It is indeed a battle between the producers and the consumers of education.

Before I came to the House I worked in industry and spent a great deal of time interviewing people for jobs. When I interviewed for jobs that required O or A-levels, I was horrified regularly at the low level of general literacy and numeracy of many young people. It is not their fault. How unfair it is for them that they did not receive a proper basic education and for the 25 per cent. of Britain's long-term unemployed that they are either innumerate, illiterate or both. How can we expect them to play their part in Britain's ship, HMS Enterprise, if their education has not developed their intelligence, innate skills and ambitions? Our education reforms are a key factor in the Government's enterprise initiative.

I am lucky to have an American student working for me as a part-time research assistant. Earlier this week I told her that I was hoping to speak in this debate and she did a bit of work for me. Most of all, she put across to me strongly that in America enterprise and business are stressed at all levels of the education system, that in the universities and colleges tremendous stress is put on business and economics, and that people want to study those subjects. In no way is a career in industry frowned on.

My assistant pointed out that the Olympics in Los Angeles were wholly financed by private money and made a healthy profit. It was the first time that it had been done, yet the American people thought it was an admirable idea. If we were to host the Olympic games there would be no question of private enterprise; it would be down to the local councils. There need to be changes in education and attitudes.

One of the bees in my bonnet—as with education this one is not the responsibility of the DTI, although perhaps it should be — which is shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson), is that one of the greatest obstacles to economic progress in inner city areas, towns and industrial areas, such as Colne Valley and Huddersfield, is the planning restrictions which can do so much to stifle enterprise, small businesses and entrepreneurs. I want the green belt protected, which is why it is important that we provide land for industrial and commercial development, for use by entrepreneurs in our towns and cities because that is the way in which we create new jobs.

I know of several developments in my own area of west Yorkshire which have been delayed, frustrated or even stopped because of the planning refusals, or the unnecessary planning restrictions and conditions that make the enterprise barely viable or, in some cases, impossible. There are a whole host of reasons for that. Sometimes it is because the plans are contrary to the local plan or because the highway department or the water authority objects. Sometimes the fire regulations make it difficult to proceed; and it is sometimes because of the Government. In my constituency for example, 128 buildings were listed as of historic importance in 1980. By 1987 that figure had increased to 1,455—it had been multiplied by 12. When such buildings are listed, we restrict their use for industrial development. Of course, we must protect our architectural heritage, but I believe that that has gone too far.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs will not be too disappointed that I have not referred to many of the proposals in his White Paper. There are not many proposals in it with which I disagree. It is a very good document and I welcome the increased business development help and consultancy that it outlines. I am pleased that it recognises that red tape and bureaucracy equal time-wasting and enterprise-blunting.

The real secret of the success of enterprise in this country lies outside the remit of the DTI. The downward spiral of income tax must continue, as must the reform of capital taxation. I have not touched on trade because I have not had the time. Clearly, the Government's emphasis on high-quality training is excellent. I hope that as British firms continue to prosper they will start to do more and more of their own training. Furthermore, the consistency and stability with which the Government have provided economic policy during the past eight years is of

[Mr. Riddick]

equal importance to enterprise. However, most importantly, we must get the education system right. We must change attitudes and we must get the planners off the backs of the entrepreneurs.

Free enterprise is at the heart of Britain's economic renaissance. The spirit of invention and enterprise is working in Britain once again as it did 150 years ago. If Government create the right conditions, free enterprise will do the job of reducing unemployment and creating wealth and happiness for the British people.

1.22 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): One of the prerequisites of these Friday debates appears to be to say where we were before coming here. My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) has been to the sunny sands of Saudi Arabia. The Opposition spokesman the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) is from the sunny sands of Grimsby. I have come from the dentist and, for that reason, I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), who opened the debate, for being absent. While he launched eruditely into the subject of enterprise, I had my feet up and was flat on my back, being capped—no doubt an experience more often felt by Opposition Members.

I very much enjoyed the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) and the other speeches that I was present to hear, but unfortunately I did not hear the opening speech. I am sorry that my hon. Friends have been so adamant about the green Benches of the Opposition. It is quite restful on the eye, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby is worth the rest of them put together, with his wit and the entertaining speech that is about to come. Linked to the wit and musical talents of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs it should be a fine summing-up for a Friday afternoon. We look forward to it.

I refer first to the changes in our society and the need for enterprise initiatives of all kinds to adapt our society to those changes. We must take into account the fact that we are moving from a world in which we spend two thirds of our life at work to a world in which we spend one third of our life at work. That is partly because of shorter hours, the shorter working week, longer holidays and earlier retirement.

We are also moving towards a world where, increasingly, people have more than one job at a time and more than one career during their working lives. We are also moving towards a world where employment in itself is no longer the norm, as more and more people are becoming self-employed. That is where such initiatives are particularly important.

About 700,000 new businesses have been created in the past eight years and the number of self-employed has increased from 1·9 million to about 2·6 million between 1979 and 1986, although the Minister may have more up-to-date figures. It is welcome to note that almost 250,000 people have taken up the enterprise allowance scheme. That is a new way forward, but we have a long way to go to catch up with some of our competitors abroad in encouraging smaller firms.

In Japan, for example, almost 50 per cent. of people work for firms which employ fewer than 20 people and only 8 per cent. work for firms which employ over 500. The same pattern is apparent in France and Italy. However, in Britain, some 26 per cent. of people work in big firms and only 25 per cent. in small firms.

There is much scope for greater expansion of our small firms sector and of the self-employed sector. The rewards are there to grasp. The recent report from the university of Newcastle, compiled by Doyle and Gallagher, showed that, from 1982 to 1984, only firms which employed fewer than 20 employees were the net creators of jobs. That is significant. The birth and expansion of firms is occurring in those sectors. They are creating the jobs on which the British economy so desperately depends.

Small firms have many benefits. Obviously, managerial control is much simpler, industrial relations problems are fewer and quality is more responsive to customer needs. However, small firms also have to contend with many problems. Their ability to innovate after the first idea is more restricted. They are more likely to have cash flow problems and less likely to have cash for investment and research. They are also less likely to understand marketing and export aspects and the technology that we need to encourage them to tackle. That is not surprising because most small firms start with an individual who has an idea. He does not start as an expert on marketing or man management.

We can give much more support to small firms. I welcome the initiative, particularly the marketing aspect, not only in terms of expanding horizons for the marketing of small firms, but of encouraging small firms to consider the nitty-gritty of advertising. Too often, in small firms' advertisements, one sees the small ad mentality of trying to fit as many words as possible into a confined space, hoping to get the message across. Advice on that matter could go a long way to assist such firms.

I also welcome the changes which will make access to the various schemes easier. For example, under the loan guarantee scheme, since 1981, £600 million has gone to 18,000 small firms. Very few of those grants have been in amounts of less than £15,000, yet the small grants are often the most needed. Grants under the scheme have been most difficult to obtain because of the complicated procedure involved. It is good that the Government and the banks have worked together to ease that problem.

I also welcome a move that is occuring in the EEC. I do not recall that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby has ever welcomed anything from the EEC, except perhaps the fish which, of their own free will, swim into the Grimsby docks——

Mr. Austin Mitchell: The other way.

Mr. Bowis: Into the Grimsby nets, and then they go the other way.

The hon. Gentleman might force himself to welcome the movement in the EEC in respect of the fiche d'impact. It is difficult to translate, but it has nothing to do with fish. It does not translate exactly as the enterprise and deregulation unit but it requires all legislation and amending legislation to go to a committee for its impact on small firms. Until it has been through that process, legislation cannot be enacted. There is a lesson for my hon. Friend to preach to his colleagues in some of the other Departments—not least the Treasury and the DHSS—to ensure that their legislation has no unfortunate impact on small firms, as, sadly, it too often has.

I welcome the shift in DTI spending away from the broad regional grants to more selective spending on technology, research and development and advisory services. That is the right way to encourage businesses to start and to grow. In the latter context, it is good to see that spending has increased from about £142 million to £147 million, approaching three or four times as much, over the period of this Government.

Hon. Members have raised the problems of labour shortage and uncertainty over the housing market, among others. Again, I hope that my hon. Friend will speak to his colleagues in other Departments about the effect of the cost of local government on small firms. Progress is being made in many parts of the country, not least my own area in Wandsworth, where the partnership between local and national Government has brought in more new firms—including manufacturing firms. In Battersea, we have reduced unemployment by 19 per cent. in the last year, and in Wandsworth it is down to 9·2 per cent. Wandsworth is the only inner London borough, apart from the City of London, where unemployment is below 10 per cent.

Much of that improvement is due to the policy of keeping rates low so that jobs can be created in the inner cities, and there is a fear that the new uniform business rate will have an unfortunate impact on some small firms. The National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses did a survey of its own members, and found, for example, that a new engineering workshop in Norfolk would be paying 219 per cent. more in UBR, a hairdresser in Lincoln 300 per cent. more, a pub in Broadstairs 362 per cent. more and a railway arch workshop in Slough 440 per cent. more. Although the Government are rightly trying to help the north, as opposed to the south, in some of their rate reform policies, when they say

"The more prosperous businesses in the South East will be paying more rates",

they must be using a transferred epithet, because businesses in the south-east will pay more business rates whether they are prosperous or not.

I do not wish to cut into the happy duet that we are about to enjoy, but I briefly ask my hon. Friend the Minister to pass on to his right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State my welcome for his use of 25 employees as the definition of a small firm. In the past, figures of anything from 100 to 250, or even 500, have been used. In fact, about 78 per cent. of firms employ five or fewer people, and the enterprise initiative package will assist those very small firms to grow.

I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say, and I am grateful for the opportunity given to us by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington to debate the matter.

1.33 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I shall begin the basso profundo part of the duet, leaving the tremolo to the Minister, who has brought the skills of rock opera to the Department of Trade and Industry.

Let me first congratulate the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) on winning the ballot. I must congratulate him rather less on the motion, which, had it come from anyone else, would have been regarded as pure sycophancy—a desperate attempt to escalate an hon. Member's career from the higher reaches of Parliamentary Private Secretary. In the hon. Gentleman's case, however, I accept that it is not sycophancy, but is meant sincerely. I have heard him on this subject before, and I know that he speaks from a genuine concern.

I hope, however, that the hon. Gentleman will admit that the motion has brought an incredible amount of economic illiteracy into the Chamber. Perhaps it is just because it is Friday. It is amazing, when we pick up stones on Fridays, what crawls out from under them. A bigger collection of political twerps and economic illiterates have spoken today than I have ever heard before. Apart from the hon. Members for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), whose speech I enjoyed, the economic illiteracy has been tremendous.

I hope that the Minister can distance himself from some of the nonsense that has been mentioned by Conservative Members. It has been my pleasure to hear all that nonsense because I am Leader of the Opposition (Friday). Warhol said:

"everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes"—

and indeed, everyone will be Leader of the Opposition for a morning—today it is my turn. In that capacity I wish to comment on the essence of the debate, the enterprise initiative document.

Gladstone used to entertain parties of visiting Liberals on his estate of Hawarden, where the great man relaxed by chopping down trees. Lord Randolph Churchill said that all that Gladstone's visitors went away with were chips from the trees that he had chopped down and that that was all he had provided for the people of the country. Churchill said:

"He told them that he would give them and all other subjects of the Queen much legislation, great prosperity and universal peace, and he has given them nothing but chips. Chips to the faithful allies in Afghanistan, chips to the trusting native races of South Africa, chips to the Egyptian fellah, chips to the British farmer, chips to the manufacturer and the artisan, chips to the agricultural labourer chips to the House of Commons itself."

Gladstone was a big man, but the man whose initiative we are debating today is certainly not big. Gladstone was a hairy man, but mine brother Young is a smooth man, a more emollient presence than Mr. Gladstone. Certainly, Lord Young of Graffham did not chop down the trees himself—if we consider those trees to be the great oaks of British industry—they were brought down by the economic insanity that the Government pursued from 1979 to 1982. During that period one fifth of the British manufacturing capacity was closed down and 28 per cent. of manufacturing jobs went. Indeed, 1·8 million manufacturing employees lost their jobs and, for the first time, we became a net importer of manufactured goods.

Lord Young has been sent in to clear up the resulting disastrous landscape created during that period. He has been sent in to pick up the chips and to redecorate the stumps. It is similar to the joke that Adlai Stevenson made of Richard Nixon, namely that he was such a good politician that if he chopped down a great redwood he would stand on the stump and give a speech in favour of conservation. That is not Lord Young's job, he would get an advertising agency to do it for him. Indeed, the budget for the enterprise document and its promotion on television is £6·3 million. That money will be spent to pull the wool over the eyes of the people.

Lord Young would tell us that the trees have been chopped down for the best possible reasons. Some £6·3 million is being spent on telling us that the DTI is doing more when, in fact, it is doing less. The Conservative party

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

often claims that the Labour party throws money at problems. It appears that Lord Young throws advertising agencies at problems and expects them to provide some kind of solution. The maxim is, "When in doubt advertise", and the DTI's advertising budget is expanding pari passu with the deficit in manufactured trade.

Lord Young has an advertising budget to tell us that the stump is still flourishing. All that it needs is good advice about its appearance and perhaps a consultative agreement with a painter to redecorate what is left of the stump of British industry.

Lord Young's job as a Minister is not to solve problems, but to conceal them. The Prime Minister has said, "David is not like other Ministers." That may be a compliment, but I am not sure, given the calibre of other Ministers. The Prime Minister has said, "Other Ministers bring me problems, David brings me solutions." Some might wish that that solution was a dilute mixture of tranquillisers or hemlock. That is not my wish. The solution that is brought to the Prime Minister in the initiative we are debating today is smarm—derived from Lord Young's repeated words, "Yes, ma'am." Smarm as the answer to Britain's problems is oozing out of the DTI.

Mr. Forman: As the hon. Gentleman is talking about the direction of the DTI under its present leadership, does he not at least pay tribute to the fact that since 1979 the balance of spending within the DTI has shifted dramatically away from propping up the industries of the past towards greater support of innovation and research and development? Is that not exactly what the Labour party would wish?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is still working for that promotion. Of course we welcome that shift. However, it is shift within a reduced and misapplied budget. There is no strategy for the regeneration and encouragement of British industry.

Returning to Randolph Churchill and Lord Gladstone, what does Lord Young say to a nation which now has a higher level of import penetration than any other advanced industrial country? What does he say to a nation in which the imports of foreign manufacturers as a proportion of British output was 9 per cent. in 1966 and is now 48 per cent. — double the proportion in west Germany and in France? What does he say? He advertises. What does he say to an economy which has just had its worst ever monthly trading deficit? He advertises. What does he say to a manufacturing industry that has gone from a £5 billion surplus in 1978 to a £7 billion deficit? He advertises. What does he say to his ministerial colleagues who are now seriously embarrassed at the failure of the DTI to stop that trade gap widening remorselessly this year? He advertises.

The White Paper and its associated documents that have been pouring out from the DTI are an advertising compendium with no substance. They are irrelevant to the real problems.

The problem is that industry was so badly battered by what the Government did between 1979 and 1983 that the industries that survived the economic holocaust caused by high interest rates, an overvalued pound and a depressed and deflated domestic economy because of cuts in Government spending, had to throw overboard research, design, development and training — indeed, everything that makes for non-price competitiveness. They had to do that simply to survive.

Investment is still down. As a nation, we spend three times less on each individual training system than is spent in Sweden. We produce three times fewer trained engineers than France. Research, design and development have all gone.

Now, in this motion, we are asked to praise the DTI's belated efforts in that direction. Praise is due to them, but it is about time they saw some light. They cannot simply graft on those measures and expect them to take. They cannot expect business to become competitive by grafting on research and design through consultancy arrangements. Research and design spring from competitiveness, they do not produce it. They are a reflection of competitiveness and the dynamic of British industry which begins with price competitiveness and generates profit.

Profits have always been too low in Britain. If we had higher profits we would have invested more, there would have been improved productivity, output and quality. We would have been able to spread research, design, development and model changes in the automobile industry over a larger output, thus pressing less heavily on each unit cost. If we had been able to do that, we would now be more competitive. We cannot graft on competitiveness at this late stage after the prelude of 1979 to 1983.

Competitiveness is a syndrome; it cannot be created by consultancy arrangements. It is a driving desire for change, growth and expansion, a desire to compete and to win in the world market which does not exist because industry has been cowed and battered by what has been done to British industry in the name of monetarism. The danger is that we are now locked into a lower level of output and production. It is difficult to expand beyond it without sucking in imports and worsening the balance of payments.

It is true that there was an improvement between 1986-87. The pound and oil prices came down. Therefore, our exports became slightly more competitive. Productivity went up and unit labour costs went down. The Government were beginning to learn some economic sense — if we run the economy for competitiveness, we can increase productivity and bring down unit labour costs by the expansion that that generates. But we must run the economy to be competitive. The Government were prepared to do that only because an election was in the offing in 1987. It is certainly not the start of an economic miracle.

We shall face serious difficulties in manufactured trade — difficulties to which the enterprise initiative is largely irrelevant. With the dollar coming down, we face the fact that two thirds of the increase in manufactured exports that has occurred since 1979—it is a small increase—has gone to the American market. That two thirds is now threatened by the fall in the dollar. Also, American exports have become more competitive. They are already considerably more competitive in volume terms. Trade that is diverted from the American market competes more bitterly and intensely with our other traditional markets. We are still in the syndrome that the NEDC diagnosed in the 1970s, when Britain turned out products of a lower unit value than France or West Germany but imported high-value goods. That is still true.

Imports are taking an increasing share of the British market. That sounds incredible, after all the praise of the regeneration of British manufacturing that has come from Conservative Members. If British manufacturing has been so powerfully regenerated by the new spirit that the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) wanted to make compulsory in schools—he scolded the unemployed for not feeling the new spirit of enterprise—why is it that, between 1979 and September 1987, the percentage of the domestic chemicals market taken by imports increased from 30 per cent. to 40 per cent.? That was in less than 10 years.

The proportion of imports in mechanical engineering increased from 29 to 38 per cent., in electronics from 31 to 48 per cent., in motor vehicles from 38 to 48 per cent., in textiles from 33 to 46 per cent., in clothing from 29 to 38 per cent., in washing machines from 28 to 35 per cent. in 1987, and in televisions from 22 to 37 per cent. If we are so good, why has that happened? It is because industry has been so badly treated by the Government that it has not been able to compete. We cannot make it compete by grafting on the new elements that have suddenly been thought of by Lord Young.

All the basic weaknesses of the British economy still exist. They have to be dealt with—not the peripheral matters with which the enterprise initiative deals. I shall quote various reports that have been produced over the past few months about the state of British manufacturing. I hope that the Minister will give us his assessment of their accuracy. Investment is almost the life-blood of competitiveness—the one thing on which we have to fight back against the world — yet investment in manufacturing is 9 per cent. lower than it was in 1979. Indeed, in large sectors there has been a net disinvestment. We have been living on the seedcorn. The annual industrial survey of the *Financial Times* in January 1988 stated:

"In many areas . . . it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the rising sales of British goods derive less from investment in new products than from competitive prices, stemming from relatively low wages, and a currency level which, until recently at least, has been competitively priced."

On productivity, a summary of recent academic research by Warwick university states that Britain is still part of a

"vicious and self-perpetuating spiral of low wages, low morale and low productivity."

A CBI memorandum to the NEDC last October states:

"Britain remains a relatively low-pay, productivity, low profit economy".

How will we improve all the things that we are supposed to improve in design if we have a low-pay, low-profit economy, if we do not involve workers, and do not generate investment? The Cranfield-British Institute of Management study, entitled "Managing Manufacturing Operations in the UK, 1975-1985" stated:

"The regrettable but overwhelming conclusion must be that very little has happened in manufacturing operations in the UK over the last ten years. This is particularly true in the key areas of 'competitive' edge—delivery reliability, lead times and use of new technology."

That is the background.

We welcome the provision of help and these consultancy arrangements in design and marketing. There should be a bonanza for the consultancies. They will produce a lot of advice, some of which will be practicable for British industry. It is just not enough. If the Department of Trade and Industry is prepared to recognise that the state has a role to play in offering these consultancy arrangements, and encouraging manufacturing in this direction, why does it not extend it in other sectors? In our competitor countries, Governments and Government Departments offer help to their manufacturing industry. They offer support, investment, finance and a closer working relationship with Government Departments than British industry has ever enjoyed. Why is assistance offered for sectors such as design but not for all the other problem areas faced by industry, and, in particular, why not for research and development?

Research and development must be the key to new processes and new competitiveness. The DTI has spent £30,000 on a report from Coopers and Lybrand on innovation centres, which I think are necessary for Britain. Coopers and Lybrand found, no doubt because that is what the Department wanted it to find, that innovation centres were not necessary. But Japan has 190 of them, all state funded.

The Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology produced one of the most damning reports on British investment in research and development that I have ever seen. It paints a depressing picture which is contrary to that created by the advertising monstrosity that the DTI is putting out. Lord Young told that Committee that recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figures for industry-funded research and development in the United Kingdom and competitor countries gave cause for "considerable concern". He was half right. It should have been "overwhelming concern". He also said that he saw it as

"central to the Government's philosophy that the motivation for spending more on R and D must come from industry itself."

The problem is that it has not done so. It does not seem likely to do so and the Government are doing far less than they should. If we cut out defence-oriented research and development, the proportions of Government-funded research and development in EEC countries is: Germany 34 per cent., France 26 per cent., and United Kingdom 16 per cent. In other words, we are spending about half per head of what Germany is spending, about 60 per cent. of what France is spending and just a little over what is spent by those industrial powers, Italy and Belgium.

The conclusions drawn by the Committee, which looked in detail and heard evidence from all interested parties on the state of research and development, were:

"the overwhelming weight of opinion from almost every sector of the research community and from the private sector is that R & D in many fields is underfunded, and in some cases seriously underfunded . . . These two views should not be taken together to mean that the underfunding is wholly the responsibility of the Government. This is not true. A large share of the responsibility rests with industry, who have failed to invest enough in R & D and to appreciate its importance. Other sections of society, particularly the City and institutional shareholders, have to accept some responsibility. The Committee are concerned at the comparative failure of British industry to undertake and to finance R & D, and its disposition to rely on publicly funded work."

That is a crashing indictment of British industry and the Department of Trade and Industry, which has not been encouraging it to spend more on British research and development.

In the light of that failure and of the realities—not the public relations realities projected by the Department through its advertising budget and by Conservative Members reading Central Office briefs—the initiative

[Mr. Mitchell]

that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington asks us to commend is silly, smarmy and irrelevant to the real problems facing manufacturing. It is not a case, as the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) said, of fiddling while Rome burns, because the motion commends the increase in the output of firelighter manufacturers and offers them design consultancies on the shape of the briquettes that they manufacture. That is worse than fiddling while Rome burns.

The real problem is the industrial decline that must be reversed. We have wasted the oil opportunity that should have been used to expand the British economy to a new industrial strength. That opportunity was largely thrown away. Let me declare my overseas visits. In November 1987 I visited the United States and not Saudi Arabia. While I was in the United States, Senator Moynihan said that President Reagan's economic policy consisted of borrowing $3 trillion from the Japanese and throwing a party. The Government have taken the wealth from the North sea and thrown a party and, being mean, they have invited only their friends and not the mass of the British people in the way that Reagan invited the mass of the American people.

The Government have destroyed jobs and will be the only Government to go out with fewer jobs than they came in with. Over the same period America has created 10 million jobs by expanding the economy. What will happen in the 1990s when the oil contribution finishes? We will move into deficit in oil trade in 1991. The Government have used the opportunity of oil to destroy much of our manufacturing industry and we have moved into a horrendous and growing deficit on manufactured trade. I ask the Government to tell us what will happen when the oil goes in the 1990s. How will we survive and provide the jobs, preserve our standard of living, and generate growth unless we rebuild manufacturing industry? That cannot be done by the tinkering that is contained in the White Paper.

It is not a question, as the White Paper says, of a hands-off approach to industry. We have to run the economy for manufacturing, and that is what a Labour Government will do. We shall run the economy for growth, for expansion, for manufacturing and for jobs. We will not run it for finance or for the interests of money and those who have it or for high interest rates. We shall put money to work for the people and for industry. That is what any responsible Government ought to do. The tinkering in the White Paper is not reality.

British industry is now in a war, an international struggle for survival, and it is not surviving very well. Survival does not depend on small firms, 94 per cent. of which do not export. Survival depends on the big battalions and on the Government's co-operation with them to rebuild the country's economic fortunes. We send British industry into that international struggle burdened with heavier costs than its competitors. It has heavier rail transport costs and heavier electricity charges, just wilfully increased to fatten up the electricity industry for privatisation. British industry also has heavier interest rate charges than its competitors, and all those burdens are influenced by Government.

We are asking industry to fight that international war with that ball and chain round its leg. It has gone into battle not with protection and help from the Government, because it has been stabbed in the back. Any firm that invests substantially in research and development and in new products and modernisation, and diverts money from immediate profits to investment is promptly the object of a takeover bid because its share price is depressed by the very techniques of investment that are necessary to survive the international struggle. We send it into battle and we stab it in the back, and Pilkingtons is an example of that. The company then has to spend millions in fighting off the threat of the takeover bid. Lastly, we send it into battle not with Government help and co-operation, but with a Government running the economy for finance. The Government are now killing the goose, the fall in the pound from 1986, that has laid the Government's golden and electoral eggs. The real value of the pound sterling has appreciated by 13 per cent. since the last quarter of 1986. The Government complain about the increase in wages, but there has been a 13 per cent. increase in the real price of the pound. That is a bigger burden on industry than any increase in wages, and it is a direct consequence of the Government's policy of tying sterling to a deutschmark whose value must increase.

The terms of trade for manufacturers are worse than they were in 1981, and disastrous consequences will follow, just as they did in 1981. As the hosannas about success from the grovelling chorus of sycophants from whom we heard today ring loudest, matters are turning sour. We have returned to the stop phase in the stop-go cycle, and all that the Government have to offer to counter it is fatter consultancies. They are an irrelevancy.

The prospects are bleak and becoming bleaker. The balance of payments is widening, and the Government's only answer will be deflation. Exports will suffer and imports will become more competitive. None of that reality emerges from this half-baked, inadequate White Paper which fudges every issue and gives solutions to none of the problems. Essentially, it is the bland leading the blind stumblingly downhill.

2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John Butcher): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) for the timeliness of the subject that he chose for the debate. He has done the House a great service in providing us with an opportunity, for the first time in this Chamber, to consider the White Paper and the enterprise initiative and to discuss — fortuitously, only a few days before the Budget — many issues which hon. Members on both sides of the House believe should be aired.

I was interested to hear the latter comments of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). When, during his peroration on exchange rates, he launched into an analysis of competitiveness, he illustrated clearly the chasm between his approach and the approach of my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington to what precisely is required in the British economy to make us more competitive. My hon. Friend focused on non-price factors, just as the nations with appreciating currencies, such as Japan and West Germany, focus on non-price factors. If anything gives the lie to the contention of the regressive, unconstructed, backward-looking Labour party, it is this: if it was all about exchange rates, the German economy would be on its knees because it has had to cope with constantly increasing values in its currency, as have the Japanese. But they have insured

themselves against the currency-based erosion of their competitiveness by becoming involved in the issues which my hon. Friend highlighted.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Does not the Minister realise that it is precisely because those countries built their industrial power that they can sustain an appreciation in their currency? We cannot, because we are weaker. If a country's output of motor cars is 3 million, 4 million, 5 million, 6 million or, in the Japanese case, 7 to 8 million, it can spread the costs of research and design over the larger output. British Leyland produces just over 400,000 cars, which is probably about the same figure as in the late 1940s. We cannot afford the appreciation because we have not grown as much as those countries have.

Mr. Butcher: The hon. Gentleman is a perceptive man and a well-thought-of member of the Labour Front Bench. If he was giving a lecture on the economic history of the United Kingdom away from the House, he would acknowledge, rightly, the role of leads, lags and trends in an economy. Much of his speech reflected the worst sort of short-termism. He attributed to this Government faults that have been building up in our economy for a long time, especially as the world recession hit our manufacturers harder than it hit most, for reasons that I shall give in a moment. But the Germans have coped fairly easily with an increasing value of their currency because they set the framework of their economic miracle against clear principles back in the period from 1949 to 1953. As I said in a previous speech, their policies bear a strong resemblance to the policies that we put in place, in macroeconomic terms, particularly from 1982 to 1985.

Therefore, when the hon. Gentleman does his United Kingdom tour as part of the listening role of the Labour party, I hope that, when he launches into his lectures in Great Grimsby, Scotland or wherever, he will regale some of his colleagues in the Labour party with the lessons of the German economic miracle and that he will look at the period of German economic history between 1949 and 1953 when Euchen, an excellent economist, and Ehrhardt, an excellent Chancellor, laid the foundations for that German economic miracle, which are similar to the foundations that we laid in this Administration, in the teeth, at the beginning, of a world recession.

I endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington on non-price factors. He is absolutely right to focus on quality, design and marketing as just three of those non-price factors. They represent the effort, the three enabling skills in a company, that must be deployed to best possible effect. I shall come back to some of my hon. Friend's comments later.

The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), who gave his apologies to the House for leaving early, demonstrated yet again that he is the master of the mixed metaphor and that he can give a speech on any subject at any time with the minimum of consideration. Therefore, he is ideally equipped to be the next leader of the Social and Liberal Democrats, or whatever name they will be trading under at the next general election.

Let me look at the meat of the hon. Gentleman's argument. He said that we were not doing enough for small firms. He said that we had policies in place for setting up small firms, but with the exception of the business expansion scheme we were not doing enough to see them through the initial period of consolidation into further expansion. The hon. Gentleman has therefore completely misread the White Paper; he has completely misread the Department's latest initiative, because there is a whole raft of measures inside the enterprise initiative designed to help small and medium-sized companies to grow and to fill in the missing capabilities that they often find are exposed when they expand from a small company into a medium-sized company and, we hope, with many of them, eventually into a large company.

The hon. Gentleman seems to be stuck somewhere around 1968 in his appreciation of measures required to revitalise Britain's economy. I shall not hazard a guess at where the hon. Member for Great Grimsby is, but I think that he is somewhere between 1951 and about 1975½. I do not think that he is a root-and-branch clause IV man, but he is pretty much into the motherhood statements of the mid-1970s when he puts forward his recipes for recovery in Britain.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) talked about change of attitudes. That is remarked on by those who have the advantage of coming back to this country having spent a period abroad. If one talks to a business man who has been away for four or five years and who has returned to the United Kingdom in the past two or three years, such people remark on the demonstrable and sometimes spectacular change in attitudes in the board room where our managers are much more professional and ambitious, and on the shop floor where trade unionists and the work force are rediscovering some of the basic virtues that are the key generators of employment.

I should like to mention the names of some fairly typical people to whom we in the DTI talk, who are not members of the chattering classes but who in many past conversations have influenced the formation of our policy. One, whose observations I have noted over a period, is the trade unionist, Bill Jordan. When the Labour party listens, I hope that it will listen to trade unionists such as him. I assume that when the Labour party and trade unionists meet, their conversations are about getting money for the Labour party. I do not want to damn Mr. Jordan's career by flattering him too much, but he is an expert on the quality campaign and on quality as a means of preserving and creating jobs. I doubt whether that has been on the agenda of meetings held between him and the Labour party research department.

British management skills, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East pointed out, are key. My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) pointed out that things now are different from the 1960s and 1970s—we are becoming more professional. He, like my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington, returned to the issue of market share, which must be our national obsession. I am delighted to report that, at long last, the remorseless erosion of Britain's share of world trade in exports between 1964 and 1980 has been halted. We have stopped the rot. When future economic historians write about that period they will observe that a seminal event took place in about 1981-82, when that erosion of our share of world trade was halted.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dover remarked, management skills are desperately important and today's profits, as he rightly said, are tomorrow's investments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) confirmed one aspect of the White Paper, which is that we are determined to get closer to the customer and to take DTI's services out to those who are best equipped

[Mr. Butcher]

to take advantage of them. We shall use chambers of commerce when necessary; we shall open more offices; we shall listen to and pick up as many tips as we can on the best way of implementing the enterprise initiative. In the case of my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield, a soccer metaphor is perhaps appropriate. In the past five years Britain has started to move up the league table of economic performance in the OECD. It is our intention as a nation to more even further up it. Having decided that we should not be relegated in 1979-80, we have now moved up to a mid-table position and we must now decide whether to go for the championship. It is a long time since we have had the base that we now have from which to work. If we can make that decision, we must not throw the opportunity away——

Mr. Dykes: Does that mean that Britain is in the position of Queens Park Rangers, Luton Town or Arsenal?

Mr. Butcher: I have learnt on previous occasions in the House never to take sides about soccer. However, my hon. Friend will know that I took just a minuscule amount of pride in the performance of Coventry City in the last cup final. We are today in the position in which, say, Kenny Dalglish was two years ago when he was considering the sort of side to build for the championship—but enough of soccer metaphors. I am now competing with the hon. Member for Yeovil in the mixed metaphor stakes.

We shall pick up the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) about a freer market in books. He was correct to identify the great need in the United Kingdom to provide our teachers with valuable experience in commerce and industry. For the most part, they would welcome that, and I am encouraged by the reaction of commerce and industry to the White Paper. Representatives of the various sectors, such as the Institute of Directors, the chambers of commerce and the CBI, have welcomed our objective of getting 10 per cent. of teachers a year into companies to take a look at the things that will be required of the students in their care when they enter the job market. Warrington and Runcorn has shown that it provides a welcome home for inward investment by providing skilled workers and the right enterprise ethic in the local community. As we have been invited by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South to do so, we shall take a look at the inpediments to trade.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran), with his great experience as a regional director in Birmingham and as a keen observer of the national scene, made an excellent speech. There is a growing appreciation that we have to encourage our brightest and best younsters to opt for a career in industry and commerce. We need them. There is almost a form of economic warfare in the international market and we need the best people to fight in that battle on behalf of British industry and commerce. I believe that our national culture is changing and that we no longer suffer from the 19th century attitude that our top schools should produce only young people fit to become district commissioners in Africa or colonial leaders in far-flung parts of the world. We want people to lead British industry and commerce in the struggle for world markets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beverley referred to deregulation. I will communicate to my ministerial colleagues his clearly stated wish that we should take a radical approach to deregulation. My hon. Friend is currently decoding some of the terminology in our documentation and he believes that it sounds rather cautious. If necessary, I will try to persuade my colleagues in the DTI to tune that up and enhance the committment level a little.

Reference was made to the links that must be established between the universities and industry and commerce. My hon. Friend the Member for Beverley will be aware from our recent documentation that a £36 million link programme, the teaching company scheme, has been created. As far as I am aware, that scheme has no enemies. It is universally acclaimed as an excellent way to firm up links between the higher education sector and industry and commerce. Bright young men and women are entering companies on postgraduate projects. They are given specific targets and often surprise the companies by the level of sophistication that they bring to a project.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) referred to planning constraints. He brought an interesting nugget of information to the House when he explained that there had been a 62 per cent. increase in rates in his authority coinciding with the authority's marketing efforts in an economic development unit. That often happens in Labour-controlled local authorities. Such authorities seem to produce policies that make their municipalities hostile territory for the private sector and small business men. They indulge in PR massaging. They set up a project which they often call an economic development unit to make a passing statement about their desire to bring employment into the area. For the most part, I am afraid that such action is a somewhat cynical exercise.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) asked me to consider the trading and export services. I will read the *Official Report* carefully and respond to him regarding the British Overseas Trade Board.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) reasserted his argument that we should do all that we can to make education more relevant to the needs of our economy. Almost in passing he made an observation that could have dominated the debate. This side of the Budget it is probably right that it should not have done so. We have rediscovered over the past four or five years that supply-side economics work. As taxation rates come down, the take increases.

I recall an excellent article in *The Sunday Times* entitled "Who is selling the snake oil?"

In that article the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was portrayed as the cowboy who came to town waving a bottle of elixir purporting to be a cure-all for everything from hair loss to digestive complaints. His cure-all was increased taxation for everything. We have discovered that the converse is true. Reducing taxation at corporate and personal levels increases income for the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The country can then decide how to spend the increased revenue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) who, as far as I can understand, was fresh from a rectification job on his peripheral caries, brought some interesting comments to the debate, especially about job

creation and the role of small firms. We shall continue to examine what small firms pay to local government. That is a matter not for me but for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, but it is a key factor. Wandsworth is to be congratulated. Some London boroughs introduced nuclear-free zones, whereas Wandsworth is a de facto enterprise zone. Wandsworth is concerned about enterprise because it knows what enterprise does for jobs. I congratulate that brave and imaginative borough.

That takes me to the comments made by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby. He said that he would speak as a basso profundo. He will know that the basso profundo often takes the part of the jester and sometimes the ogre. I suspect that the captains of industry and some trade unionists who read his speech may see him as an ogre because he made a number of suggestions that would turn the clock back to a time when competition in world markets was not as great as it is now, and seriously weaken our resolve to fight for competitiveness. Many of the policies that the hon. Gentleman would advance would undermine and erode the competitive ethic both in the board room and on the shop floor.

The world recession hit us very hard. The weaknesses in our economy had been building up over a long period. If we can put right in one decade what went wrong gradually over about two decades, we shall have done very well indeed.

I do not know any longer where the Labour party gets its information from. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby is a great researcher and I am sure that in the listening campaign he will be a great listener. Let me take this opportunity—unusually in a debate such as this—to mention some people who, in my view, typify the industrial renaissance in this country. They are not necessarily members of the chattering classes and they are unlikely ever to appear on the Robin Day programme. However, they are certainly worthy of a visit from the hon. Members for Great Grimsby, for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). Those people, and hundreds like them, have influenced Government policy, perhaps without knowing it. I see that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) is in the Chamber, and our first port of call should be the midlands. Opposition Members should go to Lucas, an excellent company, and talk to John Parnaby, who is probably an expert — probably a world expert — on manufacturing systems engineering. He would probably enlighten the Labour party as to current trends in manufacturing sciences and intellectual investment on the shop floor. They could then go to Rugby to see Brian Small at Ingersoll.

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): Will the hon. Member give way?

Mr. Butcher: I have already given way once.

Mr. Howell: As the Minister has referred to me, should he not give way?

Mr. Butcher: Very well.

Mr. Howell: When the Minister calls at Joseph Lucas on his great tour of the midlands, he will not be able to call at its head office in Great King street in my constituency unless he hurries: it is about to be demolished and hundreds of people are about to be made redundant.

Mr. Butcher: Yes, and the Lucas company is getting into higher and higher added value. It is becoming more and more successful in its aerospace efforts. It is running a very successful Girling subsidiary. There have been redundancies, but those who observe that market would agree that the company could not have pursued its strategic objectives without some redundancies. It is always difficult for a company faced with strong markets in which it does not have an appropriate investment to decide whether to continue to fight in those markets or whether to fight where they can win. I believe that Lucas has made the correct decision.

Hon. Gentlemen should then move on and talk to Malcolm Fraser at the Council for National Academic Awards. He has some excellent ideas on management development and how to produce a modular system of qualifications for managers which builds bridges from the shop floor to academia and out again. It is a flexible system of management training. Clark Brundin, at Warwick university, together with Khumar Battacharya, has shown that universities can open their doors wide to the private sector and gain immense advantage from it. They, too, have a great deal to say on how to build Britain's industrial and commercial renaissance.

Hon. Members may like to talk to John Kerridge at Fisons. He has taken an agro-chemical company into new areas, higher added value, pharmaceuticals and science-based products. James Pilditch has produced excellent work on best management practice in books and journals of his own authorship. If hon. Members are worried about textiles and the so-called older industries—I have never liked that term—they may care to talk to Louis Van Praag who runs a company called Sabre Textiles.

I know that it is unorthodox to mention names, but they are typical of people who learnt from experience and brought a new dimension to management and a new vigour to their companies.

Design is not an extra and it is not about making products pretty; it is about the concept of a product or a service from its beginning—from the core outwards. It is about design for manufacture or maintenance. It is about fitness for purpose and, ultimately, a product's aesthetic appearance in the past four years British companies have at long last woken up to this and many are starting to reap the benefits.

Quality is not a bureaucratic obsession within a company. To repeat a phrase that I have used previously, quality is about selling products that do not come back to customers who do. It is one of the key job creators, as Bill Jordan in the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers would confirm. Quality management is now a well-rehearsed science. It does not cost money. Zero defects are now entering company cultures throughout the country.

We in our enterprise initiative support quality, design and marketing. I pay tribute to the Design Council which has run the consultancy programmes for design, the Institute of Marketing and Tony McBurnie, who is administering that side of the programme, and to the Production Engineering Research Association which has helped us to pursue our objectives in improved manufacturing practice.

During the debate we heard a great deal about management and I have a little more to say about it. In the past we have learnt, as disseminators and distributors of grants, that it is no good whatever to invest large sums to

[Mr. Butcher]

reduce the investment costs of a company if the people at the heart of that company are not professional and of the highest capability. Company performance is determined more than anything else by the calibre of the people at the centre of its decision-making process. We as a nation must make a major investment in management skills and those of our work force. When John Egan competes with Mercedes it is not Jaguar v Mercedes, but the skills of the people of Coventry in his work force competing with the skills of the people of Stuttgart. If his people are better trained and educated, he can win that battle. If they are not, he will lose it. John Egan and many other chief executives have pursued their objectives in enhancing the quality of their work forces. That is something about which the whole House should be united and which progressive trade unionists have endorsed over a long time. In my view, the best managers and the more enlightened trade unionists are now coming together and are unanimous on that proposition. Another change that has taken place in the United Kingdom during the past six or seven years is that the "us and them" mentality is at long last disappearing.

As far as the initiative itself is concerned, and the current progress, I can happily report to the House that there has been a major response to the marketing campaign——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

ACCESS TO MEDICAL REPORTS BILL

Ordered,

That Standing Committee C be discharged from considering the Access to Medical Reports Bill, and that the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Simon Hughes.]*

Committee upon Friday 29 April.

Orders of the Day

PLANNING PERMISSION (DEMOLITION OF HOUSES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 29 April.

SUNDAY SPORTS BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 22 April.

UNBORN CHILDREN (PROTECTION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Second Reading what day? No day named.

HOUSING (HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

OVERSEAS AID (ASSISTANCE TO THE POOREST) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

OPTICAL APPLIANCES (BLIND AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED PERSONS) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [12 February].

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate to be resumed what day? No day named.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it be in order for me, without detaining the House, formally to move the motion standing in my name on the Order Paper?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I am afraid that it would not be possible for the hon. Gentleman to do that. It would have been possible only if it had been reached before 2.30 pm.

M20 (Motorway Service Area)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

2.31 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Nothing generates more heat than a planning proposal, and few roles can be more ungrateful than that of the Minister who has to decide between local outrage and what he perceives as the national interest. Therefore, I enter this debate acutely conscious that my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for roads and traffic is under enormous pressure from all sides and that, as the proposal to site a motorway service area at Hollingbourne is currently subject to appeal, he may feel inhibited from making any statement on the issues today in the House.

Nevertheless, I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to put on record, in the Parliament to which all Ministers are ultimately responsible, a number of considerations that I believe my hon. Friend will have to take into account when he comes to take his decision. I also believe, as I shall later show, that there is one decision that he can announce today without trespassing on an area which is properly sub judice and for his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

I believe in motorways. They are much more efficient than other types of road. They are much less dangerous and they are now the lifeblood of a modern economy. However, if there are motorways there must also be motorway service areas—suprisingly frequently, it would appear. In 1979, the then Secretary of State accepted recommendations that argued for flexibility in spacing motorway service areas, but still expected a frequency of roughly 30 miles. In the 10 years since those recommendations were made, petrol consumption has improved by about 30 per cent., but I suppose that against that the Minister could argue that motorway service areas are much less to do with the motorist's need for putting fluid in than for letting it out. Nevertheless, on roads where a mile takes less than a minute, variations in spacing of 10 to 15 miles are hardly significant.

The idea is to have, in the Maidstone area, a motorway service area on the M20, which is shortly to be completed after many years of mutual frustration, by the insertion of the missing link between Hollingbourne and Ashford. The Department makes much of the need to open the service area at the same time as the motorway. If it were to be the only one, I might be tempted to ignore the precedent of 25 years of unserviced motorway hitherto or the unserviced years of the M25, but it will not be the only one. There will almost certainly be motorway service areas at junctions 3, 4 and 6 on the M25 and at Ashford and Cheriton on the M20.

In that embarrassment of riches, some people might wonder whether we need another service area at all. Many motorists have managed a great number of miles perfectly well without one, but, if we have to have one, where should it be? Since as long ago as 1975, it is clear that voices in the Department of Transport have been arguing to place it at Hollingbourne, and therein lies the major problem, both for those who oppose the plan and for the Minister.

Over the past 13 years, files will have grown fat with letters, memos and minutes of meetings between officials, the sum total of which has been to turn a proposal into a de facto decision. It will need more than sympathy and vision and more, even, than argument alone to overturn that decision now. It will require ministerial courage of the kind that says to respected senior advisers, "I am the Minister. I believe that that is the wrong decision and I am going to change it." That sort of courage is always in short supply, although less so in this Administration than in most. I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister has that sort of courage in ample measure. All that is needed is to demonstrate to him that since he made the choice of Hollingbourne public in 1986, and certainly since 1975, enough has changed to render a new approach as logical as it is desirable.

I wish to deal, first, with the position of Kent county council. My hon. Friend has every excuse if he feels puzzled by the apparent behaviour of Kent county council. During the recent appeal hearing, an official of that council stated that members of Kent county council supported the choice of Hollingbourne as the preferred site for a motorway service area as far back as 1976. The then vice chairman of the county planning sub-committee, who is now the borough councillor for Hollingbourne has no recollection of any debate on the subject at that time and believes that if the decision were taken at all, it must have slipped into the minutes inadvertently.

Since then the council's officers have been assiduous in promoting Hollingbourne, even to the point of virtually ignoring a recent very firm instruction from the planning sub-committee to carry out a full appraisal of an alternative site. In those circumstances, it would not be surprising if successive Ministers believed that county members approved the choice of Hollingbourne. Indeed, my hon. Friend made their approval an important ground of difficulty in meeting the objections to the site put to him by a delegation from Hollingbourne, which he met on 8 December 1986. When, after many attempts to arrange a meeting between Maidstone borough council and Kent county council had strangely foundered, a site meeting eventually took place on 5 January this year. County council members instantly resolved that the potential of the Allington site should be explored. In response to that, the county officers failed to do any such thing, but simply put another paper to a meeting of the county planning sub-committee on 23 February, reiterating their choice of Hollingbourne, Members rejected that for the second time and demanded a proper study of the Allington site.

The Minister cannot possibly be expected to make a distinction between the opinions of officers and members of a county council, unless the disagreement is brought to his notice, but I should like to assure him that Kent county council, like Maidstone borough council and all the parish councils concerned, wants him to undertake a full appraisal of Allington quarry as an alternative site for the motorway service area.

A second change since 1975 has been in the growth of traffic. Since 1977, on the B2136, which passes through Leeds village, there has been an increase of 443 per cent. in vehicles with three or more axles, including articulated lorries. In 1986, the Minister's Department admitted that the rate of growth in traffic using that narrow country road was more than twice the national average, and forecast a rise in traffic levels on the road to between 6,500 and 8,000 vehicles per 24 hours by the year 2005.

It will, I am sure, come as no surprise that a traffic survey made in December 1987 showed a 24-hour figure of 8,167 vehicles. I say that it will come as no surprise because it is, after all, the Department that gave us the

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

traffic forecasts for the M25. I do not know how that Department dares now, in its summary of evidence to the current inquiry, to suggest that we can ignore the claims that traffic is increasing on the B2163, or that the motorway service area would affect it. The M20 interchange will add hugely to the attractions of this wholly unsuitable informal bypass to Maidstone for assorted heavy lorries. If added to that were the lure of a 24-hour service area, Leeds village would be almost destroyed by the burden of traffic.

My hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), in whose constituency Leeds village lies, endorses those words entirely, and she is very sorry that a constituency engagement prevents her from saying so in person. Severe damage to Leeds village would mean a desperate loss. Both halves of the village are conservation areas, and 41 of its buildings are grade 2 listed. They are an important ingredient in what many of the half million visitors to Leeds castle come to enjoy.

The third change is that work has now begun on the Channel tunnel. That will substantially accelerate the already dramatic switch of Britain's trade from other markets to mainland Europe, and will bring many tens of thousands more vehicles and millions more visitors to Kent. With the lively and much-appreciated assistance of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Kent is working hard to protect itself from the disadvantages of this great innovation, while trying to ensure that it benefits from it also. That is why the council has declared that development will not normally be permitted

"if it is likely to cause loss of, or material damage to, landscape areas and features which are:—

(1) representative of the Kent countryside by reason of their physiographic character or vegetation cover, with particular regard being paid to those areas of rare or possibly unique scenic quality: or

(2) of historic interest: or

(3) of an unspoilt quality free from urban intrusion."

I wonder whether my hon. Friend could easily find another area in Kent in which all those criteria come so fully together.

The proposed site is in the North Downs special landscape area. It is within 500 m of the conservation area of Eyhorne street, 1,400 m from the Broad street conservation area to the north and within only 900 m of the park of historic Leeds castle, the third most popular tourist attraction in Britain. The site shares a border with an area of outstanding natural beauty, a designation so special that everyone recognises the names involved: the Lake district, the mountains of Mourne and the Cotswolds. Perhaps all of them are eagerly awaiting the chance to have a motorway service area as well.

A fourth change has been the dazzling success of exquisite Leeds castle as a tourist attraction. Host to half a million visitors a year, its special events attract between 10,000 and 20,000 visitors or more. On a fine summer evening, how many of them would park their cars in the motorway service area for a ready getaway after the concert, and how useful would a motorway service area, so blocked, be to the road user?

I shall not pretend that Leeds castle's success depends entirely on leaving its neighbours, Leeds village and Hollingbourne, undisturbed. However, I share the managing director's view that a lorry park, a caravan park and a possible motel in a motorway service area would make a change so fundamental in the castle's environment that no amount of landscaping would do more than garnish the wound.

In the old days, the rich used their influence to keep modern developments, such as the railways, at a distance from their estates, and there must always have been a temptation for Ministers to tease them when they could by defeating their endeavours and lumbering them with a line beneath the fences of their estates. In this case, the rich man is replaced by the half million ordinary citizens who come to Hollingbourne and Leeds village to see ancient England at its best. It would be a sorry memorial to be remembered as the Minister who gave them the inescapable view of a lorry park.

A fifth change relates to the position, in planning terms, of Allington quarry at the Coldharbour interchange. Until recently it was the subject of a major planning appeal. When we went to see the Minister on my birthday last year he told us that he would be unable to accept a motorway service area as part of a site where alcohol was on sale. Indeed, he also believed that the proposed development would not leave room for a motorway service area. Both of those difficulties have disappeared with the refusal of planning permission. However, two other difficulties remain. One is the nature of the refusal. The Department of Transport seems to believe that its terms preclude the use of the site for a motorway service area or anything else. The second difficulty is cost.

The valuer retained by the Department placed a value of £285,000 per acre on the Allington site. That value depends entirely upon "hope value." No developer would pay £285,000 as "hope value" for land subject to ministerial restriction of the nature described. At most, the developer would buy an option. It is important to note that an equally qualified valuer put a value of only £2,000 per acre on the site. That presupposes that the land carries only agricultural value.

The only things that are clear in this difference of opinion are, first, that the Department of Transport cannot simultaneously argue that the green wedge considerations are so overriding that they rule out the use of the quarry as a site for a motorway service area and, at the same time, value the land as if the green wedge considerations were of no importance. Secondly, unless and until there is a properly worked out consideration of the Allington site, none of us will know what the sums involved are likely to be. However, we are aware that the Allington site would be much more heavily used than the Hollingbourne site.

I find it extremely encouraging that the Tonbridge and Malling council, which does not want the green wedge damaged, argued against siting the motorway service area in the quarry, where, with great care, it will scarcely affect the visual wedge. It said:

"Tonbridge and Malling is unwilling to support the construction of a motorway service area at Allington Quarry unless and until a developer demonstrates an overwhelming case of need. An essential element of such a case would be evidence of the Secretary of State's rejection of all other alternative sites."

Therefore, the issue stays with the Minister. He has it in his power to reverse the bureaucratic mud slide that threatens to engulf the most environmentally-sensitive area of my lovely constituency.

When Lord Jenkin, then Secretary of State for the Environment, did us the honour of inspecting the site, he

told us that although we would have to accept either the interchange or the service area, it would be intolerable to have to suffer both.

In this debate I speak as the hon. Member for Mid-Kent. However, I also speak for my hon. Friends the Members for Maidstone and for Faversham (Mr. Moate) who is president of the North Downs Society. My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham would have been present if it were possible. However, I believe that I do not speak just for my hon. Friends and our constituents. I speak for the millions who, between now and the end of the century, will come to Kent looking for the essential England — the historic, small-scale, solid, ungarish England of Led the Saxon whose castle stands at Leeds and of the Canterbury pilgrims who knew, when they got to Hollingbourne, that they did not have much further to go.

If we have to explain to those visitors that the garish motorway service area — even before its inevitable expansion it will dwarf the conservation areas around it and it will fill the night sky all the year round with reflective light — could have been sited in a disused quarry where nobody lives, where nobody could see it and where no part of it would intrude on the environment, they will look at us as we would on the residents of some Third world country who turn a unique temple into a lorry assembly plant.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, I do not seek to press the Minister for a decision today. Even if I could, it would be improper for me to do so. I ask only whether he will produce a fully worked-out proposal for the Allington quarry site, which was the first choice of his own Department's consultant in years gone by, before he makes his final choice. I believe that so much has changed since his original decision was taken that it would be prudent and generous of the Minister to accede to my request.

2.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Peter Bottomley): No decision will be taken on the proposal for a motorway service area at Hollingbourne until my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment have received the inspector's report of the inquiry and have carefully considered that report. I hope that that is a partial assurance to my hon. Friend. He has drawn this matter to the attention of the House and has spoken about our hon. Friends who would have liked to express concern. It is of passing interest that not a single hon. Member of another party is involved in that environmental or transport issue.

My hon. Friend is keen to see good road communications in Kent, whether for pilgrims or for others. I noted with interest the views he put forward on television last week on procedures to help establish such roads. I thought that that was sensible and brave, but I cannot guarantee to accept those proposals, either.

We regard the provision of motorway service areas — MSAs — as an essential part of the motorway system and have carefully formulated a strategy for their provision. No doubt many former pilgrims would have been grateful if our medieval ancestors had done the same, because pilgrims experienced problems in getting refreshment on route.

My hon. Friend knows that our specific proposals for an MSA at Hollingbourne have been the subject of a public inquiry. I will take the opportunity to explain why we regard MSAs as being essential, why we selected a site at Hollingbourne, and that we propose to minimise environmental intrusion there.

Unless services are available beside the motorway, vehicles will leave the motorway to find them on local roads. Such detours defeat the heavy investment in motorways and the important public benefits they provide of faster, cheaper and safer journeys reducing traffic congestion; and improving safety in the communities bypassed.

My hon. Friend sensibly made the point about people taking rat runs, even in the country, to avoid congestion. An additional advantage of MSAs is that they enable drivers to take a rest, thus increasing their alertness when continuing their journeys and contributing further to road safety. About one motorist in six tends to come off the motorway to go to a service area. If there are no motorway service areas obviously they cannot do that. They are a significant advantage and convenience to many motorists who would otherwise have to pass by.

Organisations and individuals have stressed the need for MSAs to be provided. MSAs have always been an important feature of motorways in England. In deciding on the number to be provided, the advantages to the motorist of frequent services have to be weighed against the financial and environmental costs, the likely commercial viability and the general policy of severely restricting accesses to motorways. We don't expect motorway users to have to travel more than about 30 miles or half an hour's driving between service areas.

Following consultation with local authorities and other interested parties in 1983, we established in 1984 a strategy of providing four MSAs at the cardinal compass points of the M25, together with MSAs about 15 to 20 miles outside the orbital motorway, where they do not already exist, on major feeder motorways, including the M20. Consultants were appointed to assist the Secretary of State in deciding the provision of MSAs on the M20 in the Maidstone area and in the Folkestone area. Two were short-listed out of nine potential sites in an 11-mile corridor centred on Maidstone. Those were Hollingbourne and Allington quarry, which is also known as Coldharbour. There is no strategic need for services between Westenhanger and Maidstone.

We considered carefully the consultants' findings on the two Maidstone options. In particular we noted the conclusion that Allington quarry was preferable on environmental grounds and would serve more travellers. There were major problems about Allington quarry site. The government believed that it was desirable for the MSA in the Maidstone area to be built so as to be open by the time the M20 extension from Maidstone to Ashford was opened. My hon. Friend talked about Kent county council's view. We understood that the county council shared our view. The Allington quarry site could not be developed without the concurrent improvement of junction 5.

Mr. Rowe: My understanding is that Kent county council has said that it would prefer to see environmental considerations given precedence over the need to have the site opened concurrently with the link.

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend knows that I cannot get into what was before the inquiry. I am stating the view that we understood Kent county council to hold.

It was thought that the widening of the M20 and the improvement of junction 5 were unlikely to occur until 1993 at the earliest, and perhaps later. It was thought that Hollingbourne could be developed in time to open with the M20 extension in 1990. A major problem with Allington was the prospect that an MSA would not be open until at least three years after the completion of the M20 Maidstone to Ashford extension. That remains the position. The second major problem about Allington was a financial one. I shall not go into the details of that. I would cover ground that has been covered elsewhere.

It may be said that we have a policy of going for MSA sites in the open country, simply because they will tend to be cheaper than sites in urban or near urban areas. I assure the House that that is not our policy, as any review of our current MSAs will show. We try to choose sites that are the best in the light of all relevant factors. But we cannot ignore cost.

At my hon. Friend's request, I met representatives of the local planning authority, the parish council and the Hollingbourne society to hear their concern at first hand. I remain convinced that Hollingbourne represents the best balance of all relevant factors. Great care has been taken in preparing the site layout that will minimise environmental intrusion. Fear of environmental intrusion causes most local concern.

My hon. Friend expressed particular concern about the possible impact on views from the North Downs, from Pilgrim's way and from Leeds castle, as well as from Eyhorne street and from Hollingbourne itself. I shall explain briefly how we propose to minimise the intrusion. We do not intend to have pedestrian access to motorway service areas. The fear of having a car park for Leeds castle will not be borne out in practice.

The overall aim is to integrate the development into its surroundings, as far as possible, to mitigate any visual intrusion, and to create an attractive setting for users of the facilities.

In the design of the site layout and the landscape proposals, particular attention has been paid to views into the site from nearby properties and from the North Downs, to develop measures for minimising visual impact. Use is made of the existing landform and vegetation, as well as the proposed motorway embankment and the landscape proposals for the M20. Specific measures to reduce visual impact include the use of surplus soil to form mounds along the most sensitive boundaries. They will be beneficial upon completion of the works and before full establishment of the planting.

The lorry and coach parks—intrusive and difficult to screen—have been sited in the lowest part of the site, where it is screened from the north by Cottage and Snarkhurst woods.

The Department is seeking to acquire a 40 m strip parallel to and to the north of the London-Ashford railway line, that is, part of Snarkhurst and Cottage woods, to ensure that an adequate height of tree cover is retained to effect screening of the MSA, particularly in views from the north, those from the Broad street area on the Pilgrim's way and the important long-distance footpath, the North Downs way. The Department considers it essential that the 40 m width of Snarkhurst and Cottage woods be acquired as part of the MSA and that it be managed under departmental control. A management scheme would be prepared with the aim to achieve and maintain a healthy tall screen of vegetation, while preserving the character and ecology of the woodland.

In view of the landscape quality of the area, it has been agreed that the lighting sources for the various areas be kept lower than would normally be adopted. I cite one example. The height of column for the integral perimeter road would normally be 12 m. In this instance a 10 m height is proposed. By adopting a lower light source height for the required illumination of the site, it will be well below the top of Snarkhurst and Cottage woods as viewed from the north and seen against the background of Snarkhurst wood as viewed from the south.

That is a brief explanation of our general strategy for motorway service area provision and the particular care that we would take at Hollingbourne. I hope that, to some extent, that assures my hon. Friend of our commitment to a well-balanced and caring development of the proposed MSA on the M20. He asked me to refer to other aspects of work. It is a sensible convention that decision on such issues are taken after the benefit of the independent, impartial inspector's advice, following the conclusion of the public inquiry.

Through my hon. Friend, I say to our colleagues who cannot be here and to my hon. Friend's constituents that there has not been a more effective demonstration of local concern than that which was put forward by my hon. Friend and his constituents. They put their views forward in a firm but courteous way. In reading the newspapers, listening to them, face to face, and going round the area, I have reached an appreciation of the concerns, and of some of the issues which would have been put forward firmly by my hon. Friend if he had had time to raise them. If the MSA goes ahead, some of those concerns may turn out to be less of a problem than people imagine. However, to pursue that would take me into sectors in which I do not want to trespass.

All in all, motorway service areas, together with our roads programme, are designed to bring economic benefit, environmental relief and road safety advantages. MSAs are an important part of this, although I appreciate the concern about where they go and where they might have to go.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 22 February 1988

HOME DEPARTMENT

Neighbourhood Watch Programme (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Marland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Gloucestershire's neighbourhood watch programme, with particular regard to its involvement with the Manpower Services Commission and the community programme.

Mr. John Patten: I understand that there are now 228 neighbourhood watch schemes in the county of Gloucestershire. In an effort to sustain these schemes and to initiate new ones, the Gloucestershire community programme home watch project was launched on 25 January with the appointment of the project co-ordinator. The project is funded as part of the Manpower Services Commission community programme crime prevention initiative. It is managed on behalf of Gloucestershire police by Gloucestershire county council and, when recruiting is completed, will comprise the co-ordinator, an assistant co-ordinator and 11 workers. They will help to arrange the first meetings of new schemes, provide speakers for neighbourhood watch meetings and produce a quarterly news journal. I welcome, and commend, this imaginative scheme. Like similar schemes in other parts of the country, it will provide valuable support to the police in managing the growth of neighbourhood watch.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civil servants are employed in his Department; what are their average weekly working hours, and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job-sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

Mr. Hurd: There are some 38,600 staff in the Home Office. Conditioned hours are 41 hours a week in London and 42 elsewhere, inclusive of meal breaks. Prison officers' hours are 39 hours a week net of meal breaks, but they can opt to work a 48-hour week and the majority do so. About 11,000 members of staff are eligible to participate in flexible working hours schemes and some 8,000 do so. At least 32 members of staff are on job-sharing schemes. Information is not readily available about the number of staff who are on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight. About 18,500 members of staff — in prison service grades — have a minimum retiring age of 55 years. Most of the rest have a minimum retiring age of 60, except for some 3,000 industrial staff, whose retirement age is 65. It is not possible to estimate the number of staff who could achieve 40 years' reckonable service for pension purposes by the age of 60.

Phonographic Performance Ltd.

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department has had with Phonographic Performance Ltd. about alleged needle time restrictions on the broadcast of music on independent radio stations; and what assurances have been received from Phonographic Performance Ltd. that needle time restrictions no longer exist.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department has had with Phonographic Performance Ltd. about alleged needle time restrictions on the broadcast of music on independent radio stations; and what assurances have been received from Phonographic Performance Ltd. that needle time restrictions no longer exist.

Mr. Renton: Discussions have taken place with Phonographic Performance Ltd. on a range of issues. Phonographic Performance Ltd. has made it clear that, while the present nine-hour needle time limit is not immutable, it would expect to secure substantial payment from substantial users for any increase.

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he as as to how many independent radio stations pay £30 or more per record to Phonographic Performance Ltd. for the broadcast of single play records.

Mr. Renton: I understand that no station pays Phonographic Performance Ltd. £30 or more per record.

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what information he has as to the average price per record paid by independent radio stations to Phonographic Performance Ltd. for the broadcasting of single play records;

(2) what information he has as to the highest price per record paid by independent radio stations to Phonographic Performance Ltd. for the broadcasting of single play records; and by how much this exceeds the average.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what information he has as to the average price per record paid by independent radio stations to Phonographic Performance Ltd. for the broadcasting of single play records;

(2) what information he has as to the highest price per record paid by independent radio stations to Phonographic Performance Ltd. for the broadcasting of single play records; and by how much this exceeds the average.

Mr. Renton: I understand that Phonographic Performance Ltd. has estimated that the average fee for the broadcasting of single play records by independent local stations is £1·26 per play. The highest fee paid is over £17. Broadly similar fees are also payable to the Performing Rights Society.

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the overall percentage of net advertising revenue paid by independent radio stations to Phonographic Peformance Ltd for the broadcast of recorded music.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the overall

percentage of net advertising revenue paid by independent radio stations to Phonographic Performance Ltd for the broadcast of recorded music.

Mr. Renton: The fees were determined by the Performing Right Tribunal in 1986. Established independent local radio stations are required to pay Phonographic Performance Ltd 4 per cent. of the first £1·25 million of net advertising revenue, and 7 per cent. thereafter, for the right to broadcast nine hours of recorded music each day. Broadly similar fees are also payable to the Performing Right Society.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to how many independent radio stations pay £10 or more per record to Phonographic Performance Ltd for the broadcast of single play records.

Mr. Renton: I understand that one such station now pays Phonographic Performance Ltd above this rate.

Community Radio

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the address of the radio authority that is to issue licences to run community radio stations; and if he will make a statment.

Mr. Renton: The radio authority will be established under legislative proposals which my right hon. Friend has yet to bring before Parliament.

Murders

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many murders were committed in 1987.

Mr. John Patten: In the absence of a court decision it is not always possible to distinguish between offences of murder, manslaughter and infanticide; they are known collectively as homicide. Statistics on offences initially recorded as homicide and on offences decided to be murder are published in table 4.2 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", Cm. 233—for data up to the end of 1986—copies of which are available in the Library. Statistics on offences recorded as homicide for 1987 are not yet available.

Broadcasting Complaints Commission

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will refer to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission the risk that obscenities may be broadcast as a result of the implantation of microphones in cricket pitches; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: It is the responsibility of the broadcasting authorities to ensure that nothing is included in programmes which offends against good taste or decency. The commission is limited to considering and adjudicating on complaints of unjust or unfair treatment or unwarranted infringement of privacy arising out of broadcast programmes.

Independent Radio (Needletime Restrictions)

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to what needletime restrictions exist to limit the air play of recorded music on independent radio.

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to what needletime restrictions exist to limit the air play of recorded music on independent radio.

Mr. Renton: In general, independent local radio stations are limited to broadcasting nine hours of recorded music within the repertoire of Phonographic Performance Ltd. each day, even though most ILR stations now broadcast for 24 hours a day.

Convicted Murderers

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many previously convicted murderers, having been released from prison, have committed a further murder, since the abolition of capital punishment.

Mr. John Patten: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to a question from my hon. Friend for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) on 5 November 1987, at columns 1054-55.

Immigration (Entry Clearance)

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were waiting to be interviewed by immigration in Birmingham in connection with applications for entry clearance for members of their family to join them in the United Kingdom at 31 December 1987.

Mr. Renton: At 31 December 1987, there were 130 outstanding entry clearance applications awaiting interview of persons living in the Birmingham area. All have either now been completed or have appointments arranged before 31 March 1988.

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are employed in interviewing people whose relatives have applied for entry clearance to join them in the United Kingdom and whose applications have been referred to his Department by entry clearance officers abroad; and where these interviewers are located.

Mr. Renton: The information requested in the first part of the question is not available. The number of immigration service staff employed in such interviews varies daily and they form only part of the responsibility of the officers involved.

The majority of interviews are conducted by officers based at the following immigration offices: Aberdeen, Avonmouth, Belfast, Birmingham, Cardiff, Dover, Edinburgh, East Midlands airport, Felixstowe, Folkestone, Glasgow, Gravesend, Hartlepool, Hull, Immingham, Liverpool, Luton airport, Manchester airport, Middlesbrough, Newcastle airport, North Shields, Norwich airport, Plymouth, Preston, Prestwick airport, Ramsgate, Sheerness, Southampton, Southend airport and Stansted airport.

Domestic Assaults

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has to which police forces in England and Wales produce separate figures on the number of reported domestic assaults each year.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No regular information on the number of domestic assaults is reported separately to the Department by police forces in England and Wales.

Independent Radio Air Time

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the percentage of independent radio air time taken up by the playing of recorded music.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the percentage of independent radio air time taken up by the playing of recorded music.

Mr. Renton: This information is not readily available.

Lunar House, Croydon

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the length of time for which the public enumerator board has been out of action at the public inquiry office at Lunar house, Croydon; and what steps he is taking to ensure that it is operative.

Mr. Renton: The enumerator board in the immigration public inquiry office at Lunar house was out of action for three months. It is now fully operational.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the purpose of the visit by the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) to Lunar house, Croydon, on Friday 12 February; and how long he spent in meetings with the trades unions.

Mr. Renton: I visited Lunar house on Friday 12 February to discuss with officials in the immigration and nationality department proposals to speed up the handling of the backlog of citizenship applications. I announced the specific steps we are taking on Tuesday 16 February at columns 862-63. I did not meet the trades unions on 12 February but, because of their great concern, which was reported to me, I plan to do so on Tuesday 23 February.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate how many of the unopened items of mail presently at Lunar house, Croydon, relate to *(a)* applications for citizenship and *(b)* variations of leave.

Mr. Renton: Ninety five thousand applications for citizenship are unopened and a further 54,000 applications for citizenship have been opened but not acknowledged; 58,000 other items of mail, many of them relating to variations of leave, are unopened.

Visas

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the numbers of visas granted to visitors at immigration control for the full six-month period, the numbers of visitors' visas refused and the numbers of visitors' visas granted for a period of less than six months for *(a)* the week commencing 2 February and *(b)* the week commencing 9 February.

Mr. Renton: The information requested is not available. Figures on passenger admissions by period of leave granted for the whole of February will become available later this year when all the relevant landing cards have been received and counted.

Rodeos (South-West England)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the conduct of horse rodeos in south-west England; what action he is taking to prevent cruelty to horses used in such rodeos; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no information on such events. However, under the Protection of Animals Act 1934 it is an offence to promote or permit a public performance which includes throwing or casting, with ropes or other appliances, any unbroken horse; or to ride or attempt to ride any horse which has been cruelly stimulated to make it buck. More generally, the Protection of Animals Act 1911 makes it an offence to cause, or being the owner permit to be caused, any unnecessary suffering to any domestic or captive animal.

Breathalysers

Sir Ian Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will issue guidelines for chief constables to the effect that they should encourage the voluntary introduction an use of wall-mounted coin-in-the-slot breathalysers and breathalyser ignition locks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The clear message must be that drinking and driving do not mix. We welcome the way in which chief officers are helping to get this message across but are not convinced that their efforts would be assisted by asking them to encourage the use of self-testing devices.

Interception of Communications Act

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is satisfied with the working of the Interception of Communications Act, with particular regard to mobile telephones; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: I have no reason to believe that there are any difficulties over the working of the Interception of Communications Act in this respect. The interception of calls on mobile telephone systems which have been designated as public telecommunication systems under the Telecommunications Act 1984 is covered by the Interception of Communications Act 1985.

Cremation Certificates

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will end the requirement for two doctors to sign cremation certificates; and by how much funeral costs would be reduced if this requirement ceased, as recommended in the Broderick report.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are considering this possibility. The fee currently recommended by the British Medical Association for the completion of the confirmatory medical certificate for cremation is £19·65.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Solicitors (Costs)

54. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Attorney-General if the Lord Chancellor will take steps to ensure that solicitors, when attending their clients at remand centres, have their costs fully met under the legal aid schemes; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Solicitors who attend clients at remand centres are entitled to their costs under a criminal legal aid order provided that the determining officer who considers their claim is satisfied that the attendance was reasonable. The solicitor is allowed either his own reasonable costs or the costs reasonably incurred in instructing a solicitor local to the remand centre to attend on his behalf.

Immigration (Appeals)

59. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Attorney -General if he will take steps to expedite the hearing of appeals under section 13(ii) of the Immigration Act 1971.

The Attorney-General: Following the transfer of administrative responsibility for the immigration appellate authorities to my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor, the working methods and procedures of the authorities have been under review. Once an appeal has been lodged with the immigration appellate authorities, it is open to any party to that appeal to apply for an early hearing.

Mrs. Angela Pink

Mr. Allen: To ask the Attorney-General what information he has as to whether the Director of Public Prosecutions has yet reached a decision on the possible prosecution of Nottingham city councillor Mrs. Angela Pink; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as I am able to inform him of the outcome of the Director's consideration of this case.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Food Surpluses

66. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with aid Ministers of the European Economic Community as to the future use of food surpluses.

Mr. Chris Patten: I discuss food aid with other European Community aid Ministers at regular intervals. But food surpluses and the common agricultural policy are a matter for agriculture Ministers.

Southern Africa

70. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made on the development of infrastructure projects in the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference region.

Mr. Chris Patten: SADCC has commended to donors a large number of infrastructure projects, in particular in the regional transport field. Good progress is being made with support from Britain and other countries on rehabilitating rail routes through Mozambique, and work will begin shortly on the northern transport corridor linking Malawi to Dar-es-Salaam, for which I have approved a British contribution of £12·4 million.

Ethiopia

71. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will consider assisting the World Food Programme in obtaining the powdered milk, vegetable oil and protein-rich biscuits required in Ethiopia for children under the age of 14 years.

Mr. Chris Patten: No request has been made to us by the world food programme. We are aware of the need for food to supplement the basic diet on Ethiopia and have provided £189,000 to meet the cost of 1,000 tonnes of beans which are being distributed by the International Committee of the Red Cross. We shall also be meeting our share of the cost of the substantial qualities of supplementary food being provided by the European Community.

74. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to ensure that famine aid to Ethiopia is reaching the intended recipients.

Mr. Chris Patten: The assistance we provide is generally channelled through international and voluntary agencies with extensive experience of getting relief quickly and effectively to those in need. It is carefully monitored to ensure it reaches the intended beneficiaries.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he plans to make to the Ethiopian Government, in the light of recent consignments of corned beef that have been shipped from that country into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Chris Patten: I have no plans to make further representations to the Ethiopian Government on the subject of exports of corned beef from that country to the United Kingdom. The availability of corned beef does not seem relevant to the famine problem now affecting large numbers of Ethiopians; and exports of that commodity should bring in much needed foreign exchange.

Aid Statistics

72. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the proportion of the United Kingdom's gross national product devoted to overseas development in 1960 and for the latest annual period for which figures are available.

Mr. Chris Patten: The proportion of the United Kingdom's gross national product devoted to overseas development in 1960 was 0·56 per cent. In 1986 it was 0·32 per cent.

Tropical Rain Forests

73. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures the Government are taking to encourage sustainable development in areas of the world where tropical rain forests are at risk.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Government support the FAO tropical forestry action plan and is a member of the

International Tropical Timber Organisation, both of which are concerned with the sustainable use and appropriate conservation of tropical rainforests.

Our expenditure on bilateral aid projects in the forestry sector has increased threefold to £13 million in 1986. We provide further support through technical co-operation, research programmes and the joint funding scheme.

International Debt

75. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the chairman of the World Bank regarding the problem of international debt.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 1 February, at column 459.

76. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in implementing the debt initiative for the most debt-ridden countries, following the endorsement of that initiative at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting and by their finance Ministers.

Mr. Chris Patten: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's initiative has been well received. Some aid donors have announced the write-off of more aid debt; the United Kingdom has already almost completed this process of converting aid loans into grants and others are following our example. Seven of the poorest, most heavily indebted sub-Saharan countries pursuing sound economic policies have had their official debts rescheduled for longer than normal by the Paris Club. We continue to press our partners to accept lower Paris Club interest rates for countries eligible for the initiative.

India (Departmental Advisers and Officials)

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many advisers and officials from his Department are currently working in India in connection with phase II of the family welfare project in Orissa; when they went to India; and when he expects them to return.

Mr. Chris Patten: Two ODA advisers worked in India in connection with the pre-appraisal of this project from 1 to 12 February. One returned on 15 February and I expect the team leader to return on 23 February.

Tanzania (Population Census)

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the East African development division of the Overseas Development Administration to complete its assessment of the request for financial assistance with the preparation of the Tanzania 1988 population census; and if he will take steps to ensure that the census is not put in jeopardy as a result of the time taken by the Overseas Development Administration to deal with this request.

Mr. Chris Patten: The British development division in Eastern Africa will complete the assessment in question by the end of this month. This timetable is compatible with the plans of the Tanzanian authorities to hold the population census later this year.

WALES

Agricultural Services

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any proposals for the future provision of offices providing agricultural services in north Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: No. I consider the existing provision to be suitable for present purposes.

Community Councils

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to include community councils in the distribution of resources to local government from Government grant and the national uniform business rate.

Mr. Peter Walker: No. Community councils will meet their expenditure requirements by drawing on a collection fund maintained by the district council.

Sheep Monitoring

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) when monitoring of live sheep on a general basis was introduced in the restricted areas of Wales following the Chernobyl accident;

(2) how many scintillators were available to, and used by, his Department for the live monitoring of sheep in the restricted areas of Wales in each month from May 1986 to May 1987.

Mr. Peter Walker: The option of live-monitoring sheep became generally available to producers in the north Wales restricted area from the beginning of October 1986. From October 1986 to February 1987, a total of 10 live monitoring machines were generally in use and from March 1987 to May 1987 there were 15 machines.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Unfunded Students

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the numbers of unfunded students at universities in *(a)* Wales and England and *(b)* Scotland in each of the past five years; and what is his policy towards such students.

Mr. Jackson: Information is not available in the form requested, but I will write to the hon. Member.

Primary and Secondary School Pupils

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many pupils have been enrolled at each primary and secondary school in the Eddisbury constituency in each of the past 10 years; and what has been the pupil-to-teacher ratio in each year.

Mr. Dunn: Information on pupil numbers for areas smaller than local education authorities is not available centrally. The number of pupils on roll in all maintained primary and secondary schools in Cheshire and the pupil-teacher ratios within these schools in each of the last 10 years is given in the table.

January each year	Primary schools[1] Pupils[2]	Pupil-teacher ratio	Secondary schools[1] Pupils	Pupil-teacher ratio
1978	100,846	24·0	77,542	17·4
1979	97,858	23·5	78,945	16·9
1980	94,592	23·5	79,671	16·7
1981	90,753	23·6	79,567	16·7
1982	86,454	23·3	79,306	17·1
1983	81,917	22·6	78,796	16·8
1984	79,127	22·7	77,481	16·9
1985	77,396	22·8	76,201	17·0
1986	77,227	22·7	73,816	17·0
1987	80,957	23·2	70,861	16·7

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.
[2] Full-time equivalent pupils, part-time pupils counted as 0·5.

Inner London Education Authority

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will place in the Library a copy of Her Majesty's inspectorate's report on the effects of abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn: No.

Community Schools

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what provision he is making to ensure that the community and adult functions obtain full and comprehensive representation on the governing bodies of community schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The Education (No. 2) Act 1986 provides for school governing bodies to comprise representatives of parents, teachers, the local authority, the foundation in the case of voluntary schools and, by co-option, the community served by the school. In making their co-options, governing bodies will be able to secure such representation of other interests as is considered appropriate in the light of the school's circumstances.

Rates (Cleveland)

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the amount in money terms by which that part of the rates bill in Cleveland attributable to educational buildings will increase in 1988-89.

Mr. Dunn: None. Authorities finance their expenditure from a variety of sources. It is not possible to attribute any element of the rates bill to a particular item of expenditure.

St. Bartholomew's, Swanley

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has received on new buildings for St. Bartholomew's Roman Catholic junior, middle and infants school, Swanley, Kent; and when he expects to make a statement about those schools.

Mr. Dunn: The Department has paid grant in respect of the provision of a mobile classroom at the school. We have received no other proposals from the Kent local education authority, though we understand that a second mobile classroom has recently been provided.

University Funding

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) of 11 February, *Official Report*, column *313-4*, what is the percentage change in real terms, measured by the gross domestic product deflator, in the funding of each university by the University Grants Committee between 1980-81 and 1988-89, excluding those amounts representing compensation for changes in home student fees, compensation for redundancy and early retirement, changes to take account of minor capital works from the recurrent grant and changes in the level of local authority rates *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding additions made for the information technology and new blood programmes;

(2) pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) of 11 February, *Official Report*, column *313-4*, what is the percentage change in the funding of each university by the University Grants Committee between 1980-81 and 1988-89, excluding those amounts representing compensation for changes in home student fees, for redundancy and early retirement, changes to take account of minor capital works from the recurrent grant, changes in the level of local authority rates, additions made for the information technology and new blood programmes.

Mr. Jackson: Information is not available to make the requested deductions. In any event, like would not be being compared with like since my announcement related only to initial allocations for 1988-89.

Morley College

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has developed any proposals for financing Morley college when the Inner London education authority is abolished.

Mr. Jackson: Adult education is one of a number of issues arising from the abolition of the ILEA on which my right hon. Friend has made it clear that he will wish to seek the views of the boroughs. In doing so he will naturally wish to consider the situation of Morley college.

Orthotists

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what provision his Department is making to ensure an adequate supply of orthotists and prosthetists in the short and long term; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Courses are provided by the Paddington college and the practical training is provided by the London School of Prosthetics and by individual companies.

The Disablement Services Authority is responsible for the provision of prosthetic services and it is holding discussions with the Orthotic and Prosthetic Training and Education Council about the most suitable arrangements for the future supply of trained practitioners in these disciplines in England and Wales.

Core Subjects

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate the proportion of school time currently spent on core subjects in *(a)* inner London and *(b)* England and Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information about the percentages of pupil time spent on core curriculum subjects in England is given in the table. No figures are available for indivdual local education authorities in England. Education in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

	Junior classes	*Secondary year groups 1 to 5*
English	26·7	13·8
Mathematics	22·3	13·3
Science	6·5	13·9
TOTAL	55·5	41·0

Notes:

1. Junior classes do not include infant classes, but do include secondary-age classes in middle schools deemed primary.
2. The junior figures are as at March 1987, taken from the Primary School Staffing Survey.
3. The secondary figures are as at January 1984, taken from the 1984 Secondary School Staffing Survey.

Research Organisations

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the names, locations and broad areas of work covered by the 10 largest public research organisations in the United Kingdom ranking these according to staff numbers, turnover and net cost to the United Kingdom in 1986-87.

Mr. Jackson: I will write to the hon. Member.

New Schools (East Sussex)

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many new schools have been opened in east Sussex since 3 May 1979 and how many between 3 May 1971 and 3 May 1979.

Mr. Dunn: Since 3 May 1979, nine new schools, including nursery and special schools, have been opened, five of which are replacement schools. From the reorganisation of local government on 1 April 1974 to 3 May 1979, a total of 24 schools were opened, of which nine were replacements. Numbers before 1974 are not available. Replacements include transferred schools and schools opened following school reorganisation.

Teacher-Pupil Ratios

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the teacher-pupil ratio on the latest available date for infant, primary and secondary schools in England, in east Sussex and in the borough of Eastbourne; and what were the comparable figures for the available date closest to 3 May 1979.

Mr. Dunn: The pupil-teacher ratio in maintained infant, primary and secondary schools in England and east Sussex in January 1979 and January 1987 are given in the table. Information for areas within local education authorities is not available centrally.

Pupil-teacher ratios within schools

	England		*East Sussex*	
	January 1979	*January 1987*	*January 1979*	*January 1987*
Infant	21·7	21·2	22·1	21·6
Primary[1,2]	23·1	21·9	23·4	22·4
Secondary[2]	16·7	15·6	17·1	16·4

[1] Includes infant schools.
[2] Includes middle schools as deemed.

Examination Results

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if his Department has made further progress since 1984 in analysing local educational authority examination results, taking into account socio-economic factors.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department has not published any further analysis of the effects of socio-economic factors on local education authority examination results since statistical bulletin 13/84 — "School Standards and Spending: Statistical Analysis".

Education Reform

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, in the event of Inner London education authority abolition, what arrangements he intends to make for the supplies service and the percentage of customers who are local education authorities outside inner London.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has made it clear that we wish to discuss with the inner London boroughs the future arrangements for services currently provided by ILEA on a Londonwide basis. The Supplies Organisation will be one such service. Information on the customers of the Supplies Organisation is not held centrally.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has for the providing of research and planning resources currently provided by the Inner London education authority should that authority be abolished.

Mr. Dunn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 18 February at column *648*.

PRIME MINISTER

Dollar (Value)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister, further to her statement on the meeting of the European Council, 15 February, *Official Report*, columns 705-17, whether she will publish in the *Official Report* the value of the dollar agreed for exceptional circumstances; and what call would

be made on the contingency reserve if the nominal rate for the dollar fell to reduce the real rate, in terms of relative export prices for manufacturers, to the average for 1978-80.

The Prime Minister: The dollar reference rate for the operation of this reserve has yet to be determined, but the assumption which the Commission has used in revising its preliminary draft budget for 1988 is $1 = 0·85 ecu.

On the basis of relative GDP/GNP price movements, this exchange rate appears to imply a real rate of exchange similar to the average for 1978-80. It follows that there would be no call on the monetary reserve in the circumstances postulated.

EC (Financial Contribution)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister, further to her statement on the meeting of the EEC Council, 15 February, *Official Report*, columns 705-17, whether she will include in the *Official Report* her estimates of the amount now made available to the EEC under our reserves, including the United Kingdom rebate, in terms of the original value added tax contributions.

The Prime Minister: The new ceiling on the Community's own resources, excluding the United Kingdom's abatement, of 1·2 per cent. of Community gross national product is equivalent to a 1·9 per cent. value added tax ceiling defined as at present to include the United Kingdom abatement. The corresponding abatement-exclusive VAT figure is 1·72 per cent.

EC (Spain and Portugal)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister why Spain and Portugal have been excluded from some of the agricultural arrangements agreed by the EEC Council of Ministers; whether their output will qualify for other kinds of support; what is their production of the items in question and whether it is expected to increase; and whether the EEC will provide any money to support production or dispose of the surpluses.

The Prime Minister: Separate arrangements apply to Spain and Portugal either because of the provisions of the accession treaty or because of special decisions of the European Council. Although Spain and Portugal currently operate many of the common agricultural policy support arrangements, this is on a transitional basis. Data on production are contained in Document COM(87)1 Final, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Pound Sterling

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister whether she took into account the increase in the value of the pound sterling against the deutschmark in the negotiations in Brussels on 11 to 13 February; what value is placed on the pound sterling in the present level of common agricultural policy prices; to what extent United Kingdom common agricultural policy prices will have to be changed to reflect the value of the pound sterling against the deutschmark; and what would be the effect on United Kingdom common agricultural policy prices if the real value of the pound sterling, measured in terms of relative export prices for manufacturers, fell to the level which obtained in the fourth quarter of 1976.

The Prime Minister: All relevant considerations were taken into account during the recent negotiations in Brussels.

Common agricultural policy prices are set in ecus and converted into sterling using green rates and not market rates of exchange. The United Kingdom green rates are currently:

Arable products—1 ecu = £0·656148
Beef—1 ecu = £0·710546
Pigmeat—1 ecu = £0·694266
Sheepmeat—1 ecu = £0·652575
Other sectors—1 ecu = £0·665557

Common agricultural policy prices in the United Kingdom are not directly affected by the sterling/deutschmark exchange rate. However, under arrangements agreed in 1987, green rates will be altered following any European monetary system realignment if the net effect of the realignment of the central rates of all EMS currencies including the deutschmark is to widen the gap between green and market rates of exchange. Apart from these arrangements, there is no mechanism directly relating to CAP prices in the United Kingdom to any particular market value of sterling.

Alternative Land Use

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what is the definition of arable land used in the set-aside scheme referred to in her statement on the meeting of the European Council, 15 February, *Official Report*, column 706; how the area of arable land is to be assessed in each case; and what checks there will be against fraud.

The Prime Minister: Discussions are continuing on the details of the set-aside scheme agreed in principle by the European Council, including the points referred to by the hon. Member.

Commodity Stabilisers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister whether she will publish in the *Official Report* the agreement on stabilisers for the eight commodities referred to in her statement on the meeting of the European Council (Brussels), 15 February, *Official Report* column 705.

The Prime Minister: As I made clear in my statement to the House on 15 February, agreement on stabilisers for eight commodities — those other than cereals and oil seeds—has been delayed by France until the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 22-23 February. The text to be adopted appears as points 4 to 11 of document SN 461/88 which has been placed in the Library of the House.

EC (Overspending)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister whether the legal and binding controls which have been agreed for expenditure under the common agricultural policy will operate to terminate the price guarantees once the money has been used up or whether the EEC will be allowed to borrow against the next year's provision or make other arrangements outside the budget of the kind used to finance overspending in the past.

The Prime Minister: The detailed European Council conclusions provide for legally binding limits on agricultural expenditure, supported by automatic stabiliser mechanisms in the individual product regimes.

They further provide that when there is a risk of agricultural expenditure exceeding the budget limits, the Commission shall take remedial action whether by use of its own management powers—including the operation of the new stabilisers—or by making additional proposals to the Council. The Council is committed to acting within two months in order to remedy the situation.

EC Stocks (Depreciation)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister, further to her statement on the meeting of the EEC Council, 15 February, *Official Report*, columns 705-17, why the cost depreciation on EEC stocks has not been written off under the guidelines; and under what provision of the treaty of Rome the Commission was entitled not to include real depreciation in the annual budget.

The Prime Minister: The cost of depreciating old stocks is to be met outside the financial guidelines in order to restrict the resources available within the guidelines and hence to limit agricultural spending for the future. The cost of depreciating old stocks has built up because there has been no legal requirement on the Commission systematically to depreciate stocks to their market level.

Agricultural Prices

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister whether the arrangements for agriculture agreed at the Brussels meeting of the EEC Council of Ministers is expected to reduce the difference between common agricultural policy prices and world prices, having regard to the expected increases in yields and labour productivity; and if she will provide a forecast of the effect in each of the principal products.

The Prime Minister: Reductions in levels of common agricultural policy support consequent upon the agreement reached at the Brussels European Council will result in the difference between Community prices and world prices being smaller than they otherwise would have been. The precise effect cannot be forecast because it will depend on a larger number of factors which cannot be predicted accurately including actual Community and world levels of production.

EC Budget

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what she expects the United Kingdom contribution to the EEC budget to be in each of the next five years on the basis of the decisions made at the EEC Council in Brussels; and if she will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the estimated gross contribution under the four heads of *(a)* the rebate, *(b)* the amount paid directly for the benefit of farmers, *(c)* the amount paid indirectly for the benefit to farmers and *(d)* the amount paid for other purposes.

The Prime Minister: The overall effect of the agreement reached at the European Council will be to increase the United Kingdom's net contribution after abatement by an estimated £200 to £300 million a year compared with the existing own resources ceiling, and by an estimated £100 to £200 million a year compared with the effective level of spending in 1987. The outcome on individual budget lines will depend on a range of factors, including detailed decisions still to be taken.

EC (Vegetable Oil and Oilseed)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what were *(a)* the EEC guaranteed thresholds and *(b)* actual output for vegetable oil and oil seeds over the past 10 years; what is the formula agreed by the EEC Council of Ministers for reducing output; what assessment has been made of its effect on production; and what assessment has been made of its expected effect on imports from (i) the developing countries and (ii) other countries;

(2) what is the estimated cost of the new arrangements for agriculture agreed at the Brussels meeting of the EEC Council of Ministers for oil seeds in 1988 and for each succeeding year; what extra payments have been or will be made to Spain and Portugal in respect of agricultural production; what other payments will be made outside the agricultural chapter; what assessment has been made of the expected effect of the price regime on agricultural production; and if she will publish in the *Official Report* agricultural output figures for the EEC over the past 10 years.

The Prime Minister: The information requested on output is as follows for the three principal oil seeds. (Details of oil output are not readily available but vegetable oil content of rape seed, sunflower seed and soya beans is about 39 per cent. 40 per cent. and 17·5 per cent. respectively).

	Rapeseed	*Sunflowerseed*	*Soya beans*
1978	1,230	125	5
1979	1,205	222	22
1980	1,995	307	18
1981	1,999	513	21
1982	2,679	746	31
1983	2,492	977	89
1984	3,477	1,200	156
1985	3,729	1,776	343
1986			
EC–10	3,651	2,262	912
EC–12	3,665	3,135	918
1987[1]			
EC–10	5,901	2,780	1,440
EC–12	5,911	3,860	1,447

[1] Estimated.

Note: All figures are in '000 tonnes, and relate to EC–10 except where otherwise stated. Data are from EC Management Committee statistics.

The maximum guarantee quantity systems for rape seed and sunflower seed were introduced in 1986 with EC-10 MGQs of 3·5 million tonnes and 1·7 million tonnes respectively, and with a 5 per cent. limit on price reductions. In 1987, this limit was increased to 10 per cent. and a similar system was introduced for soya beans with an EC-12 MGQ of 1·1 million tonnes.

The European Council agreed that each 1 per cent. excess production of rape seed, sunflower seed or soya beans over respective MGQs of 4·5 (EC-10), 2·0 (EC-10) or 1·7 (EC-12) million tonnes would lead to a 0·45 per cent. price reduction in 1988-89, and to a 0·5 per cent. price reduction in 1989-90 and 1990-91, with no limit on the price reductions.

No detailed assesment has been made of the effect on production or on imports of the new system the primary function of which is to stabilise expenditure. At current world prices and exchange rates full year expenditure relating to these three oil seed MGQs would be stabilised at about 2·6 becu compared to estimated 1987 full year expenditure of 3·5 becu.

For Spain and Portugal it was agreed that an adjustment would be made to the MGQs for rape seed (10,000 tonnes for Spain; 1,000 tonnes for Portugal) and sunflower seed (1·2 million tonnes for Spain; 53,500 tonnes for Portugal) corresponding to those agreed for the EC-10. No extra payments were agreed for Spain or Portugal on oil seeds either within or outside the agricultural part of the budget.

Agricultural Expenditure

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister whether she will publish in the *Official Report (a)* details of the ceiling on agricultural spending in each of the next five years, *(b)* her estimate of the maximum amount of spending which would have been permitted if the arrangement agreed at Fontainebleau had been adhered to; and if she will make a statement on what will happen under the new formula when the ceiling is reached if there are outstanding liabilities.

The Prime Minister: The financial guidelines has been set at 27·5 becu — about £19 billion for 1988 and its annual rate of increase must not exceed 74 per cent. of the growth in Community gross national product. No estimates are available for the actual level of the guidelines after 1988. The guideline calculated under the previous arrangements would have been around 23 becu—about £16 billion—for 1988.

Expenditure in excess of the guideline would be permitted within limits set by the European Council only in the event of a substantial in-year fall in the dollar/ecu exchange rate which had a budget effect of more than 400 mecu — about £280 million. There is no provision for other exceptional circumstances.

Milk

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what arrangements were agreed for milk at the meeting of the EEC Council of Ministers in Brussels; what is her estimate of the increase in price to the United Kingdom consumer per gallon of milk as a result of the quota regime; what is the capital value of the United Kingdom quotas on the basis of the transactions known to have been carried out in 1987; and what is the highest recorded value in pounds sterling per cow in terms of a cow with (i) average milk yield and (ii) upper decile yield.

The Prime Minister: Final decisions on milk are subject to confirmation by the Foreign Affairs Council on 22-23 February; they are set out in document SN 461/88, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. It is impossible to isolate the effect of quotas on consumer prices, but as supplies for the liquid market remain adequate I would not expect it to be great. The information sought in the remainder of the hon. Gentleman's question is not available.

Wheat

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister whether, in deciding the level of the co-responsibility levy, the EEC Council of Ministers took into account the fall in the cost of production of wheat; what assessment has been made on whether the levy will stop production from rising further; and if she will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing *(a)* the difference between the EEC price and the world price of bread wheat and other wheat, *(b)* EEC production figures for wheat for each year since 1973 and *(c)* the cost of storing and financing surpluses.

The Prime Minister: The European Council took account of a wide range of factors in determining the level of the additional cereals co-responsibility levy. The additional levy, together with the reductions foreseen in intervention prices for cereals, will reduce the level of producers' returns and so restrain the production of cereals.

The information requested is as follows:

(a)

	£/tonne	
	Bread wheat	*Other wheat*
World price[1]	84-87	62
EC support[2]	116	110

[1] Quoted prices for premium milling wheat fob Canada and Australia and for lower quality wheat fob Argentina at 11 February 1988.

[2] Buying-in prices for February 1988.

(b) EEC Common Wheat Production 1973-74 - 1986

	Million tonnes
1973-74	[1]38·0
1974-75	[1]41·5
1975-76	[1]33·5
1976-77	[1]35·3
1977-78	[1]35·9
1978-79	[1]43·6
1979-80	[1]42·6
1980-81	[1]48·0
1981-82	[2]49·2
1982-83	[2]55·7
1983-84	[2]55·3
1984-85	[2]70·2
1985-86	[2]60·2
1986-87	[3]65·0

[1] EC 9
[2] EC 10
[3] EC 12

(c) The provisional cost of storing and financing intervention grain met by the Community budget in 1987 was 346 million ecu.

Agricultural Surpluses

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister when was the outset to which she referred in her statement on the European Council (Brussels), 15 February, *Official Report*, column 705, and whether she will publish in the Official Report a list of the foodstuffs for which effective measures have now been agreed to reduce agricultural surpluses below the level which obtained in the year which preceded that time.

The Prime Minister: The outset to which I referred was the start of the future financing negotiations in early 1987. The package on which agreement was reached at the European Council in Brussels contains both general measures to reduce surpluses and specific stabiliser measures for cereals, oil seeds and protein crops. The agreement on stabilisers for other products — sugar, wine, fruit and vegetables, tobacco, milk, sheepmeat, olive oil and cotton — is to be confirmed by the Foreign Affairs Council on 22 and 23 February.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what is the expected cost of depreciating surplus stocks of agricultural products outside the agricultural guideline

under the terms agreed at the meeting of the EEC Council in Brussels; which departmental Vote will bear this and over what period of time; whether the same procedure will apply to new surpluses; and how these will be funded.

The Prime Minister: The expected cost of depreciating existing surplus stocks outside the financial guideline is 6,800 mecu—£4,750 million—spread over the years 1988 to 1992. This amount will be paid to member states from the Community budget in the normal way to reimburse them for the loss in value of stocks which they have purchased. In future new stocks will be systematically depreciated within the guideline to prevent a build-up of commitments.

EC (Farming Expenditure)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what estimate she has of how much expenditure wholly or mainly for the benefit of farmers is to be carried in the future on the non-EC budget as a result of the decisions made at the meeting of the EC Council in Brussels; and what is her estimate of the amount so earned in 1987.

The Prime Minister: The European Council agreed to accept a new scheme for setting aside agricultural land with a sliding scale of Community contribution depending on the level of provision set by the member state. The cost of this scheme to member states will depend on the levels of premium and the uptake by farmers.

President Waldheim (Wartime Record)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister if, in the light of her reply to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) of 16 February, *Official Report*, columns *521-22*, she has anything to add to her answers of 23 October and 7 November 1986 to the right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister when it is expected that the inquiry into the six wartime commandos who were executed by the Nazis will be reporting; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: A report will be made to the House when the review of the results of investigations carried out in 1986 by the Ministry of Defence into the fate of captured British service men is complete. I can give no precise dates.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if she now proposes to find out if there were documents being held in the United Kingdom regarding Dr. Waldheim's wartime activities prior to his being appointed Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The Prime Minister: The review into the results of the investigations carried out in 1986 by the Ministry of Defence into the fate of captured British service men will investigate this.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if the Yugoslav authorities have been asked if they can assist the inquiry being conducted into the position of the six wartime commandos interrogated by Lieutenant Waldheim between their capture and execution.

The Prime Minister: No. It is unlikely that the Yugoslav authorities would hold records relating to the activities of German Army Group E—Waldheim's unit—in relation to the treatment of captured British service men captured in the eastern Aegean in 1944.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if the Defence Ministry and the Foreign Office are now actively seeking documentation from the United States of America and any other Governments that would help to clarify the full position over what occurred at all stages to the six wartime commandos interrogated by Lieutenant Waldheim between their capture and death.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) on 19 February, at column *752*.

Wartime Commandos (Murders)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if, in the relevant correspondence between the Defence Ministry and the relatives of the six wartime commandos murdered by the Nazis, the relatives were given all the information that was due to them over what had occurred.

The Prime Minister: It was the policy to pass on to next-of-kin all reliable information. Where there was conflicting information it was the normal practice, if possible, to resolve the conflict before writing to avoid the distress that a wrong account could cause. The more painful details were omitted unless there was pressure from the next-of-kin for a detailed account of what happened.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many civil servants are employed in his Department; what are their average weekly working hours, and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job-sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four-day working week or nine-day fornight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

Mr. Eggar: The provision for staff employed at home and abroad by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration, is 9,860.

There is no set standard working week for diplomatic wing staff serving overseas. Aid wing staff serving overseas normally work 41 hours each week, but this may vary according to local practice. Conditioned hours for all staff in London are 41 hours gross a week.

In the diplomatic wing, flexible working hours were introduced in London during 1987 on a voluntary basis. Currently, staff in 21 Departments are operating the scheme. There are no staff operating job-sharing schemes.

In the aid wing, 1,021 officers take advantage of flexible working hours and 26 staff operate job-sharing schemes.

Neither wing has staff on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight.

With the exception of a few short-term contract staff, all staff in both wings participate in the principal Civil Service pension scheme and, as such, are entitled to full pension rights at 60 years.

European Parliament

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how often the Council of Ministers has discussed the location of the seat of the European Parliament during the past 10 years.

Mrs. Chalker: The conclusions of the European Council in the Netherlands in March 1981 record that "the Heads of State and of Government decided unanimously to confirm the status quo in regard to the provisional places of work of the European institutions".
There has been no other discussion.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimates the Council of Ministers has made of the cost of its failure to determine a single seat for the work of the European Parliament.

Mrs. Chalker: No such estimate has been made.

Alexei Leim

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will raise with the Soviet Government the case of Alexei Leim, who wishes to join his sister in Israel.

Mr. Mellor: My right honourable and learned Friend last made representations to the Soviet authorities on behalf of divided Soviet families during his visit to the Soviet Union from 14 to 17 February. Yevgeny Leim, father of Alexei, was included on a list of refuseniks which was handed to the Soviet Foreign Minister at Brize Norton in December.

El Salvador

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on death threats to British subjects in El Salvador.

Mr. Eggar: We have received no reports of death threats to British subjects in El Salvador.

Turkey

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the European Economic Community's endorsement of the trade agreement with Turkey.

Mrs. Chalker: Additional protocols to the EC/Turkey association agreement, consequent on Spanish and Portuguese accession, were signed in July 1987. The Commission has recently initialled, on behalf of the Community, a voluntary restraint arrangement covering imports of textiles from Turkey.

United Nation's Resolutions

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what circumstances resolutions passed by the General Assembly of the United Nations are not binding on member states.

Mr. Eggar: Generally the power of the General Assembly is limited to making recommendations. In certain specific cases, however, it is authorised by the United Nations charter to make decisions binding on the member states — for example, approval of the budget (under article 17) and admission of new members (under article 18).

Mr. Hor Nam Hong

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why he has refused a visa to Hor Nam Hong, the Kampuchean ambassador to Moscow.

Mr. Eggar: We have no diplomatic relations nor official dealings with the PRK. Our normal policy is not to grant visas to PRK officials, although we consider every application on its merits. Hor Nam Hong is the PRK ambassador in Moscow and it would be inappropirate to issue a visa for him.

Visas

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards consulting foreign Governments about applications for visas to enter the United Kingdom from representatives of states which Her Majesty's Government do not recognise.

Mr. Eggar: It is not our practice to consult Foreign Governments in the circumstances described.

Dr. Kurt Waldheim

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if there has been any change of policy as to refusal of entry to the United Kingdom to Dr. Waldheim on the grounds that it would not be conducive to the public good for admission to be granted.

Mrs. Chalker: No.

Islamabad

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations and complaints he has received about delays in completing explanatory statements at the British embassy at Islamabad.

Mr. Eggar: Representations about individual cases, from any source, are kept on the appropriate case file. No analytical record of the nature of such representations is maintained.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many extra staff have been sent in the last 12 months from the United Kingdom to the British embassy in Islamabad to tackle the backlog of explanatory statements; when such staff were sent; when he expects the backlog to be reduced; and what scale of backlog he regards as tolerable.

Mr. Eggar: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 8 December 1987, at columns 115-16. In addition, during December 1987 three temporary additional entry clearance officers were sent to Islamabad in order to help clear the backlog by the start of the busy summer season. Future performance will be closely monitored in an effort to minimise future delays.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many explanatory statements, setting out the reasons for refusing entry

clearance to the United Kingdom, are awaiting completion at the British embassy in Islamabad and what has been *(a)* the shortest and *(b)* the longest backlog in completing such explanatory statements in each quarter in each of the last five years.

Mr. Eggar: The latest figures available relate to the end of November 1987. The number of outstanding explanatory statements was then:

	Number
Settlement	528
Non-settlement	613

The relevant statistics have been kept since November 1986 only.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average time taken in writing an explanatory statement at the United Kingdom's embassy at Islamabad; and what is the average time taken between completing and despatching explanatory statements from the post.

Mr. Eggar: An average writing time is not available. Each case is different. Once an explanatory statement has been completed, despatch is effected by diplomatic bag within a few days.

ENERGY

Dungeness Nuclear Stations

77. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment his Department has made of the possible danger to the Dungeness A and B nuclear plants of the near collision of British Airways and Balkan Airways aircraft overhead on Saturday 5 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Merionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 16 February 1988, at column *592*.

Nuclear Transport Ltd

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the percentage ownership by BNFL of Nuclear Transport Limited; what information he has as to what other partners have a stake in NTL and in what proportions; and what information he has as to the percentage ownership of NTL by Transnuklear GMBH of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I understand that the shares in Nuclear Transport Ltd are held equally by British Nuclear Fuels plc, Transnucleaire of France and Transnuklear GMBH of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Energy Management Panels

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet on 23 November 1987, *Official Report*, column *23*, how often the energy management panels set up by Government Departments responsible for the civil estate have met; what is the total annual energy bill for which they are responsible; what capital investment budget has been set aside for energy efficiency improvements; and if he will report on progress in energy efficiency in Government buildings.

Mr. Parkinson: The energy management panel for the civil estate has met twice since it was established last autumn. The total annual energy bill for the civil estate is about £60 million. The Property Services Agency is directing about £3·5 million in both 1987-88 and 1988-89 to capital improvements in energy efficiency. This is in addition to spending by individual Departments within their own works programmes and further energy efficiency improvements which arise from substantial planned maintenance expenditure by the PSA.

The panel is monitoring developments across the estate and will advise Departments on how to build on the significant progress already achieved.

Energy Forecasting

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list those research reports, conference papers and statements made by *(a)* his Department's officials, and *(b)* United Kingdom Atomic Energy Agency staff on energy forecasting, including any specific forecasts made for the United Kingdom over the past five years; and if he will place a copy of each in the Library.

Mr. Parkinson: A complete list of relevant research reports, conference papers and statements made by my Department's officials would cost a disproportionate amount to prepare. However, the most important papers on forecasting produced by the Department in recent years have been:

(i) Proof of evidence for the Sizewell 'B' public inquiry DEN/P/1. October 1982.
(ii) Department of Energy Paper on energy projections methodology DEN/S/7. 1983.
(iii) Department of Energy Paper on investment in energy use, DEN/S/3. January 1983.
(iv) Paper given to the SSRC conference on strategic planning in the nationalised industries by Dr. K. J. Wigley. September 1983.
(v) Energy Efficiency Office paper on combined heat and power. 1986.
(vi) Energy Technology Support Unit background papers relevant to the 1986 appraisal of United Kingdom energy research, development and demonstration.

I understand that the UKAEA has not published any relevant reports, papers or statements during the period referred to.

Nuclear Installations

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what changes are proposed for insurance cover and liability for nuclear installations operated by the Central Electricity Generating Board, South of Scotland Electricity Board and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, in the light of the forthcoming privatisation of the electricity supply industry; if he will set a working group to examine this issue; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: We will announce our proposals on the future structure of the electricity supply industry in England and Wales in due course. The South of Scotland Electricity Board is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Coal Production (Subsidies)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has as to the average level of Government subsidy per tonne of deep-mined coal each year since 1978 in each European Economic Community country and in the United States of America.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The information requested is set out below. It has been obtained from European Commission publications. The United States of America does not provide financial support to its coal industry.

£ tonne

	Belgium	*France*	*Federal Republic of Germany*	*[3]Spain*	*[3]Portugal*
1978[1]	27·70	15·80	11·91	—	—
1979	31·16	16·56	13·69	—	—
1980	27·75	15·17	12·19	—	—
1981	25·46	11·95	10·94	—	—
1982	16·47	17·72	8·65	—	—
1983	15·47	19·19	12·06	—	—
1984	20·09	19·87	12·30	—	—
1985	21·68	22·00	11·72	—	—
1986	34·90	23·76	21·25	—	—
1987[4]	57·55	22·16	29·45	12·08	4·92

	United Kingdom[2]
1978-79	1·60
1979-80	2·30
1980-81	2·30
1981-82	3·28
1982-83	4·96
1983-84	12·71
1984-85	87·15
1985-86	6·37
1986-87	10·02

[1] It is not possible to make absolute comparisons between the figures from different member states as the numerical basis may vary.
[2] United Kingdom figures are on a financial year basis. The others are in calendar years.
[3] Spanish and Portuguese data are not available prior to 1987.
[4] 1987 data are latest published estimates.

THE ARTS

Inner Cities

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether the Arts Council has discussed with him initiatives to encourage the arts in the inner cities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) on 10 February 1988, at column *283*.

Liverpool (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Parry: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Liverpool.

Mr. Luce: I have visited Liverpool twice in recent weeks. On 26 November I visited a wide range of arts facilities and on 16 February I participated in two television programmes on the arts. I am impressed by the range of performing arts and museum and gallery facilities in Liverpool.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many civil servants are employed in his Department; what are their average weekly working hours; and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job-sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

Mr. Brooke: There were 3,164 staff in post in the Treasury on 1 February 1988, including 852 part-time staff — each counted as half a post. Full-time staff work conditioned hours. Information is not held centrally on the hours of staff working part-time, nor on the schemes under which they do so. Six hundred and thirty-three staff were on flexitime. Most full-time and part-time civil servants are currently members of the principal Civil Service pension scheme — the main exceptions are those who work less than 15 hours a week and casual staff — and are able to retire at 60 years with pension rights related to their final salary and their full length of service, which varies case by case, up to that age.

Agricultural Support Costs

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what figures he based the claim, contained in the Economic Progress Report No. 194, February 1988, that agricultural support is costing the average European Economic Community family £550 per year; what the overall annual cost would be *(a)* in Britain and *(b)* in the European Economic Community as a whole, based on £550 per family of four; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The Economic Progress Report article made it clear that the estimate of up to £550 a year in higher food prices together with higher levels of taxation was drawn from figures produced by the Australian Department of Primary Industry, published in the Political Economy of International Agricultural Policy Reform, Canberra 1986. The figure is broadly in line with the results of other studies. Figures for total costs borne by consumers and taxpayers in the United Kingdom or any other individual European Community country are not available. Whatever the difficulties of measurement, there are substantial costs to consumers and taxpayers. The Government's long-term strategy is to reduce these costs.

Employees (Union Activities)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list, by union and Government Department, for 1976, 1986 and 1987, *(a)* the number of employees entitled to time off with pay for union activities, *(b)* the annual number of hours taken off and *(c)* the annual cost of employee's salaries for the hours when they are engaged in union activities,

Mr. Brooke: Details are not available for 1976, and are unavailable in the form requested for 1986 and 1987 except at disproportionate cost. However, I refer my hon. Friend to the replies I gave respectively to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley) on 23 January 1987, at column *782*, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) on 22 October 1987, at column *856*.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the facilities provided for union officials in each Government Department, in order that they may undertake their union duties; and if he will give the estimated value of such facilities in each Department in respect of each union.

Mr. Brooke: The facilities available for union officials are set out in the Civil Service National Whitley Council agreement on facilities for industrial relations duties and trade union activities in the non-industrial Civil Service. This was revised in 1982 and a copy is to be found in the Library of the House. The agreement is used as a model by many Departments in framing departmental agreements with their trade union sides. The precise value of these facilities provided by each Department to individual unions cannot be identified except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is satisfied that facilities provided for union officials within Government Departments are used for their proper purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The facilities provided for union officials in Government Departments are covered by the national facilities agreement and departmental agreements and arrangements. It is the responsibility of individual Departments to ensure that facilities are used for their proper purposes.

Brussels Summit

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update table 3.3 of the Public Expenditure White paper to take account of the decisions reached at the Brussels summit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 19 February 1988]:* As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has stated, the overall effect of the agreement reached at the European Council will be to increase the United Kingdom's net contribution after abatement by an estimated £200 to £300 million a year compared with the existing own resources ceiling, and by an estimated £100 to £200 million a year compared with the effective level of spending in 1987. The outcome on individual budget lines will depend on a range of factors, including detailed decisions still to be taken.

Nurses' Pay

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for 1987 and 1979 at 1987 prices the average and minimum take-home pay after tax and national insurance payments of nurses who receive only the single person's tax allowance with no mortgage or other tax allowances for the following grades of nurse *(a)* student nurse, *(b)* nursing auxiliary, *(c)* enrolled nurse, *(d)* staff nurse and *(e)* sister II.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* I regret that information on average earnings is not available for 1979 and not in the form requested for 1987. Levels of take-home pay at constant 1987 prices for nurses at the minima of their pay scales and earning only basic pay are shown in the table.

Take home pay at constant 1987 prices

£ per annum

	1979	*1987*	*Percentage increase*
Student nurse	3,396	3,790	12·0
Nursing auxiliary	3,451	3,813	10·5
Enrolled nurse	3,830	4,996	30·4
Staff nurse	4,161	5,732	37·7
Sister II	4,976	6,925	39·2

Notes:
For 1979 gross pay is at 1 June. For 1987 gross pay is current level payable from 1 April 1987.
Take home pay is gross pay less income tax, assuming only a single person's allowance, and contracted out NICs.
The 1979 income tax regime used is that in the "caretaker" Budget of May 1979.
Constant prices calculated using RPI for July of the relevant year.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Clothing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total output of clothing, the percentage exported and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information is as follows:

Clothing (ISIC major group 322)
Sales

	United Kingdom *US $ million*	*Federal Republic of Germany* *US $ million*	*Japan* *US $ million*
1970	2,410	3,017	2,294
1975	3,812	5,530	6,117
1979	6,309	7,836	10,780
1980	6,839	8,003	10,583
1981	5,742	6,125	11,459
1982	5,089	5,415	10,167
1983	4,616	5,193	10,834
1984	4,442	4,801	11,065
1985	4,873	4,736	13,682

Export ratio

	United Kingdom *per cent.*	*Federal Republic of Germany* *per cent.*	*Japan* *per cent.*
1970	11·6	13·8	19·6
1975	14·8	20·2	5·2
1979	24·9	34·0	3·2
1980	27·0	37·4	4·6
1981	28·3	42·4	4·9
1982	28·3	47·8	5·2
1983	27·8	50·5	5·8
1984	29·6	56·1	6·7
1985	30·5	62·3	5·1

Import penetration

	United Kingdom *per cent.*	*Federal Republic of Germany* *per cent.*	*Japan* *per cent.*
1970	12·5	27·8	4·4
1975	25·6	44·9	8·3
1979	35·3	59·8	15·4
1980	37·0	63·7	13·8
1981	42·0	67·9	15·3
1982	42·2	70·9	17·2

	United Kingdom	Federal Republic of Germany	Japan
	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.
1983	42·2	72·8	14·0
1984	46·3	77·1	17·6
1985	44·3	79·8	14·3

Notes

1. Information for 1958, 1960, 1965, 1986 and 1987 is not available on a comparable basis.
2. *Source*: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
3. Industry Classification: International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC).

Footwear

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total output of footwear, the percentage exported, and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information is as follows:

Footwear (ISIC Major Group 324)

Sales (US $ million)

	United Kingdom	Federal Republic of Germany	Japan
1970	486	824	358
1975	722	1,120	896
1979	1,209	1,949	2,023
1980	1,344	2,076	2,005
1981	1,294	1,599	2,077
1982	1,189	1,522	1,826
1983	1,065	1,417	1,863
1984	1,205	1,356	1,908
1985	1,076	1,297	2,418

Export Ratio (per cent.)

	United Kingdom	Federal Republic of Germany	Japan
1970	15·9	10·4	13·1
1975	14·3	15·8	3·0
1979	18·9	21·3	1·5
1980	21·6	23·2	2·0
1981	17·1	25·0	2·1
1982	15·7	27·0	2·7
1983	16·1	31·0	2·3
1984	14·7	32·3	2·4
1985	17·6	40·8	1·7

Import Penetration (per cent.)

	United Kingdom	Federal Republic of Germany	Japan
1970	15·6	23·8	2·4
1975	25·8	43·3	6·3
1979	39·9	53·1	9·8
1980	40·0	56·0	10·1
1981	40·2	56·0	10·4
1982	40·8	57·3	11·6
1983	44·5	61·1	11·2
1984	42·6	63·3	13·4
1985	46·7	68·2	10·6

Textiles

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total output of textiles by value, the percentage exported and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1985, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information is as follows:

Textiles (ISIC Major Group 321)

Sales (US $ million)

	United Kingdom	Federal Republic of Germany	Japan
1970	6,200	7,458	10,960
1975	8,570	12,356	19,232
1979	12,894	18,222	32,302
1980	12,556	18,857	32,305
1981	10,279	14,740	32,592
1982	9,062	13,731	29,693
1983	8,309	13,303	31,318
1984	8,062	12,729	31,693
1985	8,270	12,295	33,634

Export Ratio (Per Cent.)

	United Kingdom	Federal Republic of Germany	Japan
1970	17·5	21·1	16·7
1975	20·3	27·3	15·8
1979	24·4	34·1	12·7
1980	17·7	343	16·3
1981	25·8	39·0	18·5
1982	25·9	41·2	17·7
1983	26·4	41·7	17·5
1984	28·0	45·4	17·4
1985	30·2	50·5	15·1

Import Penetration (Per Cent.)

	United Kingdom	Federal Republic of Germany	Japan
1970	12·6	21·4	4·1
1975	19·9	28·1	6·1
1979	28·5	36·6	8·7
1980	29·7	37·6	7·6
1981	33·3	39·4	7·5
1982	34·9	40·0	8·5
1983	38·0	41·4	7·3
1984	40·2	43·8	9·1
1985	42·0	47·7	8·2

Notes

1. Information for 1958, 1960, 1965, 1986 and 1987 is not available on a comparable basis.
2. Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
3. Industry Classification: International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC).

Portugal

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what estimates he has made of the effect of the industrial modernisation of Portugal on the United Kingdom balance of trade with Portugal; and if he will publish in the *Official Report* details of the overall balance with Portugal in each of the past 15 years and the balance of trade in manufactures.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) on 12 February, at column *375*. The many factors contributing to the changes in these balances have not been quantified.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many civil servants are employed in his Department; what are their average weekly working hours; and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job-sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

Mr. Butcher: There were 12,763 permanent civil servants employed in the Department of Trade and Industry on 1 January 1988. The average paid working hours, including lunch breaks and overtime, of the 12,259 full-time staff is 42·0. The extent of unpaid overtime working is not known. The 504 part-time staff work, on average, 21·4 hours per week, excluding lunch breaks.

Flexible working hours is a facility open to all staff in the Department. It is authorised locally by line management and there is no record kept centrally. The number of those actually working FWH could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Some of the part-time staff share full-time jobs, but details are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Thirty-one of the part-time staff work between 29 and 33 hours per week, excluding lunch breaks, that is, broadly the equivalent of a four-day working week or a nine-day fortnight.

Maximum pension entitlement is earned after 40 years of reckonable service. Statistics are not readily available of the number of staff who, assuming service continued to normal retirement age, would reach maximum entitlement.

Engagements

Mr. Latham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will list the public engagements or meetings with persons outside the Government or the Civil Service which he has held in his capacity as Minister responsible for the inner cities since 13 January.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have had many meetings with business men and organisations involved in inner city regeneration including Business in the Community, the CBI and the Industrial Society. These meetings have shown that there is a range of ways in which companies, voluntary organisations and local communities can contribute constructively to making inner cities better places in which to live, work and invest.

Commercial Barriers (Removal)

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what provisions will be made to draw the attention of the public to the new conditions creating new opportunities within the European Economic Community after 1992, as a result of the proposed removal of commercial barriers in Europe.

Mr. Alan Clark: We are preparing a sustained national campaign so that everyone involved in business in this country knows about opportunities which will come from completing the single European market. Full details will be announced shortly.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Vaccination

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services by what percentage the uptake of *(a)* measles, *(b)* triple vaccine, including whooping cough, and *(c)* poliomyelitis vaccination falls short of the target level of 90 per cent. in each of the health authorities in England for each of the last six years.

Mrs. Currie: I have placed in the Library tables showing the available differences between the two year uptake rates and the 90 per cent. targets in 1984, 1985 and 1986. Due to NHS restructuring in 1982, comparable figures are not available for the years before 1984.

AIDS

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what evidence he has of a change of behaviour patterns following his Department's AIDS advertising campaign; and if he has any plans to improve the response to his Department's campaign.

Mr. Newton: In mounting the AIDS public education campaign the Government, and now the Health Education Authority, have adopted a step-by-step approach, with detailed monitoring and evaluation at each stage. The first stages of the campaign aimed to raise the general level of public awareness about AIDS and HIV and to provide basic factual information about the disease. The second phase of the campaign was aimed specifically at combating the spread of HIV through injecting drug misuse, with a parallel campaign aimed at discouraging young people from experimenting with drugs at all. The latest stage of the campaign was launched on 17 February by the Health Education Authority, which is now responsible for the United Kingdom-wide mass media elements of AIDS public education, working in close collaboration with sister agencies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The new campaign seeks to build on progress already made by reinforcing, among the population as a whole, knowledge of the disease and awareness of safeguarding actions which the individual can take, and by targeting specific groups who may be at particular risk, starting with business travellers.

Independent market research in the first year of the campaign revealed a very high level of awareness which was a particular objective of this phase. There was some evidence of a wider use of condoms. The research has also indicated that many homosexual men claim to have made changes in their sexual behaviour; this is supported by indirect evidence that they may have done so.

Evaluation of the second phase of the campaign is being carried out and the results are awaited. The Government and the Health Education Authority will continue to monitor closely the effects of the campaigns already undertaken and now underway and to use the results in developing policy on AIDS work in general and on campaign activity in particular.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the average cost to the National Health Service of treating an AIDS patient for the duration of the illness.

Mr. Newton: There is no detailed information available about the total cost to the NHS of treating a patient with AIDS. From research, hospital costs of in-patient treatment are estimated at £17,600 from diagnosis to death. In addition, the average cost of maintaining a patient on Retrovir (AZT) is £4,600 per year.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the expenditure of the National Health Service for 1960,1970, 1980, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987; and what percentage of the gross domestic product these expenditures represented.

Mr. Newton: Data on net NHS expenditure, excluding NHS charges, for readily available years are shown in the table. The data have been derived from Central Statistical Office national accounts.

Net expenditure of the National Health Service in total and as a percentage of GDP

	Net expenditure £ million	*Percentage of GDP*
1970	2,031	3·9
1980	11,939	5·2
1982	14,448	5·2
1983	16,307	5·4
1984	17,163	5·4
1985	18,327	5·2
1986	19,939	5·3

Notes:
(a) Before April 1 1974 local authorities incurred both capital and current expenditure on the National Health Service. The table contains all readily identifiable elements of such expenditure.
(b) Data beyond 1986 are not available.
(c) There are slight rounding differences between these figures and those published by the OECD for purposes of international comparisons.

Departmental Deputy Secretaries

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the responsibilities of each of the deputy secretaries in his Department and the numbers and ranks of staff reporting to each.

Mr. Portillo: The responsibilities of grade 2—deputy secretary level — officers in the Department and the number and grades of staff reporting to them are given in the table. In addition, approximately 4,500 staff work in the special hospitals, Disablement Services Authority, youth treatment centres, artificial eye unit and Medical Practices Committee, and a further 1,500 staff, mainly working for the independent statutory authorities, do not report through lines of command to grade 2 officers.

Title and responsibilities	*Staff reporting to each*							
	Grade 3	*Grade 4*	*Grade 5*	*Grade 6*	*Grade 7*	*Executive grades*	*Clerical and other*	*Total*
Principal establishments and finance officer								
Establishments and personnel Central management support Departmental finance Economic advice Operation research Statistics and research	6	2	26·0	20·0	140·5	868·5	880·0	1,943·0
Director of Social Security operations								
Operations in: —The Social security regional organisation —Newcastle central office —North Fylde central office Social security computing	3	—	19·0	67·0	490·0	27,899·0	63,010·0	91,488·0
Deputy secretary: Social security policy								
Social security policy	4	—	12·0	2·0	45·0	207·0	52·0	322·0
Deputy secretary: Family practitioner services and medicines policy								
Family practitioner services Policy relating to medicines	4	—	12·0	12·0	55·5	183·0	154·0	420·5
Deputy secretary: Health and personal social services policy								
Policy relating to: —Health issues —Primary care —Community services —Hospitals —Mental, maternity and child health —Child care	6	—	17·0	2·5	50·0	198·0	128·5	402·0
Director of operations: NHS management board								
Liaison with health authority on policy accountability and planning	4	1	13·0	20·0	77·5	217·5	82·0	415·0

Title and responsibilities	Staff reporting to each Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Executive grades	Clerical and other	Total
NHS buildings								
Director of personnel: NHS management board								
NHS personnel	1	--	4·0	1·0	15·0	58·5	31·0	110·5
[1]*Director of finance: NHS management board*								
Health authority financial management and control	1	—	1·0	1·0	4·0	26·0	8·0	41·0
Management consultancy services for the NHS								
[1]*Director of planning information and technology: NHS management board*								
Planning and information technology	—	—	3·0	1·0	10·0	39·5	15·0	68·5
Solicitor								
Legal aspects of health and social security	2	1	11·0	20·0	25·0	30·0	54·0	143·0
Chief inspector of social services								
Inspection of social work and some aspects of social services	—	2	14·0	—	80·0	7·0	24·5	127·5
Deputy chief medical officer								
Health issues related to: —Children, disablement, prevention and nutrition —Primary care —Toxicology and the environment —Mental health	4	7	31·5	42·0	8·0	15·0	35·5	143·0
Deputy chief medical officer								
Health issues related to: —Hospital policies and services —Management, planning and community medicine —Medical manpower	3	—	13·5	3·0	3·0	10·5	21·0	54·0
Deputy chief medical officer								
Health issues related to: —Medicines —International health —Scientific services, equipment and buildings and supplies —Cancer	2	6	33·0	5·5	5·0	21·0	35·0	107·5

[1] Senior consultants and advisers: Grade 2 status.

Wound Dressings

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has made of the net cost of introducing, on prescription, those high technology wound dressings which have recently been submitted to the drugs committee of his Department.

Mr. Newton: Several new wound dressings are currently being evaluated. No estimates are yet available of the effect on overall NHS expenditure of making these dressings available on GP prescription.

Health Care

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of Britain's gross domestic product was devoted to both public and private health care in each year from 1958 to 1988.

Mr. Newton: Data on net public expenditure, excluding NHS charges, and private expenditure as a percentage of GDP for the period 1965 to 1986 are shown in the table. They have been derived from Central Statistical Office national accounts and relate to the United Kingdom as a whole. Complete data on a consistent basis are not available for earlier years.

Net public expenditure and private expenditure as a percentage of GDP

	Net public expenditure	Private expenditure
1965	3·6	0·6
1966	3·7	0·5
1967	3·9	0·5
1968	3·9	0·6
1969	3·8	0·6
1970	3·9	0·6
1971	3·9	0·6
1972	4·2	0·6

	Net public expenditure	Private expenditure
1973	4·1	0·6
1974	4·7	0·6
1975	5·0	0·5
1976	4·9	0·5
1977	4·8	0·5
1978	4·7	0·5
1979	4·7	0·5
1980	5·2	0·6
1981	5·4	0·6
1982	5·2	0·7
1983	5·4	0·7
1984	5·4	0·8
1985	5·2	0·8
1986	5·3	0·8

Notes
(a) Before April 1 1974 local authorities incurred both capital and current expenditure on the National Health Service. The table contains all readily identifiable elements of such expenditure.
(b) Data beyond 1986 are not available.
(c) There are slight rounding differences between these figures and those published by the OECD for purposes of international comparisons.

National Health Service Consultants

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to the different frequencies and the number of times individual consultants see National Health Service patients in respect of the 10 most common hospital treatments; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: This information is not collected centrally. How often, and how many times, an individual patient is seen by the consultant is a matter for the latter to decide in the light of his clinical assessment of that patient's condition.

Child Benefit

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many overseas students resident in the United Kingdom for over 26 weeks are claiming child benefit on behalf of their children also resident in the United Kingdom; how many children are concerned; and what is the cost to public funds.

Mr. Scott: I regret that this information is not available.

Abortions

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the number of mentions of mental retardation in the mother on the notification forms for abortions carried out at or after 18 weeks gestation during 1986.

Mr. Newton: During 1986 there was one abortion notification which mentioned mental retardation in the mother, where the abortion was performed at 18 weeks or more gestation.

Donor Organs

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when his Department first considered the significance of required request as a method of increasing the number of donor organs; what studies have taken place on this matter; when a decision can be expected; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: We have followed with interest the American experience of required request legislation, which began in 1985. In May 1986 the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health visited New York to examine the operation of the laws. More recently the working party on the supply of donor organs set up by the medical royal colleges considered the introduction of legislation. They recommended an alternative non-legislative approach towards improving the availability of donor organs. I announced our decisions on the recommendations in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) on 18 December 1987, at column *934*.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what studies have been made relating to contracting in or contracting-out of any scheme to increase the supply of donor organs for transplant; and if he is now in a position to make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Successive Governments have considered and rejected contracting out schemes under which organs could be removed after death from anyone who had not registered an objection. Current legislation, as set out in the Human Tissue Act 1961, regards organ donation as a positive gift made by the donor during life or by surviving relatives after the donor's death. We have no plans to amend the Act.

Proposals for national contracting-in schemes are usually associated with computerised registers of potential donors. We are being kept informed of the progress of Lifeline Wales, a computerised register of potential donors with links to intensive care and neuro units in Wales. A national register covering England would be expensive to establish and maintain, and we would only consider making the necessary investment if the Welsh experience showed it to be clearly effective.

Prosthetists

Mr Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what assessment he has made of the needs for additional prosthetists; what support and advice his Department is giving about the need for additional prosthetists and the retraining of prosthetists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: These are matters for the Disablement Services Authority to which the hon. Member should address his questions.

Drug Testing

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will give details of the drug testing scheme results for European Economic Community-manufactured general drugs in the latest year for which figures are available;

(2) if he will give details of the drug testing scheme results for the European Economic Community-manufactured and non-European Economic Community-manufactured proprietary drugs for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Newton: I regret that no information is available about the country of origin of the drugs tested under the

scheme for testing drugs dispensed by Community pharmacies. The information available for England in the period 1 April 1986 to 31 March 1987 is as follows:

	Number of samples tested	
	Proprietary	*Non-proprietary*
Total:	1,875	2,598
(i) No action taken	1,843	2,560
(ii) Faults and deficiencies in manufacture of proprietary products or faults and deficiencies which cannot be checked by independent analysts	8	9
(iii) Minor error in dispensing	9	7
(iv) Referred to pharmaceutical service committee	15	22

Drug Recalls

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will give details of the drug recalls of European Economic Community-manufactured and non-European Economic Community-manufactured general drugs for the latest year for which figures are available;

(2) if he will give details of the drug recalls of European Economic Community-manufactured and non-European Economic Community-manufactured proprietary drugs for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Newton: I regret information is not available in the form requested. Generally, pharmaceutical companies have their own arrangements for recalling batches of defective medicines which they identify. During 1987 they involved the Department in the recall of specific batches of nine generic and five proprietary products, all manufactured in the European Community. We are not aware of any recalls in 1987 involving non-EC manufactured products.

Prostoglandin Abortions

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the other agents used in some prostoglandin abortions; and how many prostoglandin abortions were performed in England and Wales in 1986 *(a)* with and *(b)* without the use of other agents, respectively.

Mr. Newton: Doctors are asked to specify the other agents used in prostoglandin abortions on the notification form which must be submitted to the chief medical officer for every abortion performed. An analysis of this information could be provided, only at disproportionate cost, but I understand that the agents normally used are oxytocin and urea. The numbers of prostoglandin abortions in England and Wales in 1986 are as follows:

	Number
Prostoglandins only	3,616
Prostoglandins with other agents	5,570

Pay Beds

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if, in the light of the answer of 12 February 1988, *Official Report*, columns *409-10*, giving the number of pay beds in England at 31 December 1979 as 3,171, he has anything to add to the answer of 19 December 1986, *Official Report*, column *795*, which gave a figure of 2,404; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that the figure of 3,171 authorised pay beds given in my reply to the hon. Member on 12 February 1988, at columns *409-10*, was incorrect. The number of authorised pay beds in England at 31 December 1979 was 2,405. The percentage bed occupancy figure thus increases to 62·7 per cent.

Eli Lilley

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the drugs supplied to the National Health Service by Eli Lilley.

Mr. Newton: The following drugs are supplied by either this company or its subsidiary, Dista Products Ltd.:

Allegron
Amytal
Aventyl
Brietal Sodium
Capastat
Cinobac
Dimelor
Distaclor
Distaquaine V-K
Fenopron
Haelan (excluding Haelan Tape)
Ilosone
Ilotycin
Humulin I
Humulin Lente
Humulin M1/2/3/4
Humulin Z
Humulin Zn
Keflex
Keflin
Kefzol
Nebcin
Nu-Seals
Progesic
Seconal Sodium
Sodium Amytal
Tuinal
V-Cil-k.

The following products are also supplied, but prescriptions must be written in the generic name and pharmacists are free to dispense a generic product which need not necessarily be this company's.

Distalgesic
Cologel
Doloxene.

Management Consultants

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the cost to his Department of employing management consultants for each year from 1983 to 1987.

Mr. Moore: The Department's expenditure on consultants is recorded in budget years from April to March. It is not possible to isolate expenditure on management consultants alone as there is considerable overlap with computer consultancies. The expenditure on management and computer consultancies for 1983-84, 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87 and the estimated expenditure for 1987-88 are as follows:

	£ million
1983-84	3·623
1984-85	7·600

	£ million
1985-86	13·646
1986-87	16·962
1987-88	[1]25·827

[1] Estimated

Social Security Tribunals

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make a statement on the current waiting period for social security appeals to be heard by tribunals in the Nottingham region; what is the current number of appeals awaiting determination; and what steps are being taken to reduce the backlog.

Mr. Portillo: The latest available administrative statistics for the midlands region of the office of the president of social security appeal tribunals, which covers the Nottingham area, are for the second quarter of 1987. At June 1987 there were 27,398 appeals awaiting a hearing and the average time from lodgment of an appeal to the hearing in that quarter was 21·2 weeks. The president advises that in the midlands region at 12 January 1988 there were 17,301 appeals awaiting a hearing.

Responsibility for the administration of social security appeal tribunals rests with the president, his hon. Judge Byrt, QC. In response to a request from officials earlier this month, he has written a note to describe the difficulties which his organisation faces and his proposals for resolving them. Copies of that letter have been placed in the Library.

Worth House Children's Home

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list, by name and function, all those persons of whom the social services inspectorate made inquiries during his investigations concerning the operation and administration of Worth house children's home, Herne Bay.

Mrs. Currie: The inspection of Worth house children's home was a joint one with Kent county council social services department. The inspectors spoke to individuals and groups of staff and shared meals and recreation periods with the young residents; the premises were inspected and records were examined. It is not normal practice to reveal the names of individuals of whom inquiries are made in the course of inspections by the social services inspectorate.

Registration of Death (Travel Costs)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the total cost in each of the last five years to assist claimants with the cost of travel to register a death; and if such claims for assistance will be accepted after April of the current year.

Mr. Portillo: No specific provision exists in the supplementary benefit scheme to help with the cost of travel to register a death. However, provision did exist in supplementary benefit single payments to help claimants to meet the cost of travelling to arrange a funeral. Such help continues to be available under the social fund funeral payment arrangements which replaced the single payments provision in April 1987.

Details of the amounts of such payments are not available.

Death Grant

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people in the United Kingdom died in each of the last five years; and in how many deaths the death grant was paid.

Mr. Portillo: The available information is as follows. Deaths recorded in the United Kingdom include a minority of visitors from abroad who did not qualify for a death grant.

Year	*United Kingdom*	
	Deaths recorded	*Death grants paid*[1]
1983	659,101	614,000
1984	644,918	[2]13,723
1985	670,656	615,000
1986	660,735	[3]
1987	[4]	[3]

[1] Figures are rounded to nearest 1,000.
[2] Figure shown is for Northern Ireland only; figures for Great Britain not available due to industrial action.
[3] Data not collected.
[4] Not yet available.

Sources:
Central Statistical Office Annual Abstract of Statistics 1988.
Social Security Statistics 1987.
Northern Ireland Social Security Statistics 1986.

Birmingham Children's Hospital

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many private heart operations requiring intensive care beds at the Birmingham children's hospital were carried out by consultants from the Birmingham children's hospital during the week beginning 14 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: I understand that one heart operation was performed on a private patient at the Birmingham children's hospital last week. There is a long-standing arrangement at the children's hospital whereby any private patients are admitted to the hospital on the basis of clinical need and do not take priority over National Health Service patients.

Registration of Deaths

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce legislation to enable funeral directors to register deaths on behalf of the bereaved to remove the requirement on the bereaved to register a death at the registrar's office for the area where the death occurred.

Mrs. Currie: At present, information for the registration of a death may only be given to the registrar of the sub-district in which the event occurred.

A change to enable a death in England and Wales to be notified to any registrar of deaths in those countries was recently recommended for consideration in the efficiency scrutiny into the registration service which reported in 1985. Following my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State's announcement in the other place on 3 December 1987—*Official Report*, House of

Lords, column 1230—consultations have been opened on the scrutiny recommendations and on wider issues including the list of persons qualified to register deaths. It is as yet too early to predict the outcome of those consultations.

Drugs (Adverse Reactions)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the number of people who suffer significant long-term adverse reactions after taking pharmaceutical drugs; and approximately what percentage this is of those taking drugs each year.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 12 January 1988]:* Although it is not possible to provide reliable estimates of the number who suffer significant long term adverse reactions after taking pharmaceutical drugs or of the percentage that the latter represents of all who take such drugs in a year, it is clear that the percentage must be extremely small. The number of suspected adverse reaction reports received by the Committee on Safety of Medicines in 1986 was 15,527 of which 5,006 were judged serious. Of the latter, the duration of the reaction was known for 2,039 and of these only 144 exceeded three months. There is no reliable estimate of the number of people who take drugs for a medicinal purpose in a year although it must represent a significant proportion of the population if both prescription and non-prescription drugs are included.

National Insurance

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the national insurance contributions paid by a man on the national average wage goes to support the National Health Service.

Mr. Newton: In 1988-89 a man is expected to earn an average £225 per week: the NHS contribution from class 1 national insurance contributions will be 0·95 per cent. of earnings up to the upper earnings limit of £305 per week, and 0·8 per cent. of earnings from employers. The NHS contribution will fund 15 per cent. of the gross cost of the NHS in Great Britain in 1988-89. The table provides the information sought.

Estimated amount of weekly National Insurance contributions paid to the National Health Service (average male earnings)

	Weekly earnings	*Total NIC*	*NHS contributions (0·95 per cent. of earnings)*	*Percentage of NIC paid to NHS*
	£	£	£	
Not contracted out of SERPS	225·00	20·25	2·14	10·6
Contracted out of SERPS	225·00	16·57	2·14	12·9

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the figures for National Health Service expenditure per annum on *(a)* hospital running costs, *(b)* hospital capital costs, *(c)* general practice medical services, *(d)* general practice dental services, *(e)* general practice pharmaceutical services and *(f)* general practice ophthalmic services for 1979 until the last year the figures are available.

Mr. Newton: Information for 1986-87 is shown in the table.

For the earlier years I refer the hon. Member to the summarised accounts of health authorities and family practitioner committees in England which are published annually as a House of Commons paper. HC20 1986-87 covers the financial year 1985-86—the latest published.

	£'000
Hospital Services—Revenue Expenditure	8,255,383
Hospitals—Capital Expenditure	706,563
General Medical Services	1,134,612
Pharmaceutical Services	1,696,073
General Dental Services	530,550
General Ophthalmic Services	130,725

Continence Nursing Advisers

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what progress has been made in providing additional continence nursing advisers; what support his Department is giving to providing training for such advisers; if he will increase training facilities; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what official training facilities are available for nursing continence advisers; what support his Department is giving for validating such training and qualifications; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will consider giving nursing continence advisers special payments for training, skills and responsibilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting as the independent statutory body charged with the responsibility for the regulation and education of the nursing professions in England provides a curriculum for a course on the promotion of continence and the management of incontinence. It is for health authorities to determine the appropriate levels of training required for particular posts. The Nurses' Pay Review Body is currently considering appropriate rates of pay for a new clinical grading structure which will provide more scope to reward and recognise nurses who have advanced clinical skills.

Intramuscular Injections

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether his Department regards the administration of intramuscular injections by trained nurses as part of a nurse's ordinary duties; and what instructions his Department gives to hospital administrators if nursing officers insist that it is not.

Mr. Newton: The administration of intramuscular injections is part of the duties of a trained nurse and this skill is taught as part of basic training. This is not a subject on which the Department would normally give advice. Any disagreement would be a matter for local management to resolve.

Blood Samples

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether his Department regards the taking of blood samples by appropriately trained nurses as part of a nurse's ordinary duties; and what instructions his Department gives to hospital administrators if nursing officers insist that it is not.

Mr. Newton: This particular task is not included in basic training but it has been accepted by a number of health authorities as being a suitable task to be delegated to appropriately trained nursing staff. Advice is given on delegation to a nurse of tasks not included in basic training in HC(77)22, "The Extended Role of the Clinical Nurse Legal Implications & Training Requirements". A copy is being placed in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sea Birds (Carbis Bay)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the destruction of sea birds in Carbis bay, Cornwall, through entanglement in nylon monofilament fishing nets; if he will take steps to ban the use of these nets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I have received representations from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds about the recent deaths of sea birds in Carbis bay, Cornwall, through entanglement in fishing nets. Under normal circumstances the use of monofilament nets does not present a significant threat to populations of sea birds. However, in recent weeks, the adverse weather has driven sea birds inshore and prevented local fishermen from setting their nets further out to sea. Additionally, there has been a particular abundance of small fish, notably sprat, in the area. These factors, taken together, have resulted in unusually high fatalities among sea birds. We are keeping the situation under review.

Food for Needy People

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements are being made for the distribution of free food for the needy, in the current year.

Mr. Gummer: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I gave on 9 February, at column *158*, to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay).

Chile

Sir Hugh Rossi: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment was made by the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), the implications of the degree of economic stability of Chile for the prospects of trade between the United Kingdom and Chile; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: On my visit to Chile between 11 and 17 January 1988, I was accompanied by a team of business men representing a good cross-section of the United Kingdom's agro-industry. I can inform my hon. Friend that the team, who made a significant number of new business contacts, were highly impressed by the economic stability of that country and the prospects for bilateral trade in agricultural and fisheries products. I share that impression.

As I made clear to the various Ministers of the Chilean Government whom I met, I am a firm supporter of the initiative they have taken to privatise the agricultural sector. I was able, with my business team, to meet many agricultural entrepreneurs, particularly in the horticultural and fisheries sectors, who have expressed the wish to improve trade with the United Kingdom.

Nevertheless I also made it clear to representatives of the Chilean Government, as well as to the leading members of the Opposition, that, while admiring their economic progress, we could not overlook Chile's consistently poor human rights performance. I also emphasised that Her Majesty's Government would wish to see an orderly and peaceful return to democracy as soon as possible.

Water (Nitrate Levels)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further action his Department is taking to restrict nitrate levels in water; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: My Department has well-established programmes of research, publicity and advice aimed at encouraging the farming industry to adopt practices which limit the scope for nitrate leaching into water resources. In addition, we have recently launched a campaign in association with other interested organisations to raise awareness among farmers of how they can help to reduce the problem, particularly in areas where the levels of nitrate in the public water supply are significant.

EC (Food Statistics)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North of 22 July 1987, *Official Report*, column *236*, if he will update the details of *(a)* the total agricultural support for the European Economic Community, *(b)* overall European Economic Community expenditure and *(c)* total European Economic Community agricultural exports, to the latest date for which information is now available.

Mr. MacGregor: Final outturn figures for 1987 are not yet available. Budget provision for expenditure on market support and structural measures under the common agricultural policy was 24,101 mecu (£16,854 million); in addition some 4,512 mecu (£3,155 million) of expenditure on agricultural market support in November and December 1987 could not be met from the 1987 budget and will fall on the 1988 budget.

The total Community budget for 1987 including agriculture (but excluding the carry over) was 36,168 mecu (£25,292 million) compared to 34,219 mecu (£22,169 million) outturn in 1986.

Details of the value of agricultural exports from the Community in 1987 are not yet available.

Rapeseed

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been *(a)* the EEC guarantee threshold and *(b)* actual output for rapeseed compared with EEC output over the past 10 years; what assessment he has made of why the reduction of 10 per cent. in the guarantee price in 1987 did not result in a fall in output; what assessment has been made of the effect a further reduction in price of 8 per cent. will have on output; at what stage further price reductions will be triggered; what contribution these arrangements have made towards reducing agricultural surpluses; and what effect the EEC subsidies have had on imports from (i) the developing countries and (ii) other countries.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. The 1987 price reduction could not have affected rapeseed output this year since the decision was taken after the crop was planted. The additional estimated price reduction of 8 per cent. for 1988 is based on the Commission's assumed production for this year. If, however, 1988 or subsequent production proves higher than expected, additional price reductions will be introduced automaticaly in line with the objective of budgetary stabilisation.

There is no overall Community oilseed surplus, only a need to reduce and stabilise support expenditure.

Agricultural Commodities

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the increase in production of agricultural commodities in the EEC for the next five years; what estimates have been made of the effect this will have on the trade of third countries; and what assessment has been made of the implications for United Kingdom exports of manufactures to these countries.

Mr. Gummer: A range of projections of Community agricultural production and trade is contained in the Commission communication COM(87)1 final, 4 March 1987 (pp B4 to B85), a copy of which is in the Library of the House. The projections are based generally on past trends. Actual production in future years will depend on the reactions of the Community's 9 million farmers to the many factors influencing their decisions, including the new stabiliser arrangements, set-aside and Community decisions on agricultural support generally. Developments in world food trade will depend also on changes in agricultural support, production and consumption in other countries. Prospects for United Kingdom exports in manufactured goods will depend primarily on the competitive position of our manufacturing sector.

New Forest (Keepers' Strike)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the rent strike by keepers of the New Forest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have had no such representations.

Sheepmeat Stabilisers

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if there is to be a separate scheme for Great Britain under the European Community proposals for sheepmeat stabilisers;

(2) what is the maximum guaranteed quantity figures for ewes under the European Community proposals for sheepmeat stabilisers in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* the rest of the Community, including Northern Ireland;

(3) what are the relevant percentage price reductions over the maximum guaranteed quantity, under the European Community proposals for sheepmeat stabilisers for *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* the rest of the European Community, including Northern Ireland;

(4) if he will make a statement on the implications of the proposed sheepmeat stabilisers for *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* Northern Ireland.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 19 February 1988]:* The European Council at its meeting on 11-12 February had before it proposals for sheepmeat stabilisers which would provide for guarantee thresholds to be set at the estimated ewe numbers in 1987 of 18 million ewes for Great Britain; and of 44 million for the rest of the Community (including Northern Ireland). The texts provide that if these thresholds were exceeded subsequently, the basic price would be reduced — separately in Great Britain on the one hand and in the rest of the Community (including Northern Ireland) on the other—by 1 per cent. for each 1 per cent. overrun. The separate arrangement for Great Britain would be linked to the application of the variable premium scheme. The Foreign Affairs Council is expected to endorse the non-arable sector stabilisers at its meeting on 22-23 February.

Other operational details, including the starting date for applying the proposed stabiliser mechanism and the precise percentages for the first basic price reductions, will be dealt with in implementing regulations which the EC Commission has yet to bring forward.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether, under the European Community proposals for sheepmeat stabilisers, there are any arrangement for minimum import prices;

(2) what arrangements have been made, under the European Community proposals for sheepmeat stabilisers, for country imports into *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* the rest of the European Community, including Northern Ireland.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 19 February 1988]:* The importation of sheepmeat into the Community from third countries is governed by voluntary restraint agreements between the EC and the main supplying countries. The VRAs make no distinction as between Great Britain and the rest of the Community, including Northern Ireland. Texts on the sheepmeat stabiliser proposals before the European Council at its meeting on 11-12 February include suggestions as to the points which might form part of the Community's eventual negotiating mandate for discussions with third countries about their future imports. One such point is that third countries should respect import price discipline.

Coniferous Woodlands

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his policy is with regard to

coniferous woodlands being planted in areas of outstanding natural beauty under the farm woodland grant scheme.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 19 February 1988]:* Every application for the farm woodland scheme which falls within an area of outstanding natural beauty will be carefully considered to ensure that it is compatible with that designation. This is irrespective of whether the proposed planting consists predominately of conifers or broadleaves or comprises a mixture of the two.

ENVIRONMENT

Council House Sales

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department will collate regular statistics on the handling of applications by each local authority in England, indicating their performance in the execution of their duties under legislation on council house sales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Department currently requires detailed monthly reports from 11 local authorities whose processing of right-to-buy applications is unsatisfactory. Other authorities submit quarterly returns of applications received and sales completed, and may be brought within the formal monitoring arrangements if complaints received indicate that this is justified.

Rate Levels

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the amount, in percentage terms, by which the 1988-89 rate levels in *(a)* Middlesbrough, *(b)* Langbaurgh, *(c)* Stockton and *(d)* Hartlepool will exceed average wage increases over the past 12 months.

Mr. Chope: Based on provisional information, the percentages by which domestic rate increases in 1988-89 will exceed wage increases over the past 12 months are shown below. No information is available yet for Langbaurgh.

	Percentage
Middlesbrough	−2
Stockton	+5
Hartlepool	+4

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the amount by which in percentage terms the 1988-89 rates levels in *(a)* Middlesbrough, *(b)* Langbaurgh, *(c)* Stockton and Hartlepool will exceed the retail price index increase over the past 12 months.

Mr. Chope: Based on provisional information, the percentages by which domestic rate increases in 1988-89 will exceed the retail prices index increase are shown below. No information is yet available for Langbaurgh.

	Percentage
Middlesbrough	3
Stockton	10
Hartlepool	9

Cleveland County Council

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the increase in the number of employees engaged by Cleveland county council in each of the past five years.

Mr. Chope: The numbers employed by Cleveland county council and the increase in each of the past five years is as follows:

(Number employed—full and part-time)

June	*Total*	*Change*
1983	25,189	—
1984	24,799	−390
1985	24,664	−135
1986	26,162	+1,498
[1]1987	26,539	+377

[1] Provisional figures.
Source: Joint Manpower Watch quarterly surveys.

Domestic Rates

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the likely average household increase in rates in cash terms of ratepayers living in *(a)* Langbaurgh, *(b)* Middlesbrough, *(c)* Stockton and *(d)* Hartlepool for 1988-89.

Mr. Chope: Based on provisional information, the likely average household rate increases in cash terms in 1988-89 are shown below. No information is yet available for Langbaurgh.

	Average domestic bill (£) 1987-88	*Average domestic bill (£) 1988-89*	*Increase £*
Middlesbrough	455	484	29
Stockton	458	522	64
Hartlepool	384	432	48

Rating Reform

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many additional staff he estimates on average district councils will need to recruit in order to implement the poll tax.

Mr. Howard: It is not possible to estimate an average figure. Different authorities will choose to adopt different computer systems some of which be relatively capital intensive while others will be relatively manpower intensive.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the average cost to a district council of preparing for the implementation of the poll tax.

Mr. Howard: The explanatory and financial memorandum attached to the Local Government Finance Bill contained an estimate of between £70 million and £90 million on the establishment of the register and preparation of new billing and collection systems. Those figures would equate to an average cost of between £174,000 and £223,000 for each collecting authority.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish revised exemplifications of community charge levels for all English and Welsh

authorities for 1987-88, taking into consideration *(a)* rates of Government estimates for likely evasion and other non-collection rates in each local authority area, and *(b)* the use of rate fund balances by authorities.

Mr. Howard: The Government have made no estimate of evasion and non-collection rates. The exemplifications we have published do take account of the use of balances.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many letters he has received from members of the public since 1985 *(a)* in support of and *(b)* opposed to the community charge.

Mr. Howard: A summary of 1,271 responses received by my Department before 31 October 1986, when the consultation period on the Green Paper ended, was placed in the Library on 15 December 1986. Since June 1987, my Department has received some 3,800 letters, including about 3,400 from individual members of the public. The letters contain a variety of comments on specific aspects of our proposals or requests for further information, and for this reason do not readily lend themselves to an analysis of correspondents' views.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether poll tax registrars will have access to family practitioners committee lists of patients;

(2) whether poll tax registrars will have access to district health authority lists of patients;

(3) whether poll tax registrars will have access to the Department of Health and Social Security/National Health Service central register list of patients;

(4) whether poll tax registrars will have access to the lists of women patients being used to call and recall women for cervical cancer screening.

Mr. Howard: Community charges registration officers will have access to none of these lists.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will reproduce the figures in figures 6 to 11 of his Department's note on the relationship between local taxes and income and the distributional impact of the community charge, on the basis of the rebate system currently in operation being applied to all figures.

Mr. Ridley: No. By the time the community charge takes effect the new housing benefit system which Parliament has approved will have been in operation for two years.

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what estimate he has made as to the proportion of the total number of people eligible for rebate in respect of the proposed community charge in England and Wales who will already be in receipt of means-tested benefits;

(2) what is his estimate of the increase in the total number of people, including claimants and their dependants, who will become entitled to means-tested benefits following the introduction of the community charge in England and Wales; and what estimate he has made as to the numbers who will then be eligible for a community charge rebate but will not claim it.

Mr. Scott: I have been asked to reply.

I regret that it is not possible to provide estimates in the form requested. The Government's Green Paper "Paying for Local Government," published in 1986, estimated the community charge rebate case load in Great Britain at 7·66 million, 1·17 million above the rate rebate case load. No detailed estimates using more up-to-date assumptions are available. The Green Paper figures were based on potential entitlement and did not take account of failure to claim benefit. Nearer to the time we will be publicising the availability of community charge rebates.

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will extract from the data used in the construction of figures 9 to 11 of his Department's note on the relationship between local taxes and income and the distributional impact of the community charge in England (1) the number of households receiving rate bills, (2) the total value of their gross bills, (3) the number of households receiving rebates, (4) the total value of such rebates and (5) the total value of the net bills for the households receiving rebates, the figures to be provided *(a)* for all households in England and *(b)* separately for (i) one adult (non-retired), (ii) one adult (retired), (iii) a pensioner couple, (iv) other two adult households with or without children, (v) three adults with or without children and (vi) four or more adults, with or without children.

Mr. Ridley: The estimates requested are as follows:

Household type	*Number receiving rate bills (millions)*	*Total value gross rate bills (£million per annum)*	*Numbers entitled to rebates (millions)*	*Total value rebates (£million per annum)*
Single pensioner	2·5	795·7	1·6	321·6
Other single adult	2·2	723·5	0·7	167·2
Two adults	11·1	4,471·3	2·2	421·2
Three or more adults	2·5	1,060·7	0·5	67·3
All	18·3	7,051·3	5·0	977·5

The total value of the net bills for the households receiving rebate is not readily available.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will reproduce the figures in figures 7, 8, 10 and 11 of his Department's note on the relationship between local taxes and income and the distributional impact of the community charge, splitting the data for two adult households into pensioner couples and others.

Mr. Ridley: The following tables split the figures for two-adult households and tax units in figures 7, 8, 10 and 11 of the Department's note of 13 January 1988 on the relationship between local taxes and income, showing the results for "pensioner couples" and "other couples" separately.

Figure 7: Impact of the Community Charge with safety nets (1990-91 position: England)
Thousands of gainers and losers: Household types

	Two adults	
	Pensioner couples	*Others*
Pounds per week		
Losers		
10+	—	—
5-10	15	85
2-5	200	1,465
1-2	220	1,220
0-1	725	2,225
Total losers	1,165	4,995
Gainers		
0-1	285	1,750
1-2	120	855
2-5	145	1,175
5-10	60	450
10+	15	115
Total gainers	625	4,350
Percentage of net income		
Losers		
10+	—	0
5-10	5	10
2-5	170	520
1-2	240	1,150
0-1	750	3,310
Total losers	1,165	4,995
Gainers		
0-1	355	2,935
1-2	150	950
2-5	105	435
5-10	10	25
10+	0	5
Total gainers	625	4,350

Figure 8: impact of the community charge with safety nets (1990-91 position: England)
Thousands of gainers and losers: tax unit types

	Two adults	
Pounds per week	*Pensioner couples*	*Others*
Losers		
10+	—	5
5-10	40	155
2-5	285	1,775
1-2	270	1,325
0-1	795	2,330
Total losers	1,385	5,590
Gainers		
0-1	295	1,915
1-2	125	975
2-5	155	1,310
5-10	60	515
10+	15	155
Total gainers	650	4,870
Percentage of net income		
Losers		
10+	—	5
5-10	15	30
2-5	245	720
1-2	310	1,330
0-1	810	3,500

	Two adults	
Pounds per week	*Pensioner couples*	*Others*
Total losers	1,385	5,590
Gainers		
0-1	370	3,225
1-2	155	1,080
2-5	110	520
5-10	10	40
10+	0	10
Total gainers	650	4,870

Figure 10: Impact of the Community charge with no safety nets (England)
Thousands of gainers and losers: Household types

	Two adults	
	Pensioner couples	*Others*
Pounds per week		
Losers		
10+	15	115
5-10	35	320
2-5	220	1,335
1-2	160	960
0-1	565	1,700
Total losers	995	4,430
Gainers		
0-1	355	1,500
0-2	120	1,085
2-5	210	1,525
5-10	75	660
10+	20	160
Total gainers	780	4,930
Percentage of net income		
Losers		
10+	5	5
5-10	30	110
2-5	200	765
1-2	220	1,080
0-1	545	2,470
Total losers	995	4,430
Gainers		
0-1	415	2,870
1-2	180	1,355
2-5	170	650
5-10	15	45
10+	—	10
Total gainers	780	4,930

Figure 11: Impact of the Community charge with no safety nets (England)
Thousands of Gainers and Losers: Tax unit types

	Two Adults	
	Pensioner couples	*Others*
Pounds per week		
Losers		
10+	15	130
5-10	60	395
2-5	295	1,595
1-2	205	1,060

	Two Adults	
	Pensioner couples	*Others*
0-1	635	1,795
Total Losers	1,215	4,970
Gainers		
0-1	370	1,615
0-2	130	1,205
2-5	215	1,705
5-10	80	760
10+	20	200
Total Gainers	820	5,490
Percentage of net income Losers		
10+	5	5
5-10	50	145
2-5	275	940
1-2	275	1,245
0-1	610	2,635
Total Losers	1,215	4,970
Gainers		
0-1	435	3,105
1-2	190	1,535
2-5	175	770
5-10	15	65
10+	0	15
Total Gainers	820	5,490

North Tyneside Borough Council

Mr. Ted Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if North Tyneside borough council's grant-related expenditure allocation and grant relief entitlement for 1985-86 onwards will be adjusted to reflect the acceptance by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys that the level of estimated emigration for 1982-83 requires adjustment to reflect the estimated population figures in subsequent years.

Mr. Chope: The policy of the Secretary of State is to use the population of an area and the numbers of persons of particular ages in the area estimated by the Registrar General and certified by him for rate support grant purposes. However, the Secretary of State will consider representations made to him concerning revisions to population estimates before making his decisions for future supplementary reports for 1985-86 and later years.

Pikehall Farmhouse, Derbyshire

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how long it took him to come to a decision on the planning application in respect of the outbuilding near Pikehall farm, Pikehall, Hartington Nether Quarter, Derbyshire; and if he will give the reason for this length of time.

Mrs. Roe: A listed building consent application for demolition of the stable block of outbuildings at Pikehall farm was determined by the Secretary of State on 12 November 1983 in just under 12 months from the date when it was removed from the jurisdiction of the Peak Park planning board.

Suitably qualified and experienced inspectors are in short supply, and inquiries often take some time to arrange. A decision was further delayed in this case because the inspector adjourned the inquiry to allow parties to produce further information.

Estate Action Schemes

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much of the £75 million set aside for Estate Action schemes in 1987-88 has been finally approved to date; what proportion of this total to date has been approved for continuing schemes; and how much has been finally approved for new schemes in 1987-88.

Mrs. Roe: Of the £75 million additional resources available to Estate Action in 1987-88, £74,635 million has been formally allocated to local authorities, 53 per cent. has been allocated to continuation schemes and 47 per cent. to new schemes. The remaining £360,000 is on the point of formal allocation to continuation schemes.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what sums have been put into Estate Action schemes by private developers since 1985-86; and how many schemes to date have been supplemented by resources from private developers;

(2) how much council-owned property had been sold to private developers as part of Estate Action schemes since his Department began targeting the housing investment programme via estate action in 1985-86.

Mrs. Roe: To date some 4,600 council dwellings have been, or are in the course of being, disposed of to the private sector as part of Estate Action packages to revitalise rundown estates. Forty two schemes have been accompanied by private investment. It is not possible to say precisely how much money each private investor has contributed.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what factors his Department has taken into consideration in dividing the total Estate Action allocation of £75 million between regional offices; and how much of the allocation has been allocated to each regional office.

Mrs. Roe: Estate Action resources are distributed regionally on the basis of the quality and number of individual schemes submitted by local authorities in each region. The amounts allocated for schemes in each region in 1987-88 so far are as follows:

Region	*£ million*
Northern	8·040
Yorkshire and Humberside	10·898
North-west	21·948
Merseyside Task Force	3·934
West midlands	10·669
East midlands	4·085
Eastern	0·362
South-east	0·058
South-west	0·497
London	14·144
	74·635

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of Estate Action's continuing schemes have been finally approved to date by each of his Department's regional offices.

Mrs. Roe: The number of Estate Action continuation schemes which have received additional resources this year to date is shown below:

Continuation schemes in 1987-88

Region	*Number*
Northern	16
Yorkshire and Humberside	13
North-west	21
Merseyside task force area	6
West midlands	5
East midlands	4
Eastern	1
South-east	1
South-west	0
London	19
TOTAL	86

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the criteria for approvals of Estate Action schemes which his Department used in *(a)* 1985-86, *(b)* 1986-87 and *(c)* 1987-88; and what the criteria for the approval of Estate Action schemes will be in 1988-89.

Mrs. Roe: The criteria used in assessing Estate Action proposals submitted by local authorities have been constant since the programme was launched in June 1985 and remain the same for the coming financial year. They are spelt out in detail in the annual reports published in 1986 and 1987, copies of which are in the Library. Each application is considered on its merits with priority given to those proposals which offer residents greater choice and control over their living conditions and environment and which take full advantage of any opportunities for combining public and private sector skills and resources; under estate action's homelessness initiative additional resources are made available to help local authorities bring vacant properties on estates back into use to benefit homeless people.

ACE Funding

Mr. Allen Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in what way he gives assistance to agencies in the United Kingdom for the purposes of securing funds under the European Commission's Action by the Community in the Environment regulations; and if he will make a statement on his policy toward the European Community level of ACE funding.

Mrs. Roe: My Department is in regular contact with agencies interested in applying for funds under ACE regulation, offering advice and guidance. We supported adoption of the regulation in the Environment Council and its renewal in 1987, and are satisfied with the level of funding being offered.

English House Condition Survey

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the percentage of dwellings in the English house condition survey where the temperature in the interview room was below 21 degrees Celsius; and what were the temperatures on the stairways and the percentage of retirement pensioner households involved in the survey.

Mrs. Roe: This information is not yet available.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the amount of expenditure incurred by the Nature Conservancy Council in England, Scotland and Wales, expressed as a figure per hectare of land designated as a site of special scientific interest, in each of the last five years.

Mr. Moynihan: The NCC does not maintain records of expenditure in the form requested and this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I will write to the hon. Member.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has yet received a response from the Nature Conservancy Council on the possibility of selling off reserves.

Mr. Moynihan: No. I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Lamond) on 17 February, 1988, at columns *959-60*. The NCC is conducting an internal review of its national nature reserve policy, which is due to be completed later this year.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each outstanding planning application submitted by the Property Services Agency, giving details of address, development applied for and size of site in respect of land declared surplus to requirements by other Government Departments, noting the Department for which the Property Services Agency is acting in each case.

Mr. Chope: The information is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Tyne and Wear Development Corporation

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will supply details of *(a)* private sector and *(b)* Government funding for the Tyne and Wear development corporation for each year since its formation and the number of jobs created.

Mr. Chope: Tyne and Wear development corporation has received £1·83 million in Exchequer grant-in-aid all in 1987-88. The corporation was established on 15 May 1987. It is too early to make accurate estimates of the private sector investment stimulated or the number of jobs created.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much of the distributable revenue balances as set out by the London residuary body in its 1987-88 budget has been distributed.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 13 January 1988, at column *275*.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff were employed by the London residuary body for the purpose of carrying out its functions as of 31 March 1986; how many are currently employed; and how many he estimates will be employed in the coming 12 months.

Mr. Chope: The London residuary body did not inherit its functions from the former GLC until 1 April 1986. On that date the LRB employed 3,580 staff. It currently employs 2,114 staff. Future staffing levels are a matter for the LRB to determine having regard to its remaining functions and workload. On present forecasts, it estimates that staff numbers will have fallen to 900 by the end of 1988-89. All figures are full-time equivalents.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was received by the London residuary body from the sale of the motor vehicle registration number ALC 1, previously used by the chairman of the Greater London council.

Mr. Chope: The sum is £2,500.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the London residuary body's current estimate of capital assets awaiting disposal.

Mr. Chope: None.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what dates in each case 1986-87 revenue balances and capital receipts were paid to London boroughs; what were the amounts; and how each payment varied from the original estimates.

Mr. Chope: The amount of revenue balances and capital receipts distributed by the LRB to London boroughs in 1986-87 is published in LRB's annual report and accounts available in the Library. The estimates of amounts to be paid were contained in LRB's published budget, copies of which I am arranging to be placed in the Library. Timing of payments is the responsibility of the LRB.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what date 1987-88 revenue balances and capital receipts will be paid in full to the London boroughs.

Mr. Chope: The payment of capital receipts by the London residuary body to the London boroughs is governed by the Local Government Reorganisation (Capital Money) (Greater London) Order 1987, SI 1987/118. This provides that the residuary body shall use its best endeavours to secure that payments are made on or before the last day of the financial year in question. Any part of a payment not so made shall be paid no later than 30 June in the next financial year.

The date for payment of revenue balances is a matter for the LRB.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *275-77*, what percentage of former Greater London council assets which passed to the London residuary body are now estimated to have been disposed of.

Mr. Chope: The London residuary body has disposed of Thamesmead and the industrial portfolia. Substantial progress has been made towards the disposal of the seaside and country homes and properties in Covent Garden. County hall and about 500 residential units are being marketed. Of the remaining 1,620 properties which the LRB inherited and are considered marketable, terms have been agreed in about 50 per cent. of cases. Properties required by successors for functional purposes will be transferred to them.

MOD Properties (Sales)

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many Ministry of Defence houses in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Renfrew, West and Inverclyde have been sold in each year since 1979.

Mr. Chope: The figures are as follows:

	Number
[1]1979-81	Nil
1981-82	7
1982-83	13
1983-84	12
1984-85	12
1985-86	13
1986-87	15

[1] Inclusive.

Green Belt

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the area of designated green belt land in the St. Albans constituency *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* at the present time.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 17 February 1988]:* Prior to the approval of the Hertfordshire structure plan in September 1979 approximately 3,000 hectares of land in the St. Albans constituency were designated green belt. Following approval of the structure plan, approximately 8,300 hectares of land are now designated as green belt.

Northern Development Agency

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the amounts spent on industrial, investments and environmental improvements by the northern development agency in the Blyth Valley constituency, in each year since 1983.

Mr. Atkins: I have been asked to reply.

The Northern Development Company (NDC) has been in existence only since July 1986. In the current financial year this Department has made available £908,000 to the NDC for its inward investment promotion activities, and a further £210,000 for a wider range of activities aimed at the regeneration of the region's economy. The NDC does not engage directly in industrial investment or environmental improvement activities. The NDC's total budget for this year is £1,844,000. However, information is not available on the geographical spread of NDC expenditure.

The NDC's predecessor was the North of England Development Council, which was concerned solely with inward investment and export promotion.

Building Workers (Accident Statistics)

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about *(a)* the number of accidents and *(b)* the number of fatal accidents involving building workers employed on sites in London's docklands in the past six years.

Mr. Nicholls: I have been asked to reply.

The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Olympic-Standard Swimmers (Training)

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the training facilities available for Olympic-standard swimmers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Most training for Britain's Olympic swimmers takes place at club level, using local swimming facilities. Preparation also includes training and competition experience in 50-metre pools of which there are currently 8 indoor and 23 outdoor in England and Wales. Britain's Olympic swimming squad trains as a group at one of these pools at the Crystal Palace national sports centre. The Sports Council is currently reviewing its strategy on swimming pool provision in discussion with the Amateur Swimming Association, and will be looking at the provision of training facilities for Olympic-standard swimmers and of pools for international competition.

Treasure Trove

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the members of the review body on treasure trove laws and those organisations whom he proposes to consult.

Mr. Moynihan: There is no review body as such. On 11 February I announced the issue by the Department and the Welsh Office of a consultation paper on arrangements for reporting archaeological finds. Responses to this will be evaluated by officials, who will take into account the conclusions of a recent paper by the Law Commission on the law of treasure trove and a review by an inter-departmental group of officials under Treasury chairmanship of the arrangements for payment of awards to finders of treasure trove. Copies of the consultation paper have been sent to a number of interested individuals and to the representative organisations as set out. We shall be happy to provide further copies to any other groups or individuals who wish to contribute to the review.

Ancient Monuments Society
Association of Archaeological Officers
Association of Chief Police Officers
Association of County Councils
Association of District Councils
Association of Larger Local Councils
Association of London Authorities
Association of London Borough Planning Officers
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Avon County Council

Brick Development Association
British Aggregate
British Association of Landscape Industries
British Ball Clay Producers Federation
British Coal
British Fluorspar Producers
British Gas Corporation
British Museum
British Numismatic Society
British Pre-cast Concrete Federation
British Property Federation
British Reclamation Industries Confederation
British Telecom
British Waterways Board

CADW
C. Scope International (Metal Detector Manufacturers)
Cement Makers Federation
Central Council for Physical Recreation
Central Electricity Generating Board
Chartered Institute of Building
Chief Professional Planning Appeals Commission (N. Ireland)
China Clay Association
Civic Trust
Confederation of Construction Specialists
Conservation Society
Cornish Chambers of Mines
Council for British Archaeology
Council for Environmental Conservation
Council for National Parks
Council for the Protection of Rural England
Country Land Agents and Valuers Association
Country Landowners Association
Countryside Commission
County Planning Officers Society
County Surveyor's Society

Department of Transport
Detector Information Group
District Planning Officers Society
Dorset Archaeological Committee

Faculty of Architects and Surveyors
Federation of Civil Engineering
Federation of Master Builders
Federation of Small Mines of Great Britain
Forestry Commission

The Geological Society
The Georgian Group
The Guild of Surveyors

Hays Group Ltd (Metal Detector Manufacturers)
The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission
The Home Office
House Builders Federation

Incorporated Association of Architects and Surveyors
Institute of Building
Institute of Chartered Foresters
Institute of Civil Engineers
Institute of Field Archaeologists
Institute of Mining Engineers

Lake District Special Planning Board
Law Commission
Law Society
Local Authorities Association
London Boroughs Association
Lord Chancellor's Department

Metropolitan Planning Officers Society
Midland Archaeological Society
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Museums Association
Museums and Galleries Commission
Museum of London

National Amenities Societies
National Association of Agricultural Contractors
National Association of Opencast Coal Operators
National Association of Local Councils
National Brick Federation
National Council of Building Material Producers
National Council for Metal Detecting
National Farmers Union
National Federation of Building Trade Employers
National Federation of Clay Industries
National Heritage Memorial Fund
National Housebuilding Council
National Housing and Town Planning Council
National Trust
Nature Conservancy Council
Northern Ireland Office

Office of Arts and Libraries
The Open Spaces Society

Peak Park Joint Planning Board
Police Federation
Prehistoric Society

The Ramblers Association
Royal Commission on Historical Monuments for England
Royal Institute of British Architects
Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
Royal Numismatic Society
Royal Society for Nature Conservation

Sand and Gravel Association
Scottish Development Department
Silica and Moulding Sands Association
Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings
Society of Antiquaries
Society of Museum Archaeologists
Standing Conference of Rural Community Councils
Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers
Standing Local Authority Officers on Land Reclamation
Stone Federation
Surrey Archaeological Society

Tenant Farmers Association
Timber Growers of Great Britain Ltd
The Treasury
Trust for Wessex Archaeology

Victorian Society

Wiltshire Archaeologists and Natural History Society

Housing Needs Index (Nottinghamshire)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he received any representations from Nottingham city council regarding the effect of a reduction in the council house waiting list on the housing needs index, causing a £3·5 million reduction in anticipated income to housing associations in Nottinghamshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Waiting list figures are not included in the housing needs index and my right hon. Friend has had no representation from Nottingham city council on the subject. I understand, however, that doubt has arisen over the calculation of certain Nottingham indicators and that the matter is under discussion between the Department and the Housing Corporation.

Nuclear Installations (Decommissioning)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current status of research on decommissioning of nuclear installations under European Council decision 84/60 Euratom of 31 January 1984, specified in terms of section A, projects one to seven, section B and section C.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 19 February 1988]:* I have placed a copy of the latest available progress report published by the European Commission "The Community's research and development programme on decommissioning of nuclear installations", report EUR 11112 EN, in the Library of the House. This covers the period up to the end of 1986. When the 1987 version is available I will place that in the Library also.

Olympic-standard Swimming Pools

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all those Olympic-standard swimming pools in England and Wales which are under local authority control; and which of them are open-air facilities.

Mr. Moynihan: There are no Olympic-standard swimming pools in England or Wales which are under local authority control or are open-air facilities.

TRANSPORT

Rail Services (London)

7. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chairman of the Central Transport Consultative Committee to discuss the effects on the economy of the level of rail services to the City of London.

29. **Mr. Snape:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chairman of the Central Transport Consultative Committee to discuss the effects on the economy of the level of rail services to the City of London.

46. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chairman of the Central Transport Consultative Committee to discuss the effects on the economy of the level of rail services to the City of London.

52. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, when he next meets the chairman of the Central Transport Consultative Committee, he will discuss the effects on Britain's economy of the level of rail services to the City of London.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to do so.

Transport Subsidies

11. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has had any discussions with EEC Transport Ministers concerning the harmonisation of public transport subsidies.

Mr. Channon: No.

21. **Mr. Holland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy towards harmonising public transport subsidy levels across the EEC by 1992.

Mr. Channon: There is already a degree of harmonisation in the form of EEC directives on public service obligations and the granting of state aids for transport by rail, road and inland waterways. I see no need for further harmonisation in these areas.

28. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to increase the level of subsidy to public transport in major cities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: No. The objective of this Government has been to achieve a better balance between the interests of those who benefit from public transport subsidy and the ratepayers and taxpayers who must pay for it. As a result of our policies, annual revenue support for local bus and rail services in the English metropolitan areas has been reduced by about £85 million since 1985-86. This represents a considerable saving to both ratepayers and taxpayers, without any diminution in the overall level of service.

39. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the subsidy levels to public transport in each capital city of each member state of the EEC, expressed as a percentage of total revenue.

Mr. David Mitchell: None, except for London, in which connection I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 18 January at column *528*.

Rillington Bypass

13. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on plans for a route for the Rillington bypass; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Bids will be invited shortly from the consulting engineers for the contract to identify the preferred route for the scheme.

Driving Test

14. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received seeking changes in the driving test.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We regularly receive ideas from all quarters. The changes most often suggested are for the test to include motorway driving and night-time driving, a written test on the highway code and a different test of eyesight.

Rail Services (Quality)

15. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of the Central Transport Consultative Committee to discuss the quality of rail services.

23. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of the Central Transport Consultative Committee to discuss the quality of rail services.

Mr. David Mitchell: I refer the hon. Members to my reply earlier today to the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Haynes).

Road Tolls

16. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the use of road tolls.

Mr. Channon: A number of motoring and freight transport organisations have expressed opposition to the introduction of road tolls. Some construction and financial organisations have expressed interest in building privately financed roads which might involve charging. I have no plans to impose tolls on existing roads.

27. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received any recent proposals from the private sector for the construction of new toll roads; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Costain has recently put forward in outline ideas for a road tunnel under the Thames and for a second tier on the M25. These plans do not as yet constitute firm proposals. As we said in the 1987 White Paper, the Government are keen to encourage initiatives by the private sector for adding to the level of transport infrastructure wherever this is the most cost-effective way of providing the facilities concerned. We shall be pleased to look at any firm proposals in that light.

Safety Standards

17. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he plans to revise the enforcement of transport safety regulations in passenger transport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: I attach great importance to all aspects of passenger transport safety and its enforcement. At present I have no plans to make revisions to the system of enforcement.

24. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what priority is given to safety standards in the formation of his Department's passenger transport policies.

Mr. Channon: Safety is one of my top priorities.

38. **Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to improve safety standards in passenger transport operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: Effective and appropriate safety standards must be a continuing preoccupation of any Secretary of State for Transport. My right hon. Friend regularly reviews and improves them where this is justified.

London Underground Stations

18. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has held any recent discussions with the chairman of London Regional Transport on the future staffing of London underground stations; and if he will make a statement.

26. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has held any recent discussions with the chairman of London Regional Transport on the future staffing of London underground stations; and if he will make a statement.

34. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has held any recent discussions with the chairman of London Regional Transport on the future staffing of London underground stations; and if he will make a statement.

48. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, when he last met the chairman of London Regional Transport, he held any discussions on the future staffing of London underground stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have not discussed underground staffing matters; they are for management, in accordance with its statutory duty to operate safely and efficiently. Within that framework, I would expect staff levels to reflect the manpower required to do the job.

Network SouthEast

19. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of British Rail to discuss the volume of service on Network SouthEast.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend last met the chairman on 11 February and discussed a wide range of matters of current interest.

Commuter Services

20. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he plans to revise his policy towards commuter transport in the light of the report from the City Commuter Services group, a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: Our policy is that BR should provide its customers with an attractive and reliable service meeting the quality standards I have set, while reducing its call on the taxpayer. I see no reason to change that.

Rail Services (London to Holyhead)

22. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next proposes to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss railway services between London and Holyhead.

Mr. David Mitchell: Rail services on particular routes are a matter for BR management. Hence I have no plans to discuss the London-Holyhead service with the chairman in the near future.

Transport Supplementary Grant

25. **Ms. Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the capital allocations for transport and transport supplementary grant allocated to each London borough for the years 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The list for the 33 boroughs is in the table. The total capital allocations for London are 1986-87 — £104 million, 1987-88 — £108·8 million and 1988-89—£122·9 million.

London borough councils—Transport capital allocations 1986-87, 1987-88, 1988-89 (£ million)

Borough	*1986-87 £ million*	*1987-88 £ million*	*1988-89 £ million*
Barking	1·2	2·6	6·1
Barnet	1·7	1·3	1·0
Bexley	5·0	1·8	2·7
Brent	1·9	1·1	1·2
Bromley	1·6	1·7	8·8
Camden	2·0	1·4	0·4
City	2·5	1·3	0·6
Croydon	1·2	1·2	0·7
Ealing	4·8	5·1	6·4
Enfield	9·0	16·3	22·8
Greenwich	3·1	5·2	3·4
Hackney	2·3	1·7	1·7
Hammersmith	0·8	0·4	0·3
Haringey	3·8	3·4	8·3
Harrow	3·0	4·1	9·6
Havering	4·8	3·5	1·3
Hillingdon	8·2	7·3	10·5
Hounslow	1·8	2·0	1·7
Islington	0·4	0·8	0·4
Kensington	1·2	0·7	1·1
Kingston	9·1	9·8	5·6
Lambeth	1·0	4·1	0·8
Lewisham	1·7	1·8	2·4
Merton	3·9	7·8	6·7
Newham	4·3	3·5	2·6
Redbridge	2·4	2·8	1·9
Richmond	1·2	0·9	0·7
Southwark	3·9	3·0	4·4
Sutton	2·0	2·2	2·6
Tower Hamlets	1·0	1·0	0·6

Borough	1986-87 £ million	1987-88 £ million	1988-89 £ million
Waltham Forest	2·8	2·7	1·7
Wandsworth	6·2	6·9	2·4
Westerminster	4·2	2·4	1·5
Total	104·0	108·8	122·9

Runway Capacity (South-east England)

30. **Mr. Soames:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on runway capacity in the south-east of England.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The 1985 White Paper "Airports Policy" (Cmnd 9542) set out the pattern of airport development to meet the demand for air travel into the mid-1990s. We naturally keep the adequacy of capacity, including runway capacity, under review — as does the Civil Aviation Authority which has a statutory duty to make formal recommendations to my right hon. Friend on such matters.

Main Line Service (St. Pancras-Sheffield)

31. **Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how Government financial targets and guidelines have affected British Rail's investment in improving the midland main line service between St. Pancras and Sheffield.

Mr. David Mitchell: This service is part of BR's Inter-City network on which it is expected to earn a commercial rate of return. The board's confidence in the future of the line is demonstrated by its recent investment in a new pullman service and a £25 million resignalling programme.

Aircraft (Near Misses)

32. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many official reports of near misses involving aircraft in British air space there have been in each of the last five years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The latest Civil Aviation Authority statistics for air miss incidents involving all types of military and civil aircraft in United Kingdom air space over the last five years for which complete figures are available are:

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
A. Definite risk of collision	20	13	21	14	21
B. Possible risk of collision	55	62	57	52	50
Total risk-bearing (A + B)	75	75	78	66	71
C. No risk of collision	96	92	93	77	104
Total air misses (A + B + C)	171	167	171	143	175

Garden of Remembrance (Theydon Bois)

33. **Sir John Biggs-Davison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a grant to the Theydon Bois parish council to defray the expense of tree planting to shield the garden of remembrance at the local burial ground from noise from the M11.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are prepared to consider the possibility of a tree planting scheme under the terms of section 253 of the Highways Act 1980. The Department's regional office will get in touch with the parish council for a discussion.

Settle-Carlisle Railway

35. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects to make an announcement about the future of the Settle to Carlisle railway.

Mr. David Mitchell: As soon as all necessary consultations are complete.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current local authority contribution to *(a)* the provision of the diesel multiple unit service on the Settle to Carlisle railway, *(b)* the upkeep and maintenance of the line, *(c)* the advertising and publicity of the line and *(d)* express passenger services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I understand that during 1987-88 local authorities have contributed about £70,000 in general revenue support for the line (not attributable to individual services) and nothing towards the upkeep and maintenance of the infrastructure of the line, although some parish councils do give some general assistance towards the upkeep and general tidiness of their local stations. I also understand that local authorities contributed about £9,000 towards publicity for the line in 1987. During the next two financial years, revenue support from local authorities is expected to rise to about £130,000 if the line is retained. I have asked each authority to consider carefully the level of support it should give to the line— towards both the costs of operations and the cost of repairing the Ribblehead viaduct — in view of the importance it attaches to retaining it.

London Regional Transport

36. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects London Regional Transport to publish its draft strategic plan for future operations; and over what period it will be open for consultation.

Mr. David Mitchell: I understand that LRT intends to issue a consultative document shortly; to allow some eight weeks for responses; and to publish a new statement of strategy before the end of June.

Air Traffic (London Area)

37. **Mr. McCrindle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, when he next meets the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority, he will raise with him the possible overcrowding of the skies around London.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend frequently meets the chairman of the authority to discuss matters of mutual interest, including air space issues affecting the London area, for which the authority is reponsible. My right hon. Friend will be visiting the London air traffic control centre in the near future to see the current provision of air traffic services and to discuss the plans of the national air traffic services for the future.

Car Telephones

40. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the road safety implications of the use of telephones in cars.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have received a number of representations. Most expressed concern at the safety implications of using in-car telephones in moving vehicles. The revised highway code, issued in March 1987, tells drivers not to use a hand-held telephone while their vehicle is moving, except in an emergency. Anyone who can afford a car telephone can afford, and should use, a hands-free microphone.

Bus Services (London)

41. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of London Regional Transport to discuss London bus services.

51. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of London Regional Transport to discuss bus services in Greater London.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend and I last met the chairman of London Regional Transport on 4 February to discuss a number of issues, including bus services.

43. **Mr. Leighton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be in a position to make a statement on his policy towards privatising London bus services.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said during the recent debate on the London Regional Transport (Levy) Order 1988 that we intend to see Londoners enjoying the benefits of deregulation as soon as practicable, and that accordingly we have asked London Regional Transport to bring forward early proposals for the restructuring of London Buses Ltd. into smaller units which will be able to operate commercially in a competitive environment.

King's Cross Station

42. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, on how many occasions the London fire brigade has been called to King's Cross underground station because of a fire or suspected fire since 18 November 1987; on which dates these calls were made; how many appliances attended on each occasion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I understand from London Underground Limited that since 18 November 1987, the London fire brigade has been called to King's Cross underground station on five occasions. Three calls were false alarms — on 17 December, 10 January and 4 February. The other two calls were on 8 January and were in connection with tests carried out in connection with the formal investigation into the causes of the fire on 18 November. No record is kept by London Underground of the number of fire appliances attending calls.

Central Transport Consultative Committee

44. **Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of the Central Transport Consultative Committee to discuss its recent reports.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend met the chairman last December and discussed a range of railway matters.

Tyre Treads

45. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to implement the EEC recommendations on minimum tyre tread depth; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The European Commission has proposed a directive on minimum tyre tread depth for cars and light vehicles used throughout the Community. The question of implementation will arise only if this directive is adopted by the Council of Ministers. It has not yet been considered by the Council. In our view the Commission's proposals would impose unnecessary costs on motorists in the United Kingdom amounting to £70 million per year, with no significant benefit to road safety. I have placed a note in the Library summarising the cost and safety issues.

London Buses Ltd.

47. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to change the policy guidelines issued to London Regional Transport concerning London Buses Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Government's broad objectives for London Regional Transport remain those set out in a letter of 20 July 1984 to the chairman. In the case of London Buses Ltd., my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has more recently asked LRT to bring forward early proposals for its restructuring into smaller units in preparation for the eventual deregulation of bus services in London.

Rail Services

49. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Transport Users Consultative Committee to discuss rail services.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to meet him.

Staff Dispersal

50. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many divisions within his Department have been relocated out of London since 1979; what plans he has for further relocation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: About 80 per cent. of the Department's present staff of 14,000 is located outside London and, where practicable, work is already carried out in regional and local offices. In 1987, seven posts dealing with policy on driver licensing and vehicle taxation moved from London to Swansea and six posts in the

vehicle inspectorate technical training school moved from Stanmore to Bristol. Some 20 posts from the vehicle inspectorate's workshops and stores at Borehamwood will move to Bristol later this year. The Department keeps the question of what further blocks of work it might be cost effective to relocate under continuous review.

Air space (Isle of Wight)

53. **Mr. Higgins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many days in the last 12 months for which figures are readily available the Civil Aviation Authority has been notified that the danger area south of the Isle of Wight is safe for use by civilian aircraft and civil aircraft operators were notified and actually used the airspace.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The area to which my right hon. Friend refers consists of a number of separate danger areas within which activities dangerous to the flight of aircraft take place at different times. Unauthorised entry into danger areas is prohibited. Commercial flights normally fly in the controlled air space of the airways that go round the danger areas in question, but do not cross them. This enables such traffic to connect safely with the continental airways system.

If my right hon. Friend requires more detailed information he would do best to approach the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority which is responsible for air traffic control.

Liverpool Airport

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of Liverpool airport.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Under section 15 of the Airports Act 1986, my right hon. Friend last September proposed modifications to the Merseyside passenger transport authority's original scheme for the future ownership of Liverpool airport. The main modification proposed was that the PTA should not become a shareholder in the new airport company. Since accepting this, the Merseyside local authorities have been given extra time to work up various schemes for running the airport, but this has not resulted in the PTA putting forward an alternative. My right hon. Friend is now about to proceed with a scheme based on his September proposals.

Motor Cyclists

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what improvement in safety, as measured by the number of fatalities and serious injuries to motor cyclists, there has been from the restriction of motor cycle learners to 125 cc machines and from the restriction of 16-year-olds to 50 cc machines limited to 30 mph.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The 30 mph maximum speed restriction for 50 cc machines was introduced in 1977. The number of 16-year-olds killed or seriously injured (KSI) on mopeds has dropped from 1,691 in 1976 to 789 in 1986 — a reduction of 53 per cent. After taking account of the reduction in the number of registered mopeds in that period, the reduction in 16-year-old KSI casualties is 36 per cent.

The maximum engine size for learner motor cycles was reduced from 250 cc to 125 cc with effect from 1 February 1983. A study by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory — RR106 "The Effect on Motorcycling of the 1981 Transport Act" — suggests that the restriction on engine capacity for learner motor cycles has led to a reduction of one quarter in casualties even allowing for the declining number of motor cyclists. This is equivalent to a reduction of 7,010 in motor cyclist casualties during the first year the restriction was in force, 2,430 of whom would have been killed or seriously injured.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what grants are available to people living near to major airports towards the installation of double glazing; when this grant was last increased; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Except at Heathrow and Gatwick, noise insulation grants are a matter for the airport operator. We understand that several airports pay such grants.

The Government have designated Heathrow and Gatwick for noise insulation grants purposes and have made various noise insulation grant schemes. The most recent schemes for these airports which provided for grants to be paid by the British Airports Authority (as it was then) were introduced in 1980. The amounts payable were increased in 1981, and the schemes effectively ended in March 1985.

As promised in the 1985 airport policy White Paper (Cmnd. 9542) the schemes have been reviewed. The review suggested that there were small areas outside the scheme boundary at each airport which should be included retrospectively within the scheme. There should be no change to:

the description of dwellings to which the scheme applied,
the qualifications for eligibility,
the specification for the work to be done,
the residential qualification date.

Any additional grants would be paid, as before, by BAA plc. The amount of grant payable would be adjusted to current prices.

We are discussing with BAA plc the suggested small adjustment to the scheme boundaries and we shall make an announcement when these discussions are completed. We have no plans to introduce new schemes at these airports. We are committed to introducing a new scheme at Stansted when the airport reaches 2 million passengers per annum.

Air Traffic Movements

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what has been the level of air traffic movements at Stansted airport during each of the last five years;

(2) what has been the level of air traffic movements at Gatwick airport during each of the last five years;

(3) what has been the level of air traffic movements at London airport, Heathrow, during each of the last five years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The total number of aircraft movements including general aviation, positioning flights and so on, for each of the last five years at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports is shown in the table:

Aircraft movements[1]

	Heathrow 000's	*Gatwick 000's*	*Stansted 000's*
1982-83	274·9	151·2	33·4
1983-84	286·9	152·8	34·9
1984-85	298·8	159·8	40·4
1985-86	312·2	170·8	41·2
1986-87	318·8	173·8	46·8

[1] One movement is a single taking off or landing.
Source: "BAA Traffic Statistics—1986-87".

Shrewsbury Bypass

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give a start date and completion estimate for the A5 Shrewsbury bypass.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Subject to completion of the outstanding statutory procedures which include the compulsory purchase order, construction of the A5 Telford-Shrewsbury and A49 Shrewsbury bypasses is expected to start in the autumn of 1989 and take about two years.

Lorries (Spray)

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further steps he is taking to reduce rear and frontal spray from lorries on motorways.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Regulations were introduced in November 1984 requiring from various dates heavy lorries and trailers to be fitted with spray-reducing devices complying with British Standards BS AU 200. The situation is improving as the number of heavy vehicles fitted increases. Lorry drivers should slow down in heavy rain to reduce spray and for reasons of safety.

Chandler's Ford Bypass

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to make a start upon upgrading the Chandler's Ford bypass to motorway standards.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Subject to the outcome of outstanding legal proceedings in respect of one of the orders, we hope to let a contract later this year.

Rail Crash (Colwich)

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire on 22 January, *Official Report*, column *905*, if he can now give a final date for the publication of his inspector's report on the rail crash which occurred at Colwich, Staffordshire, in September 1986.

Mr. David Mitchell: It is anticipated that the consultations, to which I referred in my answer to the hon. Member on 22 January, will be completed by the end of the month. The report will then be printed with a view to publication at the end of March.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received about the provision of rail links between the regions and the Channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received a number of representations about this issue. It is British Rail's responsibility to plan the provision of rail links to the tunnel. Section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act requires it to publish a plan setting out its proposals by the end of 1989.

Unmanned Level Crossings

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State how many accidents involving motor vehicles have taken place at unmanned level crossings in each year since 1980.

Mr. David Mitchell: The number of road/rail collisions at unmanned public road level crossings protected by road traffic light signals for each year from 1980 to 1986 is as follows:

	Number
1980	4
1981	12
1982	13
1983	9
1984	12
1985	24
1986	19
[1]1987	20

[1] Provisional.

Greece (British Visitors)

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has had discussions with his Greek counterpart regarding that country's attitude to British visitors on inclusive tours or seat-only arrangements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paul Channon: I have had no such discussions. But I understand that the tour operators' representatives are actively involved in discussions with the Greek authorities.

Motorway Contraflows

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review the regulations on traffic contraflows on motorways, particularly as they apply to heavy vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Yes. We are reviewing this as part of our current review of motorway safety. We hope to announce our conclusions in the spring.

Search and Rescue Helicopters (Solent)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about search and rescue helicopter coverage in the Solent area.

Mr. Channon: At present, daytime search and rescue helicopter coverage in the Solent and central English Channel area is provided by Royal Navy helicopters based at Lee-on-Solent. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has been reviewing the deployment of Royal Navy and Royal Air Force search and rescue helicopters around the coast: full details of the new deployments will be announced shortly, but they will involve the withdrawal of the Royal Navy Wessex flight from Lee-on-Solent and its replacement by a Royal Navy Sea King flight at Portland. In addition, the deployment

of military aircraft at other bases will be adjusted to provide significantly better overall coverage in the English Channel—especially at night and in bad weather. The new military deployments will meet virtually all my normal requirements for civilian SAR coverage, but in view of the exceptional volume of shipping and air activity in the area I have decided to supplement the military service by inviting tenders for the provision of a civil search and rescue helicopter, probably based at Lee-on-Solent. The RAF will temporarily station one of its helicopters at Lee in the intervening period.

Breeches Buoy

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has reviewed the use of breeches buoy rescue equipment by Her Majesty's coastguard; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: With the progressive improvement of lifeboat and helicopter search and rescue services, the use of the breeches buoy as a method of rescuing stranded mariners has progressively declined, and, as I recently informed my hon. Friend such equipment has been used for rescue purposes only twice in the past five years. I have now concluded that the provision of this equipment for use by HM Coastguard is no longer justified, and it will shortly be withdrawn.

I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the many past and present regular and auxiliary coastguards who have perfected the use of the breeches buoy apparatus, and to assure them that its removal in no way diminishes the importance of the service which they provide.

Breathalysers

Sir Ian Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether, in the light of current experience in Australia, the United States of America, Canada, Germany and France, he will introduce legislation to facilitate the installation of coin-in-the-slot breath-testing devices in hotels, clubs, public houses and any licensed premises in which alcohol is consumed; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether, in the light of current experience in Australia, the United States of America, Canada, Germany and France, he will introduce legislation to facilitate the installation of breathalyser ignition locks in motor vehicles generally and Government-owned vehicles in particular; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We view with interest the development of devices to deter drinking and driving and seek to assess experience of their operation. Self-testing devices can encourage drivers to drink up to the legal limit and underestimate the effects of the alcohol consumed. Ignition locks and other technological developments may have a role to play in the longer term. The best course of any driver is not to drink alcohol at all before driving.

EMPLOYMENT

Small Firms Service

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average cost, including an estimate of all overhead costs, of answering each inquiry to the small firms service.

Mr. Cope: It is not possible to allocate costs solely to inquiries, since management of both the inquiry service and counselling service is closely interlinked. The small firms service in England in 1986-87 cost £4·7 million, excluding accommodation, dealt with 283,537 inquiries and provided 38,210 counselling sessions.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many full-time staff equivalents are employed in responding to inquiries to the small firms service.

Mr. Cope: Inquiries are handled in the main by inquiry officers of administrative officer grade. There are 58 such officers currently in post in the small firms service in England. Their duties however involve other responsibilities such as the management of the counselling service.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the anticipated costs of the small firms service in the financial year 1988-89, to the nearest £100,000; and what was the comparable expenditure on the small firms service in each of the last four financial years.

Mr. Cope: The provision for the small firms service in England in 1988-89, is £6·3 million. For 1987-88 the expected outturn expenditure is £5·9 million. In 1986-87 the small firms service cost £4·7 million. These figures exclude accommodation costs. The small firms service was managed by the Department of Trade and Industry until September 1985 and figures for 1985-86 and 1984-85 are not available on a comparable basis.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures of output he uses to assess the efficiency of the small firms service in responding to inquiries.

Mr. Cope: The small firms service uses several indicators to assess the efficiency of the inquiry service. Figures for the total number of inquiries are collected, and compared with prior years and against set targets. In 1986-87 inquiries totalled over 283,000 a 11·1 per cent. rise on the previous year with no significant increase in staff.

An indicator of the usefulness of the information given is the percentage of inquiries from previous clients, or as a result of recommendations. In 1986-87 inquiries from these sources accounted for some 30 per cent. of the total number.

These figures relate to England only. The small firms service in Scotland is administered by the Scottish Development Agency while the service in Wales it is administered by the Welsh Development Agency.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many civil servants are employed in his Department; what are their average weekly working

hours; and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job-sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

Mr. Lee: There are 63,630 permanent civil servants employed in the Department of Employment group. Except for 5,499 working part-time (of which 176 are working on job-sharing schemes) all are full time and work a net 36 hours per week in the London pay area and a net 37 hours outside London. Almost all staff work on a flexitime basis and in those offices where staff do not work flexitime it is largely due either to personal preference or because the offices are small—for example, one or two staff—or part-time offices where it would be difficult to operate flexitime arrangements. The precise arrangement of hours for each part-time worker varies according to circumstances and it would be prohibitively expensive to find out how many work a four-day week or a nine-day fortnight. Of the total staff, 62,846 are able to retire with full pension rights at age 60 years.

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will show the increase in the retail prices index between 1979 and 1985 in annual averages, with rates and indirect taxes excluded.

Mr. Lee: The estimation of movements in the retail prices index excluding indirect taxes raises a number of conceptual and practical difficulties and the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Domestic rates and water charges are readily excluded from the index and the results are as follows:

RPI excluding domestic[1] rates and water charges 12-month increases percentages

January	*Per cent.*
1980	18·5
1981	12·7
1982	11·5
1983	4·7
1984	5·0
1985	4·9
1986	5·3
1987	3·5
1988	3·1

[1] The effects of non-domestic rates on retail prices have not been excluded.

Ports

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will review the operation of employment legislation as it affects British ports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: As regards registered dockworkers covered by the 1967 dock workers employment scheme, the Government's position remains as stated in a reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) *Official Report*, Tuesday 17 November 1987, at column *915*. There are no plans to review the operation of other employment legislation as it specifically affects British ports.

Dock Labour Scheme

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the percentage rate of decline in the number of registered dock labour scheme employees since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The total of registered dockworkers declined from 25,770 at the end of 1979 to 9,945 at the end of 1987, a reduction of 61 per cent. This has been achieved through voluntary severances with Government financial assistance.

Coalfield Communities Campaign

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from the Coalfield Communities Campaign concerning the promotion of employment in coalfield areas.

Mr. Lee: None. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a recent letter from the Coalfield Communities Campaign, but it did not refer to the promotion of employment in coalfield areas.

Settle-Carlisle Railway Corridor

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he now expects to receive the Jarvis plc/Manpower Services Commission report on the Settle to Carlisle railway corridor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: I expect to receive the report at the beginning of March, and intend that it will be published very shortly afterwards.

Factory Inspectors

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many factory inspectors have *(a)* resigned and *(b)* retired in 1987; how many new recruits have been employed in the same year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: During 1987, a total of 30 of the Health and Safety Executive's factory inspectors resigned, 12 retired and 32 were recruited. A further 35 candidates were successful at the autumn 1987 recruitment competition for factory and agricultural inspectors.

Chelsea Girl Ltd.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the impact of the closure of Chelsea Girl Ltd., Ealing, upon job opportunities in Greenford and Northolt; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: I have received no advance notification of such a closure and thus have made no assessment of the impact upon local job opportunities. A range of employment, enterprise and training measures operated by my Department and the Manpower Services Commission is available to help anyone who becomes unemployed due to any closure.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is the total number of claimants in Scotland who have been refused unemployment benefit

pursuant to the recommendations of the claimants investigation team (Scotland); and if he will break this figure down according to the reasons for withdrawal of benefit for each year from 1979 to 1987, and for each unemployment benefit office;

(2) what is the total number of claimants in Scotland who have been refused unemployment benefit pursuant to the recommendations of local claimant investigation teams; and if he will break this figure down according to the reasons for withdrawal of benefit for each year from 1979 to 1987 and for each unemployment benefit office.

Mr. Lee: I take it that the hon. Member is referring to the Department of Employment's fraud investigators. While these investigators may in the nature of their work raise questions as to a claimant's entitlement to benefit, they have no authority to disallow a person's claim. That can be done only by independent adjudication authorities. It is, of course, the case that, following an investigation of possible benefit fraud, some claimants decide to modify or withdraw their claims.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is the total number of unemployment benefit claimants referred to local claimant investigation teams for each of the unemployment benefit offices in Scotland for each year from 1979 to 1987;

(2) what is the total number of unemployment benefit claimants referred to the claimant investigation teams (Scotland) for each of the unemployment benefit offices in Scotland for each year from 1979 to 1987;

(3) what is the total of unemployment benefit claimants referred to the claimant investigation team (Scotland) in Scotland; and if he will break this figure down according to the reason's for referral, for each year from 1979 and for each unemployment benefit office;

(4) what is the total number of unemployment benefit claimants referred to local claimants investigation teams in Scotland; and if he will break this figure down according to the reasons for referral, for each year from 1979 and for each unemployment benefit office;

(5) what is the total number of unemployment benefit claimants referred to local claimant investigation teams and the claimant investigation team (Scotland) in Scotland; and if he will break this figure down for each unemployment benefit office for each year from 1979.

Mr. Lee: I take it that the hon. Member is referring to the Department of Employment's fraud investigators. Information is not available on the number of referrals to such investigators in the form requested. For Scotland as a whole, the total number of cases referred for investigation since 1984-85 is as follows:

	1984-85	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	[1]*1987-88*
To centrally based fraud investigators	n.a.	405	448	365
To locally based fraud investigators	6,880	11,799	14,561	10,433

[1] The figures cover the period from 1 April 1987—31 December 1987 only.

n.a. Not available

Note:

It is not possible to break these figures down by reasons for referral. In addition to the cases shown fraud investigators will have examined a number of other claims on their own initiative.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will place in the Library copies of any guidelines or rules of procedures issued to local claimant investigation teams relating to the interviewing of unemployed benefit claimants;

(2) if he will place in the Library copies of any guidelines or rules of procedures issued to the claimant investigation team of Scotland relating to the interviewing of unemployed benefit claimants.

Mr. Lee: I take it that the hon. Member is referring to guidelines or rules of procedure issued to the Department of Employment's fraud investigators. I will place copies of the code of conduct issued to all such investigators in the Library. It would not be appropriate to make public the more detailed procedural guidance issued to staff.

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current proportion of staff within the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate engaged upon work related to *(a)* the long-term safety reviews of Magnox reactors, *(b)* generic work in relation to advanced gas-cooled reactors, *(c)* the safety of spent fuel reprocessing, *(d)* the pressurised water reactor and in particular Sizewell B and the application for Hinkley C, *(e)* general nuclear safety inspection of installations, *(f)* radioactive waste management (excluding reprocessing) and *(g)* the fast breeder reactor.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 13 January 1988, *Official Report*, at column *262*. Currently, no staff are engaged on work directly related to the fast breeder reactor.

Tourism

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were engaged in tourism in each of the travel-to-work areas covered by South Lakeland and Eden district councils at the latest convenient date.

Mr. Lee: The latest estimates, which relate to September 1984, are shown in the table. Those travel-to-work areas shown in brackets only cover small proportions of the local authority district under which they are listed.

Employees in employment in tourism-related industries September 1984

Travel-to-work areas	*Number*
South Lakeland local authority district	
Kendal	1,800
Windermere	2,100
(Settle)	(400)
Eden local authority district	
Penrith	1,400
(Keswick)	(900)
(Hexham)	(1,200)

Note: The figures do not include the self-employed.

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the numbers of overnight visits to Cumbria by overseas visitors and what was their expenditure, over the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Lee: Estimates of the number of visits and expenditure by overseas visitors in Cumbria in the years 1982 to 1986 are as follows:

	Number of visits (000s)	*Expenditure (£ millions)*
1982	177	16·0
1983	205	17·2
1984	213	21·9
1985	220	26·9
1986	216	25·1

Labour Statistics

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the current estimates and projections of the population of working age *(a)* men aged 16 to 64 years and *(b)* women aged 16 to 59 years, by standard region including Greater London for 1979, 1983, 1986, 1987 and 1988.

Mr. Lee: The figures requested are in the following table.

Estimates and projections of the population of working age

(Thousand)

	Men aged 16 to 64 years					*Women aged 16 to 59 years*				
	Estimates			*Projections*		*Estimates*			*Projections*	
	1979	*1983*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1979*	*1983*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
North	980	993	993	992	989	900	898	899	898	896
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,522	1,561	1,573	1,578	1,580	1,389	1,407	1,423	1,428	1,430
East Midlands	1,197	1,241	1,276	1,283	1,291	1,083	1,115	1,146	1,157	1,166
East Anglia	578	608	632	640	647	519	545	572	578	586
South East	5,317	5,476	5,587	5,637	5,663	4,907	4,995	5,118	5,151	5,176
Greater London[1]	2,235	2,229	2,247	2,214	2,214	2,091	2,069	2,095	2,060	2,062
South West	1,305	1,369	1,418	1,427	1,440	1,201	1,243	1,296	1,305	1,317
West Midlands	1,641	1,681	1,696	1,701	1,702	1,477	1,495	1,510	1,521	1,526
North West	1,991	2,025	2,037	2,040	2,039	1,839	1,836	1,848	1,853	1,853
Wales	863	879	890	890	892	790	798	806	807	810
Scotland	1,577	1,627	1,648	1,652	1,654	1,490	1,511	1,523	1,529	1,528

[1] Included in South East.

Sources: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and General Register Office (Scotland) for estimates.
Government Actuary's Department for projections.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Debt

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table showing the total deductions made from *(a)* invalidity benefit, *(b)* child benefit, *(c)* widows' benefit, *(d)* supplementary benefit, *(e)* unemployment benefit, *(f)* sickness benefit and *(g)* retirement pensions in each year from 1979 to 1986 under the Payments for Debt (Emergency Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1971.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is shown in the table.

Amount in £s

Financial year	*Supplementary benefit*	*Child benefit*	*Unemployment benefit*	*Sickness benefit*	*Invalidity benefit*	*Retirement benefit*	*Widow's benefit*
1978-79	764,280·45	11,801·49	122,419·34	12,715·25	132,306·44	39,759·89	60,279·09
1979-80	1,015,276·95	62,124·02	105,634·97	13,261·44	182,840·67	50,894·62	71,729·47
1980-81	1,477,225·14	70,435·71	211,779·09	15,740·65	256,734·06	83,339·53	105,914·09
1981-82	263,668·48	62,794·57	265,196·95	9,524·73	436,747·48	149,433·14	155,967·05
1982-83	474,264·89	86,299·35	367,573·98	16,694·64	872,123·58	379,438·35	322,442·86
1983-84	646,155·59	92,449·35	256,869·10	13,246·89	1,073,954·86	535,781·87	407,457·58
1984-85	724,889·61	73,860·16	121,855·50	12,935·62	1,015,112·09	442,253·64	352,402·35
1985-86	824,101·13	77,374·67	134,636·92	14,159·11	110,443·51	541,369·58	368,682·17

Travelling People

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the permanent and temporary legal sites for travelling people in Northern Ireland, giving the services provided, the number of families accommodated on each and the sources of funding in each instance.

Mr. Needham: In respect of permanent and temporary legal sites for travellers, district councils receive grants of 100 per cent. towards the reasonable capital costs from the Department of the Environment.

There are four permanent legal sites and two temporary legal sites as follows:

Permanent sites	*Families*	*Services*
1. Newry: Albert Basin	20	Contract is approaching completion to provide full facilities to Design Guide standards.
2. Coalisland	16	Full site Design Guide standards together with an adjacent serviced transit site with communal facilities.
3. Omagh: Ballinamullan	4	Full facilities to Design Guide standards.
4. Omagh: Tattykeel	9	Prefabricated toilets, running water and electricity supply to individual surfaced pitches.
Temporary sites		
1. Londonderry: Letterkenny Road	6	Communal toilet and ablution block, hard-standing, water supply. Plans are in hand for a permanent site for 10 families and this is expected to be completed in 1988.
2. Londonderry: Labre Park		Limited communal facilities but site no longer occupied.

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration he was given to the work being undertaken by the Northern Ireland Council for Travelling People; and what plans he has on their future level of funding.

Mr. Needham: The Northern Ireland Council for Travelling People is a voluntary body which receives financial aid from the Department of Health and Social Services. It is currently negotiating with that Department on future levels of grant.

The council was represented on the 1984 Department of Environment working party of travelling people. The working party produced recommendations which are the basis of current Department of the Environment policies for travelling people. The council has three representatives on the advisory committee on travellers which advises me on the implementation of traveller policy and takes an active role in promoting that policy.

Rubbish Dump, Magheramorne

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will rescind his previous decision granting planning permission to Blue Circle and require Blue Circle to readvertise its proposals for Magheramorne quarry so as to make clear its intention to infill the quarry with rubbish.

Mr. Needham: Planning permission has not been granted to Blue Circle Industries plc for landfill and reclamation of its former limestone quarry at Magheramorne, Larne.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish his reasons for not agreeing to hold a public inquiry regarding the proposal by Blue Circle to develop a rubbish dump at Magheramorne limestone quarry in East Antrim.

Mr. Needham: In view of the representations received from Larne borough council, the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland is currently reconsidering whether or not a public inquiry into this proposal should be held.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps will be taken to ensure that poisonous leachate will not travel through cracks in rock into Larne lough or underground fresh water systems if dumping at Magheramorne proceeds.

Mr. Needham: The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland is currently considering an application for consent under the Water Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 in connection with a proposal to develop a waste disposal facility at Magheramorne. The determination of such applications is designed to prevent water pollution and consents invariably contain rigorous conditions.

Alcohol Consumption

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will introduce legislation to prohibit the consumption of alcohol in gardens of remembrance, public parks and on the streets of Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: There are no plans at present to make it an offence for an adult to consume intoxicating liquor in public areas in Northern Ireland. It is already an offence for those under 18 years of age to consume alcohol anywhere other than within private residential premises and for any person to be drunk in any public place or road.

Voluntary Organisations (Grants)

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table showing the grants made by Departments under his control to voluntary organisations, in each of the last two years, with the amount in each case and the names and addresses of the recipient organisations.

Mr. Stanley: The information is as set out. I will write to the hon. Member with the addresses.

Financial year ended 31 March 1986

Department of Finance and Personnel	£
Refreshment Clubs	433,738
Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association	29,000
Northern Ireland Civil Service Retirement Fellowship	4,100
Army Benevolent Fund	15,000
Police Benevolent Fund	55,000
Ulster Defence Regiment Benevolent Fund	20,000
Public Service Training Council	199,852
Incorporated Council of Law Reporting	3,000
Civil Service Benevolent Fund	13,000

Financial year ended 31 March 1986

Department of Health and Social Services	£
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action	182,960
Community Service Volunteers	6,146
St. Vincent de Paul Society	28,080
Belfast Voluntary Welfare Society	4,000
Carafriend	3,865
Retirement Association of Northern Ireland	6,600
International Voluntary Service	15,925
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA)	28,359
Northern Ireland Council for Orthopaedic Development	17,472

Department of Health and Social Services	£
National Deaf Children's Society	2,517
Ulster Institute for the Deaf	6,552
Age Concern	74,748
Abbeyfield Society	2,250
Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults	38,276
Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health	84,700
Northern Ireland Marriage Guidance Council	35,617
Northern Ireland Council on Alcohol	57,950
British Epilepsy Association (Northern Ireland Region)	7,040
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation	32,049
Northern Ireland Widows Association	6,513
Gingerbread	71,676
Catholic Marriage Advisory Council	43,723
The Northlands Centre	22,500
Industrial Therapy Organisation	25,000
Life Care and Housing Trust	9,336
Outreach Anorexia	1,000
Northern Ireland Council for Travelling People	15,058
Womens Information Groups	2,080
Combat Huntingdon's Chorea	1,000
CRUSE in Northern Ireland	10,920
Open Door Housing Resettlement Project	16,863
Presbyterian Church in Ireland (Board of Social Witness)	10,650
Northern Ireland Rape Crisis Association	4,325
Workers' Education Association	3,900
National Council for Carers and their Elderly Dependants	520
Church of Ireland Social and Family Welfare Society	1,165
Blind Centre for Northern Ireland	29,700
Motability	17,250
Multiple Sclerosis Action Group	13,874
Soldiers, Sailors and Airmens Families Association (SSAFA)	730
Physically Handicapped and Able-Bodied (PHAB)	12,400
Family Planning Association (Northern Ireland Region)	3,500
Council on Alcohol Related Problems	22,202
Crossroads Care Attendant Scheme	13,867
Multiple Sclerosis Society (NI) Branch	3,276
Ambulance Services	3,198
Northern Ireland Council for the Handicapped	74,500
National Health Service Retirement Fellowship	580
PRAXIS	22,600
Disabled Drivers' Association	1,100
National Schizophrenia Fellowship	15,924
National Rubella Campaign	800
Home Insulation Schemes	73,000
Belfast Law Centre	61,264
Arthritis Care	1,000
Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust	20,000
British Red Cross Society	400
Simon Community Northern Ireland	5,000
Northern Ireland Pre-School Playgroups Association	84,493
Extern	59,514
Parents Advice Centre	3,892
Northern Ireland Intermediate Treatment Association	1,555
Down and Connor Catholic Family Welfare Society	58,921
Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders	3,616
Northern Ireland Childminders Association	5,865
Dr. Barnardo's	46,270
Northern Ireland Foster Care Association	2,847
Belfast Voluntary Welfare Society—Home Start Scheme	5,242
Community Service Volunteers—Give and Take Scheme	23,000
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children	41,169
Newtownabbey Auto Project	10,750
Garnerville/Knocknagoney Project	4,153
Toy Libraries Association (Playmatters)	2,000
Derry Diocesan Child Welfare Society	6,383
St. Joseph's Children's Home	4,222
BVWS Parent/Child Support Unit	5,000
Orana Children's Home	2,254
Childhaven Children's Home	2,250

Financial Year ended 31 March 1986

Department of Education	£
Arts Council for Northern Ireland	3,217,500
Line Hall Library	45,000
Northern Ireland Library and Information Services Council	460
Forum for Community Work Education	47,000
Protestant and Catholic Encounter	9,700
Corrymeela	79,200
Harmony Community Trust	29,450
Irish Council of Churches/Irish Commission for Justice and Peace—Peace Education Programme	16,080
Children's Community Relations Holiday Scheme	101,270
Churches' Central Committee for Community Work	25,820
Citizens Advice Bureaux Headquarters	111,400
Voluntary Sports Organisations	759,600
Ulster Peoples Colleges	27,210
Methodist College Inter-Schools Project	2,355
Youth Clubs and Youth Organisations	1,637,272
Ulster American Folk Park	437,000
Workers Educational Association	130,267
Educational Guidance Services for Adults	36,921
Retirement Association of Northern Ireland	3,000
British Association for the Advancement of Science	3,345
Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges	56,095
League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers	7,497
Council for Education in World Citizenship	860
Ulster College of Music	6,970
Ulster Society for Irish Historical Studies	1,340
Christian Education Movement	320
Community of the Peace	17,900
Community Relations in Schools—(East Belfast) Project	22,745
Federation of Women's Institutes (Northern Ireland)	1,000
Children's Project Northern Ireland	8,970
Farset Youth & Community Development Ltd.	8,500
East Belfast Community Council Carol Service of Reconciliation	205
Irish School of Ecumenics	1,310
Children's Holiday Scheme Northern Ireland	8,895

Financial year ended 31 March 1986

Department of Agriculture	£
Down Royal Corporation of Horse Breeders	35,000
Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster	41,140
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	125

Financial year ending 31 March 1986

Department of Economic Development	£
The Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions	87,200
Action for Community Employment (funded 1,040 projects in private and voluntary sector organisations)	14,270,000
Community Volunteering Scheme (funded 24 voluntary sector organisations)	635,000
Youth Community Projects	637,636
Community Workshops	13,356,506
Youthhelp	551,468
Incorporated Cripples Institutes and Holiday Homes	38,546
Thomas Doran Training Centre	279,514
Glencraig Village Community	64,376
Mourne Grange Village Community	128,411
Clanabogan Village Community	19,000
Royal National Institute for the Blind	7,009
University of Ulster (CAD Engineer) R & D Purposes	15,851

Department of Economic Development	£
National Trust	106,297
The Scottish-Irish Trust of Ulster	79,992
The Northern Ireland Co-operative Development Agency	24,622

Financial year ended 31 March 1986

Department of the Environment	£
British Trust for Ornithology	3,000
North Down Ringing Group	510
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	15,077
Ulster Trust for Nature Conservation	16,108
National Trust	343,472
Conservation Volunteers (NI)	124,954
Road Safety Council	75,000
ROSPA	39,412
St. Oliver Plunkett Environmental Committee	66,063
Belfast Voluntary Welfare Society	37,242
Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations	80,000
National Federation of Housing Associations	200
Registered Housing Associations	39,501,813
Unregistered Housing Associations	66,329
Belfast Housing Aid Society	27,000
Tenants Participation Advisory Service	32,000
Community Technical Aid	20,000
Alliance Avenue Community Group	15,571
Ligoniel Environmental Association	12,073
Ulster Architectural Heritage Society	26,721
Charles Shiels Institution	22,059
Church of Ireland, Richhill	5,300
First Presbyterian Church, Greyabbey	1,656
Carlisle Memorial Church	7,911
Enniskillen Methodist Church	3,300
St. Mary's Dominican Convent	1,636
The Select Vestry Desertmartin Rectory	62
The Select Vestry Queen Street Rectory, Ballymoney	3,500
First Cookstown Church Committee	1,250
Kilwarlin Moravian Church	220
Newtownards Masonic Hall	1,680
Portaferry Masonic Lodge	3,050
Ballymoney Masonic Hall	4,630
Drapers Charity—The Old Courthouse, Moneymore	960
Belfast Central Mission	318
Belfast Development Agency	258,589
Ulster Provident Housing Association	82,876
Northern Ireland Council on Alcohol	7,200
Young Men's Christian Association	12,500
Ardoyne Industrial Development Limited	110,560
Hare Krishna Movement	7,800
Divis Playgroup	2,964
National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children	4,580
Trustees of the Masonic Hall, Londonderry	5,546
Derry Catholic Club	2,574
Trustees of the Waterside Community Council	4,922
Ebenezer Gospel Hall	9,600

Financial year ended 31 March 1987

Department of Finance and Personnel	£
Refreshment Clubs	430,716
Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association	30,500
Northern Ireland Civil Service Retirement Fellowship	4,100
Army Benevolent Fund	15,000
Police Benevolent Fund	52,000
Ulster Defence Regiment Benevolent Fund	20,000
Public Service Training Council	200,474
Incorporated Council of Law Reporting	3,000
Civil Service Benevolent Fund	20,671
Royal Ulster Rifles Association Benevolent Fund—Battle of Somme Commemoration	1,000
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action	15,500

Financial year ended 31 March 1987

Department of Health and Social Services	£
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action	239,465
Community Service Volunteers	38,309
St. Vincent de Paul	34,640
Bryson House	4,000
Cara-friend	4,320
International Voluntary Service	19,202
Northern Ireland Marriage Guidance Council	68,900
Northern Ireland Family Mediation Service	1,038
Northern Ireland Womens Aid Federation	33,350
Northern Ireland Council for Travelling People	19,915
Gingerbread	91,570
Church of Ireland Social and Family Welfare Association	1,200
Northern Ireland Widows Association	10,500
Womens Information Group	2,143
Open Door Housing Association (Resettlement Project)	21,510
Life Care and Housing Trust	10,450
Catholic Marriage Advisory Council	50,520
Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association (SSAFA)	752
Retirement Association of Northern Ireland	4,890
Northern Ireland Council on Alcohol	66,426
Social Witness Board of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland	27,775
Abbeyfield Society	2,320
Belfast Law Centre	103,000
Cruse-in-Northern Ireland	14,250
Age Concern	86,990
Northern Ireland Hospice	17,000
National Council for Carers and their Elderly Dependants	400
National Health Service Retirement Fellowship	600
Northern Ireland Rape Crisis Association	17,928
Northern Ireland Council for Orthopaedic Development	127,996
British Red Cross	131
Council on Alcohol Related Problems	22,868
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA)	29,210
Family Planning Association (Northern Ireland Region)	4,760
Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health	165,290
National Rubella Campaign	900
National Deaf Children's Society	2,593
Belfast Unemployed Centre	6,000
Outreach Anorexia	2,900
Emergency Ambulances	13,300
Beaconfield	6,000
Simon Community (Northern Ireland)	17,463
Ulster Institute for the Deaf	9,249
National Schizophrenia Fellowship	19,000
Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust	150,000
Women's Forum	250
Praxis	23,980
AIDS Helpline	6,700
British Epilepsy Association	6,427
Women's Education Project	1,500
Council for the Single Homeless	2,125
Blind Centre for Northern Ireland	13,845
Workers Education Association	1,500
Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults	62,168
Motability	20,588
Multiple Sclerosis Action Group	14,290
Rural Action Project (Northern Ireland)	23,176
Northern Ireland Council on Disability	174,000
Industrial Therapy Organisation	26,000
Extern	2,000
Association of Carers	572
Arthritis Care	1,030
Disabled Drivers' Association	1,133
Multiple Sclerosis Society	3,374
Northern Ireland Workshops with the Deaf	1,000

Department of Health and Social Services	£
Northlands Centre	87,200
Crossroads Care Attendant Scheme	12,540
SHARE	2,981
Council for Advancement of Communication with Deaf People	35,000
Home Insulation Schemes	54,900
Northern Ireland Pre-School Playgroup Association	92,700
North/South Child Welfare Conference	1,500
Parents Advice Centre	4,718
Northern Ireland Intermediate Treatment Association	3,670
Down and Connor Catholic Family Welfare Society	101,547
Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders	3,795
Northern Ireland Childminders Association	3,950
Glebe House	2,435
Northern Ireland Foster Care Association	4,640
West Belfast Parent Youth Support Group	48,000
Childline—Helpline	1,350
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children	11,210
Newtownabbey Auto Project	25,000
Garnerville/Knocknagoney Project	5,000
Toy Libraries Association (Playmatters)	2,100
Derry Diocesan Child Welfare Society	25,219
Child Care (NI) Formerly known as NCVCCO	3,250
Extern	22,700
Lower Falls New Start Project	20,000
Suffolk Adventure Group	20,000
Lagan Valley Auto Project	20,000
St. Joseph's Children's Home	3,040
Corrymeela Community	10,000
Orana Children's Home	14,230
Childhaven Children's Home	1,605
Marianville	4,470

Financial year ended 31 March 1987

Department of Education	£
Arts Council for Northern Ireland	3,284,200
Linen Hall Library	46,000
Northern Ireland Library and Information Services Council	1,015
Forum for Community Work Education	53,000
Protestant and Catholic Encounter	12,700
Corrymeela	78,287
Harmony Community Trust	21,634
Irish Council of Churches—Irish Commission for Justice and Peace—Peace Education Programme	19,250
Children's Community Relations Holiday Scheme	124,169
Churches Central Committee for Community Work	23,750
Northern Ireland Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux	136,160
Voluntary Sports Organisations	348,156
Ulster People's College	22,856
Methodist College Inter-Schools Project	2,475
Youth Clubs and Youth Organisations	1,819,796
Ulster American Folk Park	402,000
Workers' Educational Association	123,500
Educational Guidance Service for Adults	47,930
Retirement Association of Northern Ireland	3,000
League for Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers	11,160
Council for Education in World Citizenship	890
Ulster College of Music	6,813
Ulster Society for Irish Historical Studies	2,380
Christian Education Movement	700
Community of the Peace People	19,000
Community Relations in Schools—(East Belfast Project)	13,465
Federation of Women's Institutes (Northern Ireland)	1,000
East Belfast Community Council Carol Service of Reconciliation	182
Irish School of Ecumenics	1,582
Social Study Conference	2,000
All Children Together	3,375
Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust	50,000

Financial Year ended 31 March 1987

Department of Agriculture	£
Down Royal Corporation of Horse Breeders	6,712
Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster	42,910
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	125

Financial Year ended 31 March 1987

Department of Economic Development	£
Northern Ireland Committee/Irish Congress of Trade Unions	96,700
Community Workshops	15,599,832
Incorporated Cripples Institutes and Holiday Homes	23,356
Thomas Doran Training Centre	251,230
Mourne Grange Village Community	206,490
Glencraig Village Community	90,337
Clanabogan Village Community	34,253
Scottish Irish Trust of Ulster	12,637
National Trust	178,144
Northern Ireland Co-operative Development Agency	50,000
"Industry Matters" (A follow on from Industry Year)	20,000
540 Voluntary Bodies (ACE Scheme)	28,489,008
20 Voluntary Bodies (Community Volunteering Scheme)	654,718
Youth Community Projects	746,191
Young Help	712,303
Royal National Institute for the Blind	8,148

Financial year ended 31 March 1987

Department of the Environment	£
Northern Ireland Council on Disability	26,000
ROSPA	43,092
Road Safety Council	79,000
Belfast Voluntary Welfare Service	73,921
Conservation Volunteers	131,996
Ulster Trust for Nature Conservation	29,463
St. Oliver Plunkett Environmental Committee	6,638
Glenbryn/Alliance Community	10,038
Connswater River Environmental Committee	10,881
Farset City Farm	2,681
National Trust	445,273
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	18,947
British Trust for Ornithology	5,000
Copeland Bird Observatory	1,250
Antrim Ringing Group	175
British Association for Shooting and Conservation	1,500
Northern Ireland Bat Group	718
Ulster Architectural Heritage Society	18,026
Charles Shiels Institute	5,000
Quinn Charity, Newry	6,000
YMCA	1,000
Ardoyne Industrial Development Limited	105,711
Belfast Development Agency	312,752
Corrymeela Community	12,643
Northern Ireland Council on Alcohol	4,400
Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations	83,500
National Federation of Housing Associations	200
Unregistered Housing Associations	94,536
Belfast Housing Aid Society	35,000
Tenants Participation Advisory Service	49,000
Community Technical Aid	22,283
Registered Housing Associations	41,161,889

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what notice was given to Her Majesty's Government of the visit of a Minister from the Government of the Irish Republic to a school and British Army post outside Newry on 8 February; and if he will make a protest to the Government of the Irish Republic about this incident.

Mr. Tom King: We were told the previous day that he would be visiting the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon).

Gas Connections

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the rate of charge to new Housing Executive tenants by the Department of Health and Social Security for gas connections in each of the last five years.

Mr. Needham: No such charge is levied by the Department nor is assistance available under the supplementary benefit scheme towards any gas connection charges which might be imposed by anybody.

Training Centres

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many places there have been in adult training centres for mentally handicapped people in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Viggers: No places are made available specifically for mentally handicapped people in training centres. However, disabled persons, including the mentally handicapped, who are capable of undertaking training can participate in the range of courses available to everybody in these centres.

Farm Incomes

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he will take to reverse rapidly falling farm incomes and fight unfair European competition, especially in the pig industry.

Mr. Viggers: Apart from the weather-affected years of 1985 and 1986, farming income in Northern Ireland has been relatively high during the 1980s. Preliminary information indicates that, after allowing for inflation, the average income per holding in 1987 was at its second highest level since 1978. This has been helped by strengthening of sterling and changes in the green pound secured by the Government over the past year so that monetary compensatory amounts are some 14 to 17 points lower than a year ago. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has made clear his recognition of the difficulties facing the United Kingdom pig industry. He has indicated his support for the European Commission's objective of removal of monetary compensatory amounts by 1992 but that this should be accomplished without further escalation of the cost of the common agricultural policy.

Students

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the number of students aged 16 years or over in respect of whom child benefit was paid in each of the past five years in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 12 February 1988]:* The information is available only as at 31 December in each year:

	Number
31 December 1982	40,002
31 December 1983	40,390
31 December 1984	40,022
31 December 1985	39,714
31 December 1986	40,250

Cloghogue Primary School

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the status of the visit to Cloghogue primary school near Newry on Monday 8 February by Mr. Wilson, the Minister for Tourism and Transport in the Republic of Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King *[holding answer 12 February 1988]:* We were informed in advance of the visit of Mr. Wilson and that he would be seeing the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). On the understanding that it would be a private visit, I made clear that he would of course be welcome.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his policy towards the criticism of the Army security presence at Cloghogue primary school which was publicly expressed by Mr. Wilson, a Minister from the Republic of Ireland, on Monday 8 February.

Mr. Tom King *[holding answer 12 February 1988]:* Mr. Wilson was on a private visit to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). The hon. Gentleman had already raised with me his concern about the location of the permanent vehicle check point, which was the one recommended by Newry and Mourne council.

Social Fund

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement explaining the method used to determine the allocation of social fund budgets to each social security office in Northern Ireland, giving examples of how the formula was applied to given offices.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* An explanation of the basis of the allocations, together with an example for one office falling within the hon. Gentlemen's constituency, has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement indicating the factors used in determining the contingency reserve in the social fund budget and explaining the conditions of its use.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The contingency reserve was set at approximately 1 per cent. of the gross budget, as for the rest of the United Kingdom. It will be used where a social security office budget needs to be increased to cope with exceptional demand resulting, for example, from a major local emergency.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement indicating the social fund budget allocation consequences for future years *(a)* if a social security office's allocation runs out and *(b)* if it is not used up.

Mr. Needham: *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The arrangements for controlling social fund expenditure are

designed to ensure that social security offices will not overspend during the year. The aim will be for payments to approach the budget for the year as closely as possible without exceeding it. If an allocation is not fully spent, the surplus will be carried over to the social fund for the following year.

Mr. Hume : To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement outlining what means will be used to monitor social fund expenditure by social security offices; and what means will be used to influence the pattern of that expenditure if monitoring suggests that there are discrepancies.

Mr. Needham: *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* Social security offices will monitor their expenditure against a monthly profile for loans and grants which will take into account any particular foreseeable local factors. In the light of actual expenditure, it may be necessary from time to time for offices to adjust their plans by spreading any deficit or excess over the remaining months of the year.

Housing Associations

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his Department's tendering policy for contracts for work under the various voluntary housing associations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* For schemes financed through housing association grant (HAG) the Department normally requires registered housing associations to use a single stage selective tendering procedure as laid down in the code of procedure issued by the National Joint Consultative Committee for Building (NJCC). However, where circumstances justify an alternative approach, other forms of building procurement such as a negotiated contract or design and build package deals may be considered for approval. These latter arrangements are proving useful in enabling associations to secure projects particularly suited to the specialist needs for which they provide.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his departmental policy towards planning applications from voluntary housing associations for developments which subsequently are passed on to private developers; how many applications of this type have been approved in the last three years and how many refused; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* Planning applications are considered on their merits and the Department of the Environment (NI) has regard only to the nature of the developments proposed and not to the identity of the applicants. Accordingly, information in the form requested is not available.

Provisional IRA (Arrests)

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Provisional Irish Republican Army suspects have been arrested and brought into police holding centres in Armagh and Castlereagh within the past two years and subsequently released without charges.

Mr. Stanley *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The total number of persons detained in Northern Ireland under section 12 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 during the period 1 January 1986 to 31 December 1987 was 2,768. Of those, 701 were subsequently charged with criminal offences and the remainder were released without charge. The figure for the numbers of those released without charge who are believed to have been members of the Provisional IRA is not readily available.

Electricity Supplies

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available to indicate by district the fitness levels of those houses without electricity supply.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, the 1984 Northern Ireland house condition survey indicates that 6,905 of the 51,330 unfit houses in the Province did not have an electricity supply.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what financial assistance is available to households seeking an electricity supply; and if he will indicate the total amounts of such assistance, by district, in the past five years.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* Assistance is available from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive through the house renovation grants scheme which it operates under the Housing (NI) Order 1983. The normal rate of grant is 75 per cent. of the approved expenditure, though a rate of 90 per cent. is available if the applicant is in financial hardship.

I understand from the chairman of the Housing Executive that the executive limits the approved expenditure to £1,020 (10 per cent. of the current maximum eligible expense for renovation grants).

Details of the assistance directly related to the provision of an electricity supply under the renovation grants scheme over the past five years are not recorded separately and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dungivien Bypass

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether there is now a start date for the Dungivien bypass; what is the present estimated cost; and what was the original estimated cost.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* No start date has been given. The present estimated cost is £2,135.00. The original estimated cost was £1,900,000.

Fluoridation

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which areas of Northern Ireland have artificially fluoridated water and which areas have naturally fluoridated water supplies; and if he has any plans to increase the number of areas which will receive fluoridated water over the next three years.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* Two areas of Northern Ireland have artificially fluoridated water supplies. These are Holywood, County Down and Tandragee, County Armagh. Fluoride occurs naturally in varying amounts in all water supplies in Northern Ireland. Decisions on the introduction of fluoridation schemes will

be based on proposals from health and social services boards which must first consult district councils and the communities affected by any proposed schemes.

DEFENCE

Service Personnel (Marksmanship)

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the standard of marksmanship in the forces.

Mr. Freeman: The already high standard of marksmanship in the forces is being improved significantly through the introduction of the new SA80 rifle. With SA80 a much higher proportion of soldiers than with the older weapon now achieve Army marksman standard. There is, however, no complacency where this fundamental skill is concerned and the forces continue to strive to raise standards still further through realistic training and rigorous annual tests.

Nuclear Test Veterans Association

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the Nuclear Test Veterans Association concerning claims for damages.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department has received numerous letters from members of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association seeking compensation for harm alleged from participation in the nuclear test programme. In addition, my noble Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement met a deputation of hon. and right hon. Members and two officers of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association on Tuesday 16 February.

Chieftain and Challenger Tanks

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken to update the targeting equipment of the Army's fleet of Chieftain and Challenger tanks.

Mr. Sainsbury: A number of enhancements to their main armament and associated fire control and other systems are currently in hand or under consideration for both Chieftain and Challenger. An advanced thermal imaging and observation sight is already being fitted to all Challengers and is now in production for Chieftain. Other improvements under development include a new high pressure gun and ammunition, new gun elevation gearbox and solid state control equipment, and improved computer sighting, and target acquisition systems.

Executive Responsibility Budgets

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many extra staff are being taken on to operate executive responsibility budgets in armed services *(a)* training establishments and *(b)* headquarters; and at what cost.

Mr. Sainsbury: The information requested is not recorded centrally. However, it is estimated that the numbers and costs of the extra staff required to process and interpret the management information associated with executive responsibility budgets in the field of service training are as follows:

	Numbers	*Cost*[1]
Establishments	100	1·5
Headquarters	22	0·4

[1] £ million per year at 1987-88 prices.

The requirement has been met through the redeployment of staff within existing manpower ceilings and cash limits.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken to reduce the growth in paperwork resulting from executive responsibility budgets in the armed services.

Mr. Sainsbury: Executive responsibility budgets are a key element in the MOD's response to the Government's financial management initiative and have a major role to play in the promotion of greater efficiency in the management of resources. This necessarily calls for more and better management information.

Home Service Units

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether home service units are notified of regular soldiers completing their engagements and resident in their recruiting areas.

Mr. Freeman: Recruitment into the home service force, which forms part of the Territorial Army, is the responsibility of the territiorial auxiliary and volunteer reserve associations. Associations are informed monthly by the Ministry of Defence of men who have recently left the Regular Army and are residing in their recruitment area. In addition, prior to discharge such soldiers are themselves notified of the opportunities for serving in the Territorial Army, including the home service force.

Departmental Research Establishments

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken to allow research establishments of his Department to retain income derived from external sources, to defray their costs.

Mr. Sainsbury: Income generated by research establishments from the use of their facilities by external customers is already credited to their executive responsibility budgets as a receipt. Achieving greater scope for the establishments to deploy their resources on a revenue-earning basis will be one aspect to be looked at in the feasibility study of their development as an agency under the initiative announced by the Prime Minister on 18 February 1988.

RN Armaments Depots

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to complete his review of the Royal Naval armaments depots at Milford Haven and Trecwn; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The report on the future of RNADs Milford Haven and Trecwn is still being studied by management. When their consideration is complete, a consultative document will be published. No date has been fixed for publication.

Flying Accidents

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the rate of major accidents per 10,000 flying

hours in 1987 for *(a)* British military aircraft as a whole, *(b)* Royal Air Force fixed-wing aircraft and *(c)* fast jet aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: In 1987, major accident rates per 10,000 flying hours were recorded as follows:

	Number
All aircraft of the three Services	0·32
Royal Air Force fixed wing aircraft	0·29
Royal Air Force fast jet aircraft	0·84

These figures are in line with the general downward trend in recent years in the rate of major accidents to military aircraft.

Royal Aircraft Establishment Trials

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the nature and purpose of the Royal Aircraft Establishment trials involving intense electromagnetic radiation in the vicinity of Hafren forest, Llanidloes, Powys, from July to October 1987.

Mr. Sainsbury: The activities to which I believe the hon. Gentleman is referring were sponsored and conducted by British Aerospace. I understand, however, that they posed no danger to the general public.

Bullying

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to implement the steps he announced to deal with Army bullying; and which of these will be given priority.

Mr. Freeman: A ban on harmful initiation ceremonies has already been issued throughout the Army, and measures to emphasise the man-management responsibilities of officers and NCOs are also being implemented. The other proposals announced — which concentrate largely on the training organisation, and on supervision of soldiers — are currently being developed within the Department for detailed approval by Ministers. This is being taken forward as a matter of urgency, although it will inevitably be some months before the process is complete. I will keep the right hon. Gentleman informed.

Stingray Torpedo

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names of those companies which were given subcontract work by Marconi for the underwater systems Stingray torpedo project.

Mr. Sainsbury: The choice of sub-contractors is a matter for the prime contractor and it is for the prime contractor to provide these details.

Nuclear Tests (Radiation Victims)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, columns *309-10*, what estimate is available to him of the number of deaths during the next 10 years amongst the nuclear test participants examined during the National Radiological Protection Board's inquiry; what steps have been taken and will be taken to monitor the incidence of *(a)* diseases other than cancer, *(b)* still births, *(c)* infertility and *(d)* genetic handicaps in that group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The National Radiological Protection Board report referred to in my answer of 28 January, in column *309*, is the only source of information available to me on the expected mortality of participants. Taking account of the ages of the participants, the NRPB has estimated that in the 10 years from 1984

"about 30 deaths could be expected from leukaemia and multiple myeloma and at least a further 20 cases in the participants and a similar number in the controls, if the men experienced the normal national mortality and cancer registration rates in England and Wales."

It is also estimated that approximately a 1,000 further deaths in each group will occur

"from the two diseases most closely related to smoking (lung cancer and chronic obstructive lung disease)".

In line with the recommendations of the report, it is intended that the information for the 10-year follow-up study will be derived from the same sources as were used for the original study, that is, cancer registrations and mortality statistics, including dates and causes of death, contained in the National Health Service central registers.

Departmental Houses

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discounts were available to sitting tenants purchasing his Department's houses in Bishopton, Renfrewshire.

Mr. Sainsbury: The discount available to sitting tenants purchasing surplus MOD houses at Bishopton is 33 per cent. if the period of occupation is less than four years. If the period of occupation is four years or over, the discount is 34 per cent. plus 1 per cent. for each complete year by which that period exceeds four years, but not together exceeding 60 per cent., that is, after 30 complete years' qualifying time.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's houses there are in *(a)* Renfrew district and *(b)* Inverclyde district.

Mr. Freeman: The MOD owns 23 houses in Renfrew district and two in Inverclyde district.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department's tenants, when allowed to buy their homes, are subject to the same discount policy as council tenants.

Mr. Sainsbury: When MOD civilian houses are declared surplus, sitting tenants are normally offered the chance to buy at the same discounts as offered by local authorities to council tenants, that is, up to a maximum of 60 per cent. The maximum discount allowed on surplus married quarters is 30 per cent. in line with the discounted sales scheme operated for service personnel. This is a scheme between employer and employee and not directly comparable with that operated by local authorities.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discounts are available to tenants of his Department's houses when they want to purchase *(a)* private designation and *(b)* local authority designation homes.

Mr. Sainsbury: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

4-tonne Trucks

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to place an order for 4-tonne trucks for the Army.

Mr. Sainsbury: A competition is currently in hand to select the services' new 4-tonne vehicle for the 1990s with a view to first production orders being placed in mid 1989. The question of any further orders of the services' existing 4-tonne vehicles is under active consideration.

Army Establishments (Services)

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent deficiencies in privatised gardening, cleaning and catering work at Army establishments are made good by service personnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: There are currently around 200 catering, cleaning and gardening contracts running at Army establishments and a further 16 let but yet to start. Contractors have taken on work previously performed by around 140 military and 4,900 civilian staff. Contracts are monitored continuously and the great majority run satisfactorily. There have been a few instances where Army personnel have been called upon to make up for recruitment difficulties being experienced by contractors but such occurrences have been very infrequent and are generally confined to the early stages of contracts.

Breathalysers

Sir Ian Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether, in the light of the experience with their installation and use by the Australian armed forces, he will arrange for the installation of wall-mounted breathalysers in all service premises in which alcohol is sold for consumption by service personnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: No consideration is being given to the installation of breathalysers in service premises.

Royal Yacht Britannia

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give his latest estimate of the cost of refitting the royal yacht Britannia.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) on 3 November 1987, at column *651*. Subject to final negotiation, the cost of refitting HMY Britannia is not expected to exceed £19 million.

SCOTLAND

Amniocentesis Tests

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many women had amniocentesis tests in each of the last five years; what was the average time between the test and the results being made available, stating the information for each health board area.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I regret that the information requested is not held centrally.

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to the number of women who had cervical smear tests in each year between 1981 and 1987 and the average time between the time of testing and the time of result and made available in each year, showing the information for each health board area.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The numbers of women who had cervical smear tests are set out in the table. Data for 1987 are not yet available. The figures relate to the health board in which the examining laboratories are located, which is not necessarily the health board in which the cervical smears were taken. Information on the time taken to notify results of tests is not centrally available.

Health Board of Testing Laboratory	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Argyll and Clyde	25,990	23,829	27,151	28,946	35,195	33,554
Ayrshire and Arran	19,753	18,497	21,218	22,827	29,219	30,098
Borders	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	11,653	11,710	12,235	12,164	13,661	14,331
Fife	—	—	—	—	—	—
Forth Valley	14,002	12,784	15,074	15,925	19,509	19,353
Grampian	33,014	32,726	35,164	37,783	43,539	45,077
Greater Glasgow	53,143	49,752	54,276	51,916	59,990	56,068
Highland	16,656	17,094	19,174	18,671	21,577	21,016
Lanarkshire	25,766	25,949	28,423	27,274	34,250	33,966
Lothian	65,070	64,408	70,713	74,668	63,272	72,122
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	28,823	28,356	31,616	32,310	36,535	36,041
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scotland	293,870	285,105	315,044	322,484	356,747	361,626

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps have been taken to ensure that where a cervical smear test is found to be positive the woman concerned is informed immediately.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Following my announcement on 10 December 1987 that a comprehensive cervical cancer screening service was to be made available to all women in Scotland aged between 20 and 60, detailed guidance was issued to health boards on the provision of such a service including the need to insitute "fail-safe" arrangements to ensure that a woman with a positive result is followed up.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to the number of cases where there was either a failure to inform on an undue delay in

informing the woman concerned of a positive cervical smear test in the Lothian health board area between 1984 and 1987.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally.

Libraries (Incentive Scheme)

Mr. Buchan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the public library development incentive scheme as it applies to Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have no plans to introduce a scheme of incentive funding for libraries in Scotland similar to that announced recently for England. I shall, however, be following with interest the progress of the scheme in England.

Rating Reform

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be in a position to provide a definition of permanency of residence in relation to the poll tax in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: A person's sole or main residence will generally be a matter of fact in relation to the circumstances of each case. The only exception relates to persons undertaking a full-time course of education who are to be regarded, under section 8(4) of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987, as being solely or mainly resident in the area of the local authority in which they are resident during term time for the purpose of undertaking the course. There is no question of my right hon. and learned Friend providing a definition of sole or main residence for community charge purposes.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of the cost to local authorities of new computers for implementing the poll tax.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is not held centrally. Additional capital allocations of £15 million will, however, be made available to local authorities in respect of 1988-89 to meet expenditure incurred in implementing the community charge. This is on top of the additional £6 million capital expenditure consent already allocated in 1987-88.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest estimate of additional staff required by Scottish local authorities to implement the poll tax.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is not held centrally. It is for individual local authorities to consider the manpower implications of the plans for their own areas.

Domestic Assaults

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to which police forces in Scotland produce separate figures on the number of reported domestic assaults each year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have no information on the extent to which statistics such as these, which are not collected centrally, are compiled by individual police forces.

Orthopaedic Consultants (Ayrshire and Arran)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many elective operations major and minor, were carried out in each year since 1980 by each orthopaedic consultant employed by the Ayrshire and Arran health board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available in the form requested.

Operating Theatres (Ayrshire and Arran)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many operating theatres there are in the Ayrshire and Arran health board area; what was the number of operations carried out in each during each of the past three years; and the percentage utilisation in terms of hours for each theatre.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available centrally.

Orthopaedic Consultants (Highland Health Board)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the number of elective operations, major and minor carried out for each year since 1980, by each orthopaedic consultant employed by the Highland health board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available in the form requested.

Operating Theatres (Raigmore Hospital)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the number of operating theatres at Raigmore hospital of the Highland health authority, the number of operations done in each, for the last three years for which figures are available and the percentage utilisation in terms of hours for each theatre.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available centrally.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios (Perthshire)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of pupil-to-teacher ratio in the schools in Perthshire in the years 1978, 1986 and 1987.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on schools in Perthshire can be obtained from Tayside regional council.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios (Angus)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of pupil-to-teacher ratios in the schools in Angus in the years 1978, 1986 and 1987.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on schools in Angus can be obtained from Tayside regional council.

Catering and Domestic Service Contractors

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *664*, if he will list the names of each trade association for catering and domestic service contractors and the names of the individuals representing them, at the meeting of 2 October 1987.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The British Hotels, Restaurants and Caterers Association was represented by Mr. T. Brannigan, Mr. E. Wilkinson, Mr. C. Bone, Mr. R. Dyson and Mr. J. Kilpatrick; the Contract Cleaning and Maintenance Association by Mr. J. Hall, Mr. M. Davies and Mr. A. Tucker.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *664*, whether any informal minute or record was made by any individual at, or subsequent to, the meeting of 2 October 1987, which related to that meeting.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Yes; an informal report on the seminar was prepared for my information.

Johnstone Infectious Diseases Hospital, Renfrewshire

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of the original contract to build the new purpose-built block at Johnstone infectious diseases hospital in Renfrewshire; and what is the new cost for the revised plan.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The cost of the original contract to provide a support services block at the hospital was £990,882. The cost of the revised contract, including the new provision of a recreational area for patients, is still subject to negotiation, but the board is confident that it will be less than the cost of the original contract.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the cost implications to the responsible health board of halting the planned kitchen at Johnstone infectious diseases hospital, Renfrewshire.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Argyll and Clyde health board anticipates that there will be an overall saving on the contract. In addition, the future cost of providing recreational facilities for patients at Johnstone hospital will now be avoided.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland why the electricity and gas supplies for the now cancelled kitchen block at the Johnstone infectious diseases hospital, Renfrewshire, are still going ahead; and at what cost.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The change of use of part of the block from kitchen to recreational facilities does not affect the requirement to supply the block with electrical power or to introduce a gas supply which will fuel the heating system.

The provisional total is £14,540, which is already included in the contract price.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what compensation is to be paid to the contractor following cancellation of the building of the kitchen at Johnstone infectious diseases hospital, Renfrewshire.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Johnstone hospital provides facilities for the elderly and the young physically disabled. No compensation is to be paid to the contractor following the cancellation of the fitting out of the kitchen at the hospital.

Grampian Health Board (Correspondence)

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make available to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North copies of correspondence between Grampian health board and the Scottish Home and Health Department which relate to discussions and negotiations culminating in the signing on 3 November 1987 of the efficiency savings schedule of agreements by Mr. H. Fullerton for Grampian health board and by Mr. A. McKechnie and Mr. H. McGrath for the staff side, joint staff consultative committee.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Correspondence between the Department and health boards is not normally made available to other parties.

On 22 June the Scottish Home and Health Department wrote to Grampian health board asking for details of a new bonus scheme which it understood had apparently been introduced by the board for certain ancillary staff. The board replied on 14 October confirming that a new flat-rate bonus scheme for domestic, catering, portering, linen and laundry, hairdressing and gardening staff had been introduced to replace a number of existing ancillary staff bonus schemes. The letter dealt solely with the content of the scheme and the fact that staff representatives had been involved in its preparation and introduction.

Northumberland Natural Park

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer of 15 February, *Official Report* column *482*, what acreage of the Northumberland natural park was afforested with conifers in 1958, 1960 and 1965.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

Year (at 31 March)	*Area of productive coniferous woodland (hectares)*
1958	11,000
1960	12,000
1965	15,000

NHS Staff (Telephone Fault Repair System)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) whether all Health Service staff required to be on emergency call are registered for British Telecom's priority fault repair system; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will take steps to ensure that after April health boards will continue to pay the cost for employees on British Telecom's priority fault repair system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: British Telecom is in the process of changing the arrangements for the operation and funding of emergency repairs to telephones at NHS premises and at the homes of key personnel. The Scottish Home and Health Department is consulting interested parties, including health boards and professional associations, about the arrangements to be made. The Department aims to identify arrangements which represent good value for public money, do not conflict with the terms of service of the key personnel concerned and, above all, are effective.

Scottish Special Housing Association

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will give the capital programme for the Scottish

Special Housing Association for each of the last five years, showing the proportion in real and percentage terms financed from capital receipts and from borrowing;

(2) if he will give the projected capital programme for the Scottish Special Housing Association for each of the next five years, showing the proportion in real and percentage terms to be financed from projected capital receipts and from borrowing;

(3) if he will give the capital receipts from house sales for each of the last five years for the Scottish Special Housing Association.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As the Scottish Special Housing Association's capital allocation is determined annually within the normal arrangements for public expenditure, programme figures are not available for any years after 1988-89. It is not possible to distinguish between the sums from capital receipts and borrowings from the National Loans Fund to meet capital expenditure for any financial year.

The table shows capital programme expenditure at cash prices and at 1986-87 prices for the five years up to 1986-87; it also gives capital receipts for house sales at cash prices and expressed as a percentage of capital programme expenditure for the same five years; estimated outturn figures for 1987-88 and 1988-89 have been included as appropriate.

Capital Programme Expenditure and Capital Sales Receipts

	Capital programme expenditure (cash price) £ million	*Capital programme expenditure (1986-87 prices) £ million*	*Capital receipts from house sales (cash price) £ million*	*Capital receipts from house sales as a percentage of capital programme expenditure (cash price) Percentage*
1982-83	59·9	71·6	19·2	32·0
1983-84	52·3	59·7	30·1	57·6
1984-85	65·0	71·1	35·0	53·8
1985-86	50·7	52·3	24·9	49·1
1986-87	54·0	54·0	23·0	42·6
1987-88	64·7	n.a.	39·9	61·7
1988-89	54·9	n.a.	40·3	73·4

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each of the sums borrowed by the Scottish Special Housing Association in 1987 to finance its capital programmes, showing in each case the terms and from whom borrowed.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is shown in the table. All the association's borrowings are from the National Loans Fund.

Sums borrowed by the SSHA from the National Loans Fund in 1987-88 (to 19 February 1988)

Date of advance	*Amount of loan £ million*	*Term*	*Interest Rate per cent.*
2 April 1987	6·0	60 years	9·125
30 June 1987	4·2	60 years	9·250
30 June 1987	11·8	30 years	9·250
30 June 1987	16·0	183 days	9·250
31 December 1987	16·0	60 years	9·750

Sheep Monitoring

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many scintillators were available to, and used by, his Department for the monitoring of live sheep in the restricted areas of Scotland in each month from May 1986 to May 1987.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The figures are as follows:

	Number
1986	
May	Nil
June	Nil
July	1
August	1
September	1
October	4
November	6
December	6
1987	
January	8
February	8
March	8
April	8
May	8

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when monitoring of live sheep on a general basis was introduced in the restricted areas of Scotland following the Chernobyl accident.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: July 1986.

Nurses

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to recruit and retain nurses within the National Health Service in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) of 27 October 1987, at column *104*.

In the intervening period, the Nursing and Midwifery Staffs Negotiating Council has agreed a new grading structure which recognises specific skills and will enable nurses to progress in their careers without necessarily having to move into management, will recognise post-basic clinical skills and training at all levels and provide a response to shortages in key specialisms. The Nurses' Pay Review Body has been asked to make recommendations on salaries in the new structure as part of its annual report on pay.

In addition, the launch of a joint *Nursing Times*/ Scottish Home and Health Department campaign on nurse recruitment and retention will take place on Monday 28 March 1988 in Edinburgh.

Geese

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what weight is given to the number of geese grazing on land when determining whether a licence to shoot should be granted; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what criteria he applies in determining the density or numbers of geese that are deemed to be causing significant damage for the purpose of granting a licence to shoot.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Licences are granted only where white-fronted geese are regularly causing damage in concentrations of more than 200 birds on restricted areas of land carrying crops or improved grass.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what step he has taken to satisfy himself that the licensed shooting of white-fronted geese on Islay has not caused nor is likely to cause any disturbance to the wild birds in the proposed special protection area known as the Rhins.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No licences have been issued in respect of land lying within any of the SSSIs including the Rhins. Licensed shooting outwith the SSSIs would not be expected to disturb birds within the protected areas.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to procure manpower for the purpose of scaring white-fronted geese from farmland on Islay.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A scheme for the scaring of geese on farmland lying outwith the protected areas has already been introduced with support from the Manpower Services Commission for the employment of scarers.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many licence applications he has now received to shoot white-fronted geese; how many licences have been granted to date; and if he has received advice from the Nature Conservancy Council in respect of each licence application.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Twenty eight applications for licences to shoot white-fronted geese have been received and 10 have been granted. The Nature Conservancy Council was informed in advance of each of the licences to be issued.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 23 February 1988

WALES

Rate Relief

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what would be the value to the average ratepayer in Wales, in 1988-89 prices, if domestic rate relief were at 33·5 p in the pound.

Mr. Peter Walker: £42·20 (compared with the present value of £23·30) for domestic ratepayers.

Sport

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the amount of Government financial assistance to sport in Wales since 1979.

Mr. Grist: Direct central Government support for sport and recreation in Wales is provided by way of grant-in-aid to the Sports Council for Wales. From 1979-80 to 1986-87, which is the last year for which outturn figures are available a total of £22·5 million was paid in grant. In the same period central Government support of £4·3 million was provided to local authorities via the urban programme. Of this the Welsh Office met 75 per cent. of the approved expenditure, the remaining 25 per cent. being met by the sponsoring local authority.

Local authorities' gross current expenditure on sport and recreation in this period was £345·5 million. This was financed in part by the rate support grant which is unhypothocated and by specific and supplementary grants of £18·3 million.

Housing (Renovation)

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been spent on the renovation of public and private housing stock in Wales since 1979.

Mr. Grist: Local authorities and housing associations have, since April 1979, spent £570 million on the renovation of public housing and £414 million on the renovation of private housing.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the amount of Government financial assistance to, and *(b)* the number of jobs created in, each enterprise zone in Wales since their designation.

Mr. Grist: Welsh Office expenditure, by way of payments under the urban programme and of compensation in respect of rate relief, is estimated as follows:

	Designated	*Expenditure £ million*	*Employment*
Delyn enterprise zone	21 July 1983	6·6	+1,200
Swansea enterprise zone	11 June 1981	10·8	+1,900
Milford Haven enterprise zone	24 April 1984	6·1	+420

Regional industrial assistance paid to individual companies on the zones is not included.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much of the planned provision for the Welsh Development Agency, at constant prices, is expected to be from *(a)* rents, sales and services and *(b)* Government funding, in each of the years 1988-89 and 1990-91.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information is as follows:

£ million, 1987-88 prices[1]

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Rents, sales and other receipts	46·1	47·5	47·8
Net provision	62·0	58·3	57·7

[1] The planning figures have been adjusted to constant 1987-88 prices using the GDP deflator.

Urban Programme

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the amount of public expenditure under the urban programme in Wales for each year since 1979.

Mr. Grist: Capital and revenue public expenditure under the urban programme (including urban development grant) in Wales for each year since 1979 is as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	4·2
1980-81	8·7
1981-82	9·1
1982-83	17·4
1983-84	15·0
1984-85	20·8
1985-86	24·9
1986-87	[1]26·5
1987-88	[1]26·7

[1] Estimated.

Morriston Hospital

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will direct the West Glamorgan health authority to ensure that the names of the people undertaking the inquiry into the intensive baby care unit at Morriston hospital are made public and that the results of the inquiry are published.

Mr. Grist: I understand that West Glamorgan health authority has initiated an internal inquiry following serious allegations about the special-care baby unit, Morriston hospital. The inquiry team will consist of the chairman of the authority and two members to be specified. The intention is for their report to be presented

to a meeting of the authority in March 1988. In the circumstances I have no reason to consider the issue of a direction to the authority on this question.

Glanrhyd Bridge

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the chairman of British Rail about the replacement of Glanrhyd bridge on the central Wales line.

Mr. Peter Walker: I met the chairman of British Rail on 5 February 1988. I am pleased to say that the chairman informed me that he hoped a new bridge would be in place by the autumn of this year.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Budget

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of gross national product was allocated to official overseas development aid in 1987.

Mr. Chris Patten: This information will not be available until later this year.

THE ARTS

Public Libraries

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Minister for the Arts if has any proposals to enlarge the scope for public libraries to generate increased revenues; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: I have today presented to Parliament a Green Paper, "Financing our public library service: Four subjects for debate." In it, I ask for views on the best means of achieving the Government's objectives of supporting the provision of the free basic library service at public expense, while at the same time enlarging the scope for library authorities to generate increased income by joint ventures with the private sector and by charging for specialised services.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Earlsfield Police Station

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to close Earlsfield police station in Wandsworth, London, SW18; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that there are no plans to close Earlsfield police station.

London (Policing Costs)

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost per inhabitant of policing London; and what is the average cost per inhabitant of policing areas outside London.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Expenditure per thousand population for each police force in England and Wales is given in "Police Statistics 1986-87 Actuals" published by The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, a copy of which is in the Library.

The publication recognises that because of differences between the Metropolitan police and other forces direct comparisons of costs may be misleading.

Sentries

Sir John Biggs-Davison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to what steps the police are taking to ensure that sentries on duty outside the royal palaces and royal residences, and their horses, are not subjected to unpleasant attentions from tourists and others; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The police have the necessary powers to deal with any difficulties which may arise.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Lawn Mowers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total output of lawn mowers, the percentage exported and the proportion of the domestic market taken by imports in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* West Germany and *(c)* Japan in 1958, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975 and in each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information for the United Kingdom is shown in the table. That for West Germany and Japan could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

£ million

	Sales[1]	*Exports*	*Imports*
1975	40·4	10·4	1·5
1979	86·9	17·2	9·0
1980	98·1	18·3	10·4
1981	108·6	18·1	12·4
1982	99·2	17·3	14·9
1983	101·8	15·7	12·6
1984	103·6	20·1	20·0
1985	115·7	22·9	20·5

[1] Output figures relate to sales by manufacturers in the United Kingdom with a minimum employment of 25 in years up to 1980 and 50 from 1981 onwards.

Red Cross Emblem

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he has given his authority under section 6(2)(b) of the Geneva Conventions Act 1957 for the use by the Labour party of a design so nearly resembling the Red Cross designated in section 6(1) of the Act as to be capable of being mistaken for or understood as referring to that emblem.

Mr. Butcher: No authority has been given in the matter by either the Secretary of State or by the Board of Trade.

Marmosets

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on attempts by the Danish Government to secure marmosets from the United Kingdom for the purpose of chemical warfare research;

whether he intends to take steps to prevent those animals being exported for such purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Department has no information on attempts by the Danish Government to secure marmosets from the United Kingdom for the purpose of chemical warfare research.

ENERGY

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many civil servants are employed in his Department; what are their average weekly working hours; and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job-sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

Mr. Parkinson: Numbers employed fluctuate over time; currently the Department employs around 1,000 civil servants whose normal hours are 41 per week for full-time staff, and of whom 10 per cent. are on flexitime. Four are on job-sharing schemes and two are on a four-day working week. All except casual staff acquire the pension rights provided by the principal Civil Service pension scheme; last year five out of 34 officers who retired qualified for a full pension.

Hinkley Point Power Station

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the reports of incidents at Hinkley Point power station from 1985 to date, indicating *(a)* in which cases the alarm was sounded and *(b)* in which cases the alarm failed to sound.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Since 1985 there have been three incidents at the Hinkley Point site reported to the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate under the arrangements reported to Parliament on 26 July 1982 and revised on 30 April 1987. These occurred on 25 October 1985, 29 November 1985 and 31 October 1986, and details are included in the Health and Safety Executive's quarterly statement on nuclear incidents, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. Only the incident on 29 November 1985 included the declaration of a site incident requiring the sounding of the site's sirens, and I am advised that they performed satisfactorily.

Deep-mined Coal (Subsidies)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish the average level of Government subsidy per tonne of deep-mined coal in each year since 1978 in each of the member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Mr. Michael Spicer *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* The OECD does not publish details of aid to member states' coal industries. The information in the table has been obtained from European Commission publications.

£/tonne

Calender year	*Belgium*	*France*	*Federal Republic of Germany*	*Spain*[3]	*Portugal*[3]	*Financial year*	*United Kingdom*[2]
1978[1]	27·70	15·80	11·91	—	—	1978-79	1·60
1979	31·16	16·56	13·69	—	—	1979-80	2·30
1980	27·75	15·17	12·19	—	—	1980-81	2·30
1981	25·46	11·95	10·94	—	—	1981-82	3·28
1982	16·47	17·72	8·65	—	—	1982-83	4·96
1983	15·47	19·19	12·06	—	—	1983-84	12·71
1984	20·09	19·87	12·30	—	—	1984-85	87·15
1985	21·68	22·00	11·72	—	—	1985-86	6·37
1986	34·90	23·76	21·25	—	—	1986-87[4]	10·02
1987[4]	57·55	22·16	29·45	12·08	4·92		

[1] It is not possible to make absolute comparisons between the figures from different member states as the numerical basis may vary.
[2] United Kingdom figures are on a financial year basis. The others are in calender years.
[3] Spanish and Portuguese data are not available prior to 1987.
[4] 1987 data are the latest published estimates.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Grants

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what, according to his best estimate, is the proportion of the whole amount of money spent on student grants is accounted for *(a)* in theory and *(b)* in practice by parental contributions for each year since 1979 until the latest year for which the Government can estimate.

Mr. Jackson: The information relates to mandatory and full-value discretionary awards made by local education authorities in England and Wales. Assessed parental contributions are expressed as a percentage of the combined total of all assessed contributions (from parents, spouses and students themselves) and LEA expenditure on maintenance awards.

Academic years	*Percentage*
1979-80	19·3
1980-81	19·0
1981-82	21·3
1982-83	23·7
1983-84	24·4
1984-85	31·3
1985-86	36·8

How much in practice parents contributed to the maintenance of their student children is not known.

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science to what extent there is a shortfall in providing examiners and moderators for the forthcoming GCSE examinations.

Mrs. Rumbold: The GCSE examining groups are responsible for recruiting and employing GCSE examiners and moderators, and I understand that they are currently reviewing progress.

English Grammar

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to encourage the teaching of English grammar; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government attach great importance to the study of English language. Last year my right hon. Friend established a committee under the chairmanship of Sir John Kingman to advise on what, in general terms, children need to know about how the English language works, and in consequence what they should have been taught and be expected to understand on this score at ages 7, 11 and 16. The committee's report is expected next month. Under our proposals for a national curriculum, English will be a core subject. A working group will be established after Easter, following and building on the work of the Kingman committee, to advise on attainment targets for ages 7, 11, 14 and 16 and the associated programmes of study for all aspects of English.

Education Reform

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, where the physical capacity of a school is above the 1979 intake, he will then allow that capacity to be the determining factor in deciding how many pupils should be admitted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Under the existing legislation, admissions authorities for maintained schools are at liberty to set admissions limits above the standard number of such schools if they so wish.

Under the provisions of chapter II of the Education Reform Bill, if admissions to a school are higher than the existing standard number in the school year immediately prior to implementation of the new legislation, that number will become the new standard number for the school and therefore the number up to which the school must be prepared to admit. If LEAs and governors agree that a school can admit pupils in excess of the standard number, they will be able to do so without reference to the Secretary of State, and if there is no agreement, there is provision in the Bill for the matter to be referred to the Secretary of State for decision.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how many more staff he expects to employ at his Department for the purposes of recalculating grants for the 12 inner London local education authorities;

(2) how many more staff he expects to employ in his Department for the purpose of administering capital expenditure bids for the proposed 12 inner London local education authorities following the abolition of the Inner London education authority;

(3) whether he is able to make any estimate as to additional staffing requirements in his Department in connection with the administration of grant-related in-service training after the proposed date of transfer of the functions of the Inner London education authority to the inner London boroughs;

(4) whether he will estimate the staffing implications for his Department of the monitoring and approval of local management schemes proposed by inner London boroughs prior to the proposed transfer of functions to them after the abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn *[holding answer 18 February 1988]:* My right hon. Friend is setting up a special unit in the Department of Education and Science to advise and assist boroughs in preparing to take over responsibility for education. The unit will be mainly formed by the reallocation of existing staff, but two new posts have been allocated.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out his estimate of the aggregate of the appropriate levels of spending for inner London councils on the education service in 1990-91; and what is the Inner London education authority's estimated spending in 1987-88 in cash terms and in volume terms.

Mr. Dunn *[holding answer 18 February]:* It will be for each council to determine the appropriate level of spending on the education service in 1990-91. The Inner London education authority's budgeted spending for 1987-88 at outturn prices, as shown in its published estimates, is £1,024·7 million.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many extra staff will need to be employed, and at what cost, to provide returns under statutory requirements to collect statistics and information in the proposed 12 inner London local education authorities, following the abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn *[holding answer 18 February 1988]:* It will be for each inner London council to determine the staffing they consider appropriate for the collection of statistics.

Teachers (Assessment and Testing Report)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will initiate a study on the implication for teachers' working time arising from the recommendations of the assessment and testing group's report;

(2) if he has assessed the cost and resource implications of the task group's report on assessment and testing; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what is his estimate of the cost of implementing the recommendations of the assessment and testing group, arising from his answer of 12 January, *Official Report*, column *205*.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has invited the task group on assessment and testing to undertake a more detailed study of arrangements for implementing and administering the national assessment system proposed in its recent report. The group's advice on this, and public reaction to its report, should enable the organisational and resource implications to be gauged.

Pupil Statistics

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was *(a)* the expenditure per pupil and *(b)* the average size of classes in (i) infant, (ii) primary and (iii) secondary schools in (1) England, (2) East Sussex and (3) the borough of Eastbourne on the available date closest to 3 May 1979; and what are the equivalent figures for the latest available date, adjusted in the case of expenditure for inflation.

Mr. Dunn: The available information is given in the table. Information in respect of separate districts within local education authorities is not held centrally.

	Nursery schools	*Primary schools*	*Secondary schools*
Net institutional recurrent expenditure per pupil (£)[1]			
England			
1979-80[2]	1,305	609	980
1985-86	1,370	815	1,175
East Sussex			
1979-80[2]	1,295	670	970
1985-86	1,190	760	1,085
Average class size[3]			
England			
1979-80	not available	25·4	20·9
1985-86	not available	25·5	20·3
East Sussex			
1979-80	not available	25·2	21·4
1985-86	not available	26·3	21·0

[1] Net institutional recurrent expenditure covers the cost of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. It does not include the cost of school meals, central administration and inspection, debt charges or revenue contributions to capital outlay.

[2] The cash prices for 1979-80 have been repriced to 1985-86 prices using the gross domestic product (market prices) deflator.

[3] The analyses are in respect of classes taught by one teacher in a specified period on the day of the census count in January each year and may not be representative of the pattern of classes over the academic year as a whole.

School Meals

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the number of children who will no longer qualify for free school meals on the Isle of Wight after 1 April *(a)* numerically and *(b)* expressed as a percentage.

Mr. Dunn: Children currently receiving free school meals at the LEA's discretion or because the family is in receipt of family income supplement will no longer do so when the Social Security Act 1986 comes into effect on 11 April. In October 1986, the latest date for which data are available, the number of children receiving free school meals in these two categories was 446, or 6 per cent. of the total number of pupils taking meals.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Arms Control

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much time has been spent by arms control officials in his Department on work specifically relating to naval arms control during the last six months.

Mr. Mellor: It is not possible to quantify separately the time devoted by FCO officials to different arms control issues. However, naval matters constitute one aspect of their work.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list any naval arms control proposals put forward by the Government during the last 10 years.

Mr. Mellor: A bilateral agreement was concluded with the Soviet Union in 1986 on preventing incidents at sea. The text of this agreement was laid in the House as Command Paper No. 57 in January 1987.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what naval arms control measures he is putting forward in response to Mr. Gorbachev's statement in October 1987 that nuclear weapons should be withdrawn from the Soviet Baltic fleet and from the Baltic and Leningrad military districts, that an Arctic peace plan should be drawn up, that there should be a Nordic nuclear free zone and that consultations should begin on limiting military activity in the Baltic sea, North sea, Norwegian sea and Greenland sea.

Mr. Mellor: We have made clear in the course of bilateral contacts that proposals aimed at limiting freedom of movement on the high seas would create difficulties for the Alliance given its need to reinforce Europe by sea in times of crisis. As far as the proposal for a Nordic nuclear-free zone is concerned, our view is that such a zone would do little to enhance international security because of the direct relevance to the Nordic area of nuclear and conventional forces stationed elsewhere.

San José IV Ministerial Conference

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the San José IV ministerial conference.

Mr. Eggar: We will make available to the House the economic and political communiqués which we expect the conference to adopt once it has taken place on 29 February to 1 March.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Governments of *(a)* the United States of America, *(b)* the other countries of the EEC, *(c)* Argentina and *(d)* other countries, regarding the proposed military exercise in the Falkland Islands from 7 to 31 March; and what has been the nature of the representations in each case.

Mr. Eggar: We have had discussions with a number of interested Governments regarding the reinforcement exercise to take place in the Falkland Islands from 7 to 31 March. The content of these discussions is confidential.

ENVIRONMENT

Docklands

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of the London Docklands

development corporation's budget has been spent using its powers under the Inner Urban Areas Act to give grants and loans to existing firms in docklands.

Mr. Chope: LDDC has spent £1,984,253 to date — which is 0·5 per cent. of its grant-in-aid.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much public money the London Docklands development corporation has received to date.

Mr. Chope: To date the London Docklands development corporation has received £387·1 million grant-in-aid.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who is responsible at the London Docklands development corporation for liason with the Docklands Forum following the dismissal of Mr. John Mills.

Mr. Chope: The LDDC board is to consider which of its members should represent the corporation on the Docklands Forum.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are being taken to appoint a new deputy chairman of the London Docklands development corporation.

Mr. Chope: Consultations are continuing and an announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many civil servants are employed in his Department; what are their average weekly working hours, and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job-sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

Mr. Ridley: On 1 February 1988 there were 32,820 staff employed in my Department (including the PSA); 741 of these work part-time, including job-sharers. Separate figures for job-sharing schemes are not available. Non-industrial staff in central London work 41 hours per week (gross); elsewhere 42 hours. Industrial staff work 44 hours per week, gross. The average weekly hours of part-time staff is 19·7 hours.

Most full-time staff work a five-day week — except those working shifts. Numbers of staff working a four-day week or nine-day fortnight are not readily available.

Flexible working hours agreements operate on a local basis; there are currently 115 local schemes in operation. Staff are free to participate in them, or not to do so, if they wish. Figures for participants are not kept centrally.

All staff are entitled to retire on pension at age 60. Maximum pension rights normally accrue after 40 years total service; 4,128 of present non-industrial staff would have 40 years service by age 60. Those with shorter service do, however, have the opportunity to purchase some additional qualifying years for pension purposes. Corresponding figures for industrial staff are not readily available.

Nuclear Waste Disposal Dumps

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans Nirex has to create nuclear waste disposal dumps in Lancashire and Cumbria, other than Sellafield; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend expects UK Nirex Ltd to make proposals early in 1989 for a deep dual-purpose disposal facility for two-level and intermediate-level radioactive waste, after evaluation of the response to the discussion document "The Way Forward" and scientific studies. At this stage neither Nirex nor the Government has any firm proposals for the siting of a radioactive waste repository and no part of the country can be ruled out.

Local Authority Property Assets

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he proposes to take to compel those local councils which are not using, under-using, inefficiently managing, or wasting £100 billion of assets, as identified in the recent Audit Commission report on local authority property assets, to dispose of those assets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier) gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) on 17 February 1988 at column *660*.

Moore Manor Park Development, Runcorn

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to make a decision about the Moore Manor park development near Runcorn.

Mrs. Rae: I hope to do so shortly.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when, pursuant to his answer of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *968*, he expects to announce the areas he intends to designate as urban development corporations; and if he will detail the locations under consideration.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend expects to make a further announcement shortly.

Northamptonshire Structure Plan

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce his decision on the revised Northamptonshire county structure plan.

Mrs. Rae: The modifications which the Secretary of State proposes to make to the submitted replacement plan will be published in the near future. There will then be an opportunity for representations to be made on them to my right hon. Friend before he makes his final decision on the plan.

Rating Reform

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the composition of the community charge implementation unit; what are its terms of reference; and if it will publish guidance for local authorities.

Mr. Howard: The implementation sub-group of the community charge working group was established in November 1987 to provide a forum for discussion of issues arising from the implementation of the community charge.

The group comprises officials of the Department of the Environment, the Department of Health and Social Security and the Welsh Office, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, Association of District Councils, Association of County Councils, the London Boroughs Association and the Association of London Authorities.

The terms of reference of the group are to consider the practical issues arising from registration for, and billing, collection and recovery of the community charge, with a view to *(a)* providing an input to the preparation of regulations; *(b)* providing advice to local authority practitioners; *(c)* assessing the resource implications of implementing rate reform.

The sub-group will produce a series of practice notes on the implementation of the community charge for use by local authorities, professional bodies and other interested parties.

St. George's Hospital Site

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications of the recent planning consent granted by Westminster city council for the redevelopment of the St. George's hospital site, Hyde park corner, for the implementation of the conditions laid down in his appeal decision of 21 December 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I understand that Westminster city council has resolved to grant planning permission and listed building consent for the redevelopment as an hotel and offices of the St. George's hospital site. The planning permission is subject to a section 52 agreement and the listed building consent to further procedures, including consideration by HBMC and possible notification to the Secretary of State. If permission is subsequently granted it is for the owner to decide whether to take up the new permission or that granted on appeal in 1982, provided the latter is still valid.

MOD Properties (Sales)

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many Ministry of Defence houses in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Renfrew, West and Inverclyde have been sold in each year since 1979.

Mr. Chope *[pursuant to his reply, 22 February 1988, c. 62]:* The answer given to the hon. Member on Monday 22 February was not given in full. The complete answer is as follows:

a. Scotland	*Year*	*b. Renfrew, West/ Inverclyde*
5	1979-1981	Nil
7	1982	Nil
13	1983	1
12	1984	5
12	1985	6
13	1986	1
57	1987	46
Nil to date	1988	—

PRIME MINISTER

NHS Hospitals (Visits)

Q5. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to pay an official visit to a National Health Service hospital.

The Prime Minister: I visit a number of hospitals during the course of each year, but I have no immediate plans for further visits at present.

Confectionery Industry

Q86. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on Government support for the confectionery industry.

The Prime Minister: The confectionery industry continues to be important both to the economy as a whole and to our exports. The Government's policies seek to promote a climate within which industry is encouraged to compete effectively, and with special and increasing emphasis on the opportunities offered by the wider internal market of the Community.

Currently food manufacturers are eligible to apply for assistance towards new capital investment under Government schemes administered by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment. These include a variety of measures described in the recent White Paper "DTI — the department for Enterprise". The industry is also covered by a range of measures from information and counselling to financial incentives designed to assist small business, including those in the confectionery manufacturing sector.

Poland

Q104. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Prime Minister, what plans she has to visit Poland.

The Prime Minister: I hope to visit Poland this year.

Year 2000

Mr. Amess: To ask the Prime Minister what plans the Government have to celebrate the year 2000.

The Prime Minister: None as yet.

Engagements

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties

in the House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty The Queen.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Adley: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on her recent visit to the Channel tunnel.

The Prime Minister: I visited Shakespeare Cliff on 5 February and met representatives of Eurotunnel and the various contractors working on the Channel tunnel. I was most impressed by the substantial progress they have clearly made with this most exciting civil engineering project.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Training Scheme

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of entrants to the job training scheme have obtained a credit or qualification as a direct result of their time on the scheme since its inception.

Mr. Cope: Information on credits or qualifications is not yet available. The Manpower Services Commission has commissioned a follow-up survey which will give information on qualifications. The results should be known in the spring.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will show by region, including Greater London, and by male and female, the numbers of people who were *(a)* without jobs and who looked for work in the four weeks before their labour force survey interview and were available to start work within two weeks, who wanted full-time jobs, the number who wanted part-time jobs and the number who had no preference, *(b)* unemployed according to the standard labour force survey definition who were looking for full-time jobs and the number looking for part-time jobs and the number who had no preference, *(c)* in part-time jobs who were looking for a different job with longer hours or looking for an additional job, *(d)* looking for a different job with shorter hours, *(d)* claimants not unemployed by the definition using broad International Labour Organisation guidelines on the grounds that they were employed and *(f)* claimants not unemployed by the conventional labour force survey definition on the grounds that they were employed.

Mr. Lee *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The available information from the preliminary results of the 1987 labour force survey is as shown in the following tables:

Table 1

ILO/OECD unemployed[1] looking for work as an employee[2] and wanting a full or part-time job or having no preference

Spring 1987, thousands

	Full-time		*Part-time*		*No preference*	
	Males	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
Great Britain	1,105	431	68	421	127	167
Northern	90	25	•	25	•	12
Yorkshire & Humberside	114	37	•	40	14	15
East Midlands	70	30	•	36	10	•
East Anglia	27	14	•	17	•	•
South East	221	104	25	105	21	33
of which Greater London	119	44	•	39	13	13
South West	54	33	•	36	•	13
West Midlands	130	38	•	45	17	22
North West	157	65	•	57	17	23
Wales	73	26	•	21	•	•
Scotland	169	58	•	40	21	28

[1] People without a job who were available for work and had either looked for work at some time in the last four weeks or were waiting to start a job they had already obtained.

[2] People looking for work as self-employed were not asked if they would prefer to work full or part-time.

• Sample size too small for a reliable estimate.

Table 2

Unemployed[1] persons looking for work as an employee[2] and wanting a full or part-time job or having no preference

Spring 1987, Thousands

	Full-time		*Part-time*		*No preference*	
	Males	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
Great Britain	1,106	433	58	368	124	153
Northern	92	26	•	22	4	11
Yorkshire and Humberside	111	37	•	33	14	14
East Midlands	73	31	•	30	•	•
East Anglia	27	15	•	13	•	•
South East	222	107	21	97	22	31
of which Greater London	117	45	•	36	12	12
South West	52	33	•	31	•	11
West Midlands	128	40	•	36	16	19
North West	155	62	•	55	15	21
Wales	77	24	•	17	•	•
Scotland	169	58	•	32	20	24

[1] GB labour force definition.
[2] People looking for work as self-employed were not asked if they would prefer to work full or part-time.
• Sample size too small for a reliable estimate.

Table 3
Persons in employment in part-time jobs[1] looking for a different job with longer hours or an additional job
Spring 1987 *Thousands*

	Males	*Females*
Great Britain	141	239
Northern	11	15
Yorkshire and Humberside	17	24
East Midlands	11	15
East Anglia	•—	11
South East	31	66
of which Greater London	14	21
South West	10	20
West Midlands	11	28
North West	19	34
Wales	15	•—
Scotland	11	18

[1] Based on the respondent's own assessment, not on the number of hours usually worked.
• Sample size too small for a reliable estimate.

Table 4
Persons in employment looking for a different job with shorter hours
Spring 1987 *Thousands*

	Males	*Females*
Great Britain	209	97
Northern	•—	•—
Yorkshire and Humberside	20	14
East Midlands	17	•—
East Anglia	•—	•—
South East	78	34
of which Greater London	29	17
South West	18	•—
West Midlands	15	11
North West	25	•—
Wales	11	•—
Scotland	•—	•—

• Sample size too small for a reliable estimate.

It is estimated that there were 114,000 male and 80,000 female claimants employed in Great Britain in spring 1987. However, a reliable analysis of employed claimants by region is not available.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment under what circumstances and which categories of claimants are issued with the form CFN 982A at unemployment benefit offices; and what instructions are issued to benefit staff.

Mr. Lee *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* Form CF(N)982A is a questionnaire issued by unemployment benefit offices to claimants who do not qualify for unemployment benefit on their United Kingdom contribution record but who have been employed abroad in an EC country or a country with which the United Kingdom has a reciprocal agreement.

Completed questionnaires enable inquiries to be made to establish whether any contributions paid abroad may assist claimants to qualify for unemployment benefit. Completed forms are forwarded to the overseas branch of the DHSS.

"Training for Employment"

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the IFF Research Ltd. survey of 1,400 employers referred to in the "Training for Employment" White Paper (Cm. 316).

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* I plan to publish details of the results of the IFF Research Ltd. survey, quoted in the White Paper, "Training for Employment" (Cm. 316) in the *Employment Gazette* shortly.

SCOTLAND

Labour Statistics

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the unemployment totals for Cunninghame, North constituency by ward in *(a)* January 1983, *(b)* January 1987 and *(c)* January 1988.

Mr. Lang: Unemployment statistics on a ward basis are available only from June 1983. The table shows the number of unemployed claimants by ward in the Cunninghame, North parliamentary constituency for January 1984, 1987 and 1988.

	Unemployed claimants		
Ward	*January 1984*	*January 1987*	*January 1988*
Ardrossan North	536	581	454
Ardrossan South	593	616	572
Arran	296	260	273
Beith	321	368	305
Dalry	298	321	305
Fairlie, Skelmorlie and Cumbrae	212	250	220
Garnock East	267	281	277
Kilbirnie North	382	399	351
Kilbirnie South	459	467	372
Largs North	279	265	284
Largs South	158	195	198
Saltcoats East	558	520	478
Saltcoats North	513	501	408
South Beach	370	507	448
West Kilbride	312	330	264
Total	5,554	5,861	5,209

These figures are not directly comparable due to a change in the compilation of the statistics in March 1986.

This information is available in the Library.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total number of unemployed people in *(a)* the Dundee, East constituency and *(b)* the Dundee travel-to-work area who are (i) under 25 years, (ii) between 25 years and 35 years, (iii) between 35 and 50 years and (iv) over 50 years on the latest available date.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The number of unemployed claimants on 8 October 1987 is given in the table.

Age group	Dundee, East constituency Total	Dundee travel-to-work area Total
Under 25	2,510	5,051
25-34	1,729	3,524
35-49	1,773	3,337
50 and over	1,195	2,513
All ages	7,207	14,425

This information is available in the Library.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many young people under 25 years in *(a)* the Dundee, East constituency and *(b)* the Dundee travel-to-work area have been unemployed for more than one, two, three and four years on the latest available date.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The numbers of unemployed claimants under 25 years of age on 8 October 1987 are shown in the table.

Duration Unemployed	Dundee, East Parliamentary Constituency	Dundee Travel-to-Work Area
Up to 1 year	1,693	3,554
1 to 2 years	396	759
2 to 3 years	185	332
3 to 4 years	96	161
over 4 years	140	245
Total	2,510	5,051

This information is available in the Library.

NHS (Voluntary Contributions)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give what information he has about voluntary and charity contributions to the Health Service for each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on voluntary contributions to the Health Service is not held centrally.

Hospital Charges

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what sums were collected by each health board from non-United Kingdom residents for hospital charges in 1985-86 and 1986-87; and what is the estimated net sum after deductions of costs of administration.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The amounts collected are given in the table. The administrative costs associated with the collection of income are not separately identifiable.

Income from patients resident outside United Kingdom

Board	1985-86 £	1986-87 £
Argyll and Clyde	2,057	11,006
Ayrshire and Arran	7,220	8,375
Borders	3,064	3,450
Dumfries and Galloway	8,303	1,112
Fife	3,297	4,988
Forth Valley	2,296	8,699
Grampian	23,555	14,241
Greater Glasgow	68,022	159,809
Highland	13,828	21,758
Lanarkshire	3,880	1,773
Lothian	126,884	89,490
Orkney	686	565
Shetland	—	—
Tayside	45,368	34,166
Western Isles	490	744
TOTAL	308,950	360,176

Source: Annual accounts of health boards.

Afforestation

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the area of land newly afforested in the United Kingdom in 1987.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In the year to 31 March 1987, the Forestry Commission planted 5,342 hectares and grant-aided the planting of 19,147 hectares by the private sector. In addition, a total of 831 hectares was planted in Northern Ireland.

Solicitors

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases have occurred since 1972 where solicitors have been found to have passed on to a third party or parties, from clients held in police custody, information which has interfered in the police investigation of the case or any subsequent prosecution.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I regret this information is not collected centrally.

Home Security Grants

Mr. McTaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to introduce home security grants for tenants and home owners.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Not at present.

Elderly People

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are over *(a)* 65 years, *(b)* 75 years and *(c)* 85 years in each region in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The registrar general's population estimates for 30 June 1986 are as follows:

	Ages 65+	75+	85+
Scotland	742,568	308,871	56,704
Regions			
Borders	18,855	8,320	1,593
Central	37,296	15,123	2,708
Dumfries and Galloway	24,154	10,047	1,890
Fife	50,413	20,648	3,681
Grampian	69,309	30,346	5,837
Highland	28,146	12,129	2,242
Lothian	109,641	47,261	9,109
Strathclyde	328,266	131,200	23,149
Tayside	64,488	28,064	5,391
Islands Areas			
Orkney	3,224	1,404	257
Shetland	3,132	1,444	288
Western Isles	5,644	2,885	559

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many places there are in local authority residential care for the elderly for each region; and what has been the percentage change since 1979;

(2) how many places there are in private residential care homes for the elderly; and what has been the percentage change since 1979;

(3) how many places there are in homes for the elderly owned or operated by churches, charities, housing associations or other voluntary organisations; and what has been the percentage change since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Provisional figures are available separately for places in voluntary and private homes for the elderly in 1987, but for 1979 a single total only is available. There were 2,306 places in private homes and 4,441 places in voluntary homes in 1987 an increase of 30·1 per cent. over the 1979 total. The information requested on places in local authority homes for the elderly is as follows:

Places in local authority residential homes for the elderly

	1987[1] *(Number)*	*Change since 1979 (per cent.)*
Regions		
Borders	348	+6·7
Central	469	+61·7
Dumfries and Galloway	328	+2·5
Fife	699	+37·6
Grampian	990	+5·0
Highland	457	+3·6
Lothian	1,417	+16·0
Strathclyde	3,904	−4·5
Tayside	1,046	+8·6
Orkney	70	0
Shetland	70	+14·8
Western Isles	195	+61·2
Scotland	9,993	+6·8

[1] Provisional.

Health Services

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* his Department's staff targets for the Scottish hospital and community health services for each year from 1979 up to the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Home and Health Department does not set annual targets as such. In medical services the establishment of senior registrars is determined annually. Targets are being negotiated with health boards for the numbers of recruits to nursing training and annual discussions take place with health boards about requirements for staff in certain professions allied to medicine. health boards are being encouraged to develop manpower planning in the context of the Department's monitoring of progress towards the priorities set out in "Scottish Health Authorities Priorities for the Eighties"—the SHAPE report.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the proportion of Scottish gross domestic product spent on *(a)* the Health Service as a whole, *(b)* hospital and community health services and *(c)* family practitioner services, for each year from 1970 until the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information in the form requested is only available from 1974-75 and is set out in the table:

*NHS Expenditure as a proportion of Scottish gross domestic product**

	(a) Total national health service *Percentage*	*(b) Hospital and community health services* *Percentage*	*(c) Family practitioner services* *Percentage*
1974-75	6·4	4·9	1·1
1975-76	6·7	5·1	1·2
1976-77	6·5	4·9	1·2
1977-78	6·5	4·9	1·2
1978-79	6·6	5·0	1·3
1979-80	7·0	5·2	1·3
1980-81	7·8	5·9	1·4
1981-82	8·1	6·1	1·5
1982-83	8·0	6·0	1·6
1983-84	8·0	5·9	1·6
1984-85	8·1	6·0	1·6
1985-86	7·9	5·8	1·6

* calculated at factor cost.

Widdicombe Committee

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to his reply of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *719*, he is in a position to announce the publication of the Government's conclusions following consultations on recommendations made by the Widdicombe Committee.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We are not yet in a position to announce a publication date.

Family Protection

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to his reply of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *716*, he is in a position to announce the publication date of the report on the working of the Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection) (Scotland) Act 1981.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I regret that I cannot yet announce the publication date of the report of this research; I shall write to the hon. Member when it has been determined.

Cancelled Operations

Dr. Moonie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a table showing, for the latest available year, the number of operations or theatre lists cancelled in Lothian and Fife health boards, by specialty.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available centrally.

Housing (Improvements)

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many successful applications have been made by housing authorities in relation to housing action area and improvement order declarations for an enhanced level of approved expense for grant purposes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In the period from May 1983 to date, approval has been given to 626 applications

by local authorities for increases in the maximum eligible expense limits in respect of 4,375 houses and non-residential premises within housing action Areas. Approvals relating to improvement order cases cannot be separately identified.

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many housing action area and improvement order declarations have been made by each local authority in Scotland over the last 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In the 10-year period to 1987 the total number of housing action areas declared by each of the Scottish local authorities and submitted to the Secretary of State as draft resolutions is set out in the table. Information on the number of improvement orders made by local authorities is not held centrally.

Housing action areas declared in Scotland (1 January 1978—31 December 1987)

	Number
Borders Region	
Berwickshire	—
Ettrick and Lauderdale	9
Roxburgh	4
Tweeddale	2
Central Region	
Clackmannan	12
Falkirk	10
Stirling	22
Dumfries and Galloway Region	
Annandale and Eskdale	—
Nithsdale	2
Stewartry	—
Wigtown	—
Fife Region	
Dunfermline	1
Kirkcaldy	68
North East Fife	—
Grampian Region	
Aberdeen City	54
Banff and Buchan	4
Gordon	—
Kincardine and Deeside	—
Moray	—
Highland Region	
Badenoch and Strathspey	—
Caithness	—
Inverness	2
Lochaber	1
Nairn	—
Ross and Cromarty	2
Skye and Lochalish	—
Sutherland	4
Lothian	
East Lothian	7
Edinburgh City	57
Midlothian	1
West Lothian	—
Strathclyde Region	
Argyll and Bute	151
Bearsden and Milngavie	2
Clydebank	8
Clydesdale	6
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	2
Cumnock and Doon Valley	—
Cunninghame	48
Dumbarton	4
East Kilbride	1
Eastwood	—
Glasgow City	478
Hamilton	18
Inverclyde	24
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	—
Kyle and Carrick	1
Monklands	3
Motherwell	15
Renfrew	57
Strathkelvin	3
Tayside Region	
Angus	7
Dundee City	76
Perth and Kinross	53
Islands Areas	
Orkney	—
Shetland	—
Western Isles	117

Opencast Mining

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on assurances given by British Coal about the safety of houses which are near opencast mining works *(a)* in the village of Coalburn and *(b)* in other places affected by similar activities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am not aware of the assurances to which the hon. Member refers. I understand that conditions attached to the planning permission granted to British Coal in respect of its opencast operations at Dalquhandy, Coalburn, include a requirement, prior to the commencement of work on the site, to provide an independent report into the potential effect of the proposed opencast coal development on all properties in the Coalburn area, particularly with regard to the potential loss of hydraulic pressure in former coal workings under the area and blasting.

Young Offenders

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of reports for drugs offences by children in *(a)* the Tayside region and *(b)* the Dundee area on the latest available date and for each year since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Initial police reports on children for drugs offences

Year	*City of Dundee District*	*Tayside Region*
1979	1	1
1980	1	1
1981	1	1
1982	—	—
1983	—	—
1984	4	6
1985	—	—
1986	—	1

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of reports on children for

offences involving handling offensive weapons in *(a)* the Tayside region and *(b)* the Dundee area on the latest available date and for each year since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Initial police reports on children for offences involving the handling of offensive weapons

Year	City of Dundee District	Tayside Region
1979	5	10
1980	18	26
1981	27	46
1982	12	28
1983	17	26
1984	11	20
1985	14	22
1986	11	19

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of reports for crimes and offences per 1,000 children in *(a)* the Tayside region and *(b)* the Dundee area on the latest available date for each year since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Number of initial police reports on children for crimes and offences per 1,000 children aged 8 to 15.

Year	City of Dundee district	Tayside region
1979	59	43
1980	61	46
1981	72	53
1982	59	45
1983	63	60
1984	56	48
1985	56	48
1986	58	47

The rebasing of the population estimates following the 1981 census results in a discontinuity between 1980 and 1981.

Interdicts

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps the Lord Advocate takes, pursuant to the answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *295*, when seeking interdicts, to ensure that the media are not subject to restrictions in Scotland to which they would not be subject in England.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* Where Ministers decide to seek orders against the media both in England and Wales and in Scotland in respect of the same material, appropriate consultation takes place to secure that the Lord Advocate, in approaching the Scottish courts, seeks interdict in terms which are compatible with any injunction sought from or granted by the English courts.

Catering and Domestic Service Contractors

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column 664, if he will list the employing company of those making representations on behalf of the trade associations at the meeting held on 2 October 1987.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The representatives of the trade associations which took part in the seminar on 2 October 1987 were employees of Gardner Merchant Ltd.; Gemini Taylorplan Services Ltd.; Compass Services (UK) Ltd.; Mediclean Ltd.; and RCO Contract Services Ltd. Mr. John Hall of the Contract Cleaning and Maintenance Association also took part.

Johnstone Infectious Diseases Hospital

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) why it was not decided until after contracts had been signed for a new kitchen that a recreation area would be built at Johnstone infectious diseases hospital at Renfrewshire;

(2) why it took 18 months to plan the new purpose-built block at Johnstone infectious diseases hospital; and why four to five weeks after the signing of the construction contract, work was stopped on the kitchen.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* After the Argyll and Clyde health board had let the contract, advice was received that the service to patients could be improved by the introduction of a cook-chill system for food, which would also generate revenue savings. The board therefore cancelled the part of the contract relating to the fitting-out of the kitchen, and revised the scheme to improve the recreational facilities for the patients instead. The project falls within the board's delegated limit; it is up to boards to manage the progress of such projects through the various building procedures subsequent to approval-in-principle, taking account of the availability of resources at the tender stage.

NHS Staff (Telephone Fault Repair System)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will increase health boards' budgets to cover the cost of maintaining health service employees on British Telecom's priority fault repair system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* Health boards are given expenditure allocations which are not generally related to specific items.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to reduce hospital waiting lists in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* I regard the reduction of the time patients have to wait for consultation and treatment as one of the urgent tasks facing the NHS. An additional sum of £3·6 million has already been allocated to health boards for this purpose during the current financial year. I am presently considering what further action needs to be taken. I hope to discuss this with health board chairmen in the next few weeks.

Nurses

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give figures showing the number of nurses who have left the National Health Service in Scotland for every year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* This information could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the policy of the Forestry Commission with regard to the rent and accommodation of *(a)* employees in general and *(b)* forest keepers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* In common with Government Departments generally, the Forestry Commission charges its employee tenants a "fair rent" in the spirit of the Rent Acts. Where, for management reasons, it is necessary for an employee to live in a particular commission house (a "key house") a standard rent is charged in accordance with the Civil Service pay and conditions code. The Commission's policy on accommodation is to retain only key houses and houses in locations where no alternative accommodation is available. Forest keepers in the New Forest are treated in the same way as other commission employees.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average rent charged on accommodation provided for Forestry Commission forest keepers at the latest available date; and what has been the figure on the same date for each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The information is as follows:

Year (at 1 December)	*Average Weekly Rent Charged* £
1983	11·56
1984	11·56
1985	13·09
1986	13·09
1987	24·75

The rents for 1983 to 1986 were "standard rents" determined on the basis of Civil Service rules. The 1987 rent represents a full "fair rent".

Dyslexic Children

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many schools or educational centres for the teaching of dyslexic children there are in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In accordance with the recommendations made in the report of the committee of inquiry into the education of handicapped children and young people (1978) local authorities make provision, as far as practicable, for children with special educational needs in the school system as a whole rather than in specialised establishments. Information about the number of schools providing for dyslexic children is not held centrally.

Raigmore Hospital

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the number of operating theatres at Raigmore hospital of the Highland health board, the number of operations done in each, for the last three years for which figures are available, and the percentage utilisation in terms of hours for each theatre.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[pursuant to his reply, 22 February 1988]:* There are 11 operating theatres at Raigmore hospital. The other information requested is not available centrally.

NATIONAL FINANCE

European Community Budget

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the annual ceiling on EEC expenditure in terms of pounds sterling at current prices and so on, estimated division between the four own resources, and the estimated United Kingdom contribution after deduction of the rebates.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply to him on 22 February, at column *17*, and to her second reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend East (Mr. Taylor) on 17 February, at column *613*. The Commission's latest estimates for 1988 envisage yields of agricultural and sugar levies (less 10 per cent. to cover collection costs) of 2·8 becu and of customs duties (less collection costs) of 8·6 becu, and contributions in respect of VAT of 23·6 becu. The residual financing requirement will depend on decisions still to be taken on the overall level of expenditure.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the statement on the meeting of the EEC Council, *Official Report*, 15 February, columns 705-17, whether he will include in the *Official Report* his estimate of the amount now made available to EEC under own resources, including the United Kingdom rebate, expressed in terms of the original value added tax contribution.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply to him on 22 February, at column *15*.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has revised his estimates in the Autumn Statement of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the European Economic Community for the current and future financial years, in the light of the agreement reached at the European Council on 11 and 12 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke *[holding reply 22 February 1988]:* I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 22 February, at column *17*.

VAT (Spectacles and Medical Goods)

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement following the decision of the European Court of Justice in the proceedings taken against the United Kingdom over exemption from value added tax for spectacles and certain other goods supplied with medical care.

Mr. Lilley: This decision arises from the EC sixth directive on VAT, which was adopted in 1977. The Government will abide by the court's decision, but we need to study the judgment in detail, and consult interested trade bodies, before we can make any firm decisions about how to proceed. The United Kingdom has a treaty obligation to implement rulings from the European Court. Any amendment to United Kingdom law imposing taxation would have to be proposed to, and approved by, the House of Commons.

Civil Service Manpower

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if copies of the annual report by the Treasury on Civil Service manpower changes in 1986-87 will be made available to right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr. Major: Yes. The 1986-87 annual report has been given to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee today and copies placed in the Library of the House.

Government Departments (Staff)

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of staff in post in central Government Departments at 1 January.

Mr. Major: On 1 January 1988 there were 583,485 staff in post in central Government Departments. Of these 508,628 were non-industrials and 74,857 were industrials.

Smoke Detectors and Fire Extinguishers

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the revenue received in the financial year 1986-87 from the imposition of value added tax on *(a)* smoke detectors and *(b)* fire extinguishers; and what is the estimated figure for 1987-88.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* I regret that the information is not available.

Bank of England (Registrar Department)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects a decision to be reached on the relocation of the Bank of England's registrar department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The relocation of the Bank of England's registrar's department is a matter for the Bank of England.

VAT (Funeral Charges)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking the imposition of zero rate value added tax on funeral charges rather than to exempt them from value added tax; and what impact the introduction of zero-rate value added tax on funeral charges would have upon Exchequer revenue.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has received no such representations. It is not possible to estimate the revenue effect of introducing zero rating of VAT on funeral charges without disproportionate cost.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many civil servants are employed in his Department; what are their average weekly working hours, and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four day working week or nine day fortnight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

Mr. Donald Thompson: On 1 January 1988 there were 10,357 staff in post counting part-timers as half and excluding casuals and those working fewer than 10 hours a week.

Average weekly working hours of MAFF staff are not available. However, full-time pay is normally related to "conditioned hours" for non-industrial civil servants of 36 hours per week net of meal breaks in London and 37 hours outside.

The number of staff using the Ministry's flexible working hours scheme is not available. However, use of the scheme is open to all non-industrial civil servants up to and including grade 7 with limited exceptions such as travelling officers and those employed in small units which have to be staffed throughout the day.

Thirty staff are now sharing jobs and further plans are in hand.

Nineteen staff work a four-day week; none work a nine-day fortnight.

The only officers who can retire on full pension are those who have served 40 years or have bought added years to bring them up to 40 years. We estimate that over the past three years about 8 per cent. of awards at age 60 fell in this category.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by how much common agricultural policy prices would rise in the event of the value of the deutschmark rising 5 per cent. within the ERM of the European monetary system against all EEC currencies; what would be the effect on the stabilisers; and how any increase in surpluses would be forced.

Mr. MacGregor: Arrangements agreed in 1987, but not yet activated by an EMS realignment, provide that green rates will be altered following any such realignment (which would take place in the circumstances the hon. Member cites) if the net effect of the realignment is to widen the gaps between green and market rates of exchange. The effect on common agricultural support prices expressed in national currencies would depend upon changes in the central rates of all EMS currencies, including those such as sterling, which are not in the ERM. It cannot be predicted in advance.

The stabiliser arrangements, which are not linked to agrimonetary considerations, will act to penalise production in excess of the thresholds set for the various commodities, and therefore help to constrain expenditure.

Food Prices

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the oral reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North of 4 February, *Official*

Report, column 1154, what estimate he has made of income forgone as a result of the difference between the rate of increase in food prices and all items included in the retail prices index *(a)* in total since 1979 and *(b)* for each year since 1979 assuming that the extra price of food was all passed on to the producers.

Mr. MacGregor: It is not possible to estimate the levels of farm income forgone in the hypothetical situation envisaged without making a large number of arbitrary assumptions. Such estimates would in any case be open to different interpretations.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the statement on the meeting of the European Council, *Official Report*, 15 February, column 711-12, whether he will explain how the milk quotas are working; and if he will give his estimate of the distribution of the benefit between the producer, the consumer and the taxpayer.

Mr. Donald Thompson: While they were not the Government's preferred solution to the problems of the dairy sector, milk quotas have acted as an effective limitation on surplus production within the Community. By comparison with the situation that would have prevailed had no action been taken, they are of general benefit.

Green Pound

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the impact of 1 per cent. change at the margin in the average rate of the green pound on *(a)* United Kingdom net Exchequer cost, *(b)* farm incomes and *(c)* the retail prices index.

Mr. MacGregor: The impact of a green pound devaluation designed to reduce United Kingdom monetary gaps and, where relevant, MCAs in all commodity sectors by one percentage point would depend on a number of factors, including the effects of recent changes in support arrangements. However, once all the effects had fed through a broad estimate is that it could, in a full year *(a)* increase United Kingdom expenditure by around £13 million (provisional); *(b)* add approximately £45 million to producer revenues, after taking account of increased prices of purchased feed and seed; *(c)* add of the order of 0·02 per cent. to the RPI.

Sheep Monitoring

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many scintillators were available to, and used by, his Department for the monitoring of live sheep in the restricted areas of Cumbria in each month from May 1986 to May 1987.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* After development and testing of suitable equipment in the period of August 1986, sets of live monitoring equipment became available to, and were used by, my Department for the routine monitoring of live sheep in the "mark and release" scheme in the Cumbria restricted area as follows:

	Total number of Ministry sets available for use	*Number of sets in Cumbria restricted area*
September	9	9
October	9	9
November	17	10
December	18	7
January 1987	18	7
February	18	7
March	20	14
April	19	14
May	18	13

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when live monitoring of sheep on a general basis was introduced in the restricted areas of Cumbria following the Chernobyl accident.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The option of live monitoring sheep became generally available to producers in the Cumbria restricted area from late September 1986.

Forest Damage

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in the *Official Report* the research studies currently being undertaken *(a)* within his Department or *(b)* commissioned by him into forest damage in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 19 February 1988]:* A range of publicly funded research into this area is being carried out by the Forestry Commission and the Department of the Environment.

Farm Land and Rural Development Bill

Ms. Quin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the Forestry Commission about the Farm Land and Rural Development Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* One of the purposes of the Farm Land and Rural Development Bill is to provide enabling powers for the proposed farm woodland scheme. Since this scheme is to be administered jointly by the Forestry Commission and the Agriculture Departments, the Forestry Commission has been closely involved in work on the Bill from the outset.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Rubbish Dumps

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what evidence he has of botulism and leptospirosis affecting humans and animals being spread from rubbish dumps by rats and seagulls.

Mr. Needham: None.

Cloghogue Primary School

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what what is the distance from Cloghogue primary school of the new Army look-out post at Cloghogue, Newry.

Mr. Stanley: Approximately 400 m.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the distance from Cloghogue primary school of the new police/Army building which acts as a road check on the Newry to Dublin road.

Mr. Stanley: Approximately 400 m.

Army and Police Installations

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Army and police installations are presently situated in South Armagh and Newry; and on average how many helicopter flights are made in and out of each installation per day.

Mr. Stanley: There are 18 security force installations in the South Armagh area. Helicopter flights vary considerably with weather, operational and other factors; it is not the practice to give details of operational flights.

Fencing (Compensation Claims)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many claims for compensation have been made at Drummacavall, Crossmaglen, as a result of fencing being cut by Army and police personnel during the period from January 1987 to January 1988; and how many payments have been made by way of compensation;

(2) how many claims for compensation have been made at Creevekeeran, Crossmaglen, as a result of fencing being cut by Army or police personnel during the period from January 1987 to January 1988; and how many payments have been made by way of compensation;

(3) how many claims for compensation have been made at Glassdrummon, Crossmaglen, as a result of fencing having been cut by Army or police personnel during the period from January 1987 to January 1988; and how many payments have been made by way of compensation.

Mr. Stanley: The information is as follows:

Location	*Claims for fence cutting received 1 January 1987—1 January 1988*	*Compensation paid*	*Offers made*	*Under consideration*
Drummacavall	35	31	2	2
Creevekeeran	32	27	4	1
Glassdrummon	33	31	1	1
Totals	100	89	7	4

Note: The figures quoted in the table include claims (a) for fence damage only and (b) for fence and other damage (eg to land, crops and livestock).
Claims made against the Ministry of Defence are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Arms and Ammunition (Seizures)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many seizures of arms and ammunition belonging to the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Freedom Fighters have been made by the security forces during November 1987, December 1987, January 1988 and February to date; where these seizures were made; and what quantity of arms and ammunition were seized.

Mr. Stanley: Weapons and ammunition recovered by the security forces in Northern Ireland during the period 1 November 1987 to 12 February 1988 and which are believed to belong to Loyalist paramilitary organisations are as follows:

Firearms and Ammunition recovered 1 November 1987 to 12 February 1988 believed to belong to Loyalist paramilitary organisations.

Date	*Location*	*Firearms*	*Live Ammunition (Rounds)*
3 November 1987	Belfast	2	10
7 November 1987	Newtownards	1	—
9 November 1987	Belfast	1	—
10 November 1987	Belfast	1	29
11 November 1987	Belfast	1	12
13 November 1987	Omagh	1	—
18 November 1987	Omagh	—	5
19 November 1987	Magherafelt	7	6,600
26 November 1987	Limavady	—	1
7 December 1987	Belfast	—	1
10 December 1987	Lisburn	4	1,360
25 December 1987	Belfast	3	37
29 December 1987	Lurgan	2	74
31 December 1987	Belfast	3	329
31 December 1987	Belfast	1	—
6 January 1988	Belfast	—	1
7 January 1988	Belfast	2	—
7 January 1988	Belfast	5	99
8 January 1988	Portadown	91	11,520
8 January 1988	Belfast	1	15
14 January 1988	Holywood	—	1,047
15 January 1988	Belfast	—	3

Date	Location	Firearms	Live Ammunition (Rounds)
19 January 1988	Limavady	5	—
23 January 1988	Belfast	1	67
25 January 1988	Belfast	—	2
29 January 1988	Belfast	1	—
4 February 1988	Belfast	54	40,910

Army Look-out Posts

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Army look-out posts, of the type presently being operated at Drummacavall, Creevekeeran, Glassdrummon and Cloghogue, are sited in each of the constituences of South Down, Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Mid-Ulster, Foyle and East Londonderry.

Mr. Stanley: None.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what how many Army look-out posts, of the type presently being operated at Drummacavall, Creevekeeran, Glassdrummon and Cloghogue, are sited in the constituency of Upper Bann.

Mr. Stanley: None.

Gas Connections

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will increase the amount of financial assistance given to new Housing Executive tenants for gas connection.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but I am informed by the chief executive that the Housing Executive does not give financial assistance to new tenants for gas connection.

Units of Management

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been employed in all the administration and clerical grades in each of the last 10 years in *(a)* Down unit of management, *(b)* Newry and Mourne unit of management, in County Down and *(c)* Banbridge unit of management.

Mr. Needham: The information is as follows:

Numbers of administrative and clerical staff at 31 December
Unit of management

Year	Down	Newry and Mourne[1]	Craigavon and Banbridge
1978	140	123	246
1979	147	132	252
1980	149	133	256
1981	154	151	264
1982	161	152	268
1983	155	161	265
1984	153	164	279
1985	158	176	284
1986	125	179	277
1987	119	187	282

[1] A breakdown in the form requested is not readily available.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been employed in various physician grades in each of the last 10 years in *(a)* Down unit of management, *(b)* Newry and Mourne unit of management, in County Down and *(c)* Banbridge unit of management.

Mr. Needham: The information is as follows:

Numbers of medical Staff (excluding consultants) employed at 31 December[1]
Unit of Management

Year	Down	Newry and Mourne[2]	Craigavon and Banbridge[2]
1978	26	30	78
1979	26	30	76
1980	25	36	73
1981	28	39	76
1982	28	39	73
1983	29	42	69
1984	30	44	68
1985	29	46	72
1986	31	44	72
1987	27	45	73

[1] Consultants have not been included as they are employed by the board and not by units of management.
[2] A breakdown in the form requested is not readily available.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been employed in various nursing grades in each of the last 10 years in *(a)* Down unit of management, *(b)* Newry and Mourne unit of management, in County Down and *(c)* Banbridge unit of management.

Mr. Needham: The information is as follows:

Numbers of nursing staff employed at 31 December

	Unit of management								
	Down			Newry and Mourne[1]			Craigavon and Banbridge[1]		
	Trained	Student	Others	Trained	Student	Others	Trained	Student	Others
1978	476	66	140	305	20	59	769	277	237
1979	509	56	139	364	21	58	797	311	229
1980	501	93	137	392	22	52	824	310	232
1981	520	99	133	453	25	72	853	307	236
1982	538	111	131	458	31	67	883	314	230
1983	548	103	129	465	24	67	897	326	222

	Unit of management								
	Down			Newry and Mourne[1]			Craigavon and Banbridge[1]		
	Trained	Student	Others	Trained	Student	Others	Trained	Student	Others
1984	543	84	125	468	6	66	913	321	215
1985	546	79	127	469	—	69	936	322	209
1986	551	84	137	468	—	62	934	304	191
1987	554	78	139	482	—	67	960	278	182

[1] A breakdown in the form requested is not readily available.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been employed in all the technical and ancillary grades in each of the last 10 years in *(a)* Down unit of management, *(b)* Newry and Mourne unit of management and *(c)* Banbridge unit of management.

Mr. Needham: The information is as follows:

Number of Professional and Technical/Ancillary and General Staff employed at 31 December
Unit of Management

Year	Down		Newry and Mourne		Craigavon and Banbridge	
	Professional and Technical	Ancillary and General	Professional and Technical	Ancillary and General	Professional and Technical	Ancillary and General
1978	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1979	87	948	73	1,279	163	1,694
1980	88	1,011	82	1,290	173	1,714
1981	90	1,100	84	1,393	179	1,855
1982	91	1,171	93	1,452	188	1,908
1983	102	1,227	98	1,465	173	1,961
1984	78	1,107	104	1,455	178	1,881
1985	80	1,056	109	1,416	175	1,911
1986	74	1,016	91	1,391	154	1,824
1987	69	1,055	75	1,362	135	1,815

n/a = not available.

Hospital Casualty Services

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the future of hospital casualty services in Belfast.

Mr. Needham: The responsibility for managing these services lies in the first instance with the Eastern health and social services board which has only recently issued a consultative document containing proposals to rationalise casualty services. It would therefore not be right for me to comment further at this stage.

Ground Rents

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration has been given to bringing forward legislation *(a)* to abolish ground rents and *(b)* to allow house owners and tenants to buy ground rents out for a nominal sum.

Mr. Viggers: The subject of ground rents is being considered by the land law working group as part of that body's overall review of the land law of Northern Ireland. The working group produced an interim report on ground rents in 1983 which recommended the prohibition of the future creation of ground rents and a simplified procedure for buying out existing ground rents. The working group's final report is expected to be published later this year and the Government will then give careful consideration to all the recommendations contained in that report in the light of consultations which will follow its publication.

Flats

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost per housing unit for the conversion of the Russell court flats by Belfast Improved Houses; and what was the cost per housing unit of building the Belgravia flats by the Northern Ireland Housing Association.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* Until final accounts in respect of these two schemes have been received it will not be possible to calculate average unit costs precisely. However, based on expenditure to date, average construction and related costs per unit in the Russell court and Belgravia schemes should be in the region of £25,500 and £30,000 respectively.

Castledawson Bypass

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether there has been any slippage in the original start date for the Castledawson bypass; what is now the proposed start date; and what is the present estimated cost.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 16 February 1988]:* No start date has ever been announced for the Castledawson by-pass, and at this stage it is not possible to forecast one.

The present estimated cost is £2·5 million.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the same guidelines apply for visits into Northern Ireland for Ministers from the Republic of Ireland as apply to Ministers from other

foreign countries; if there has been any change in these guidelines for Irish Ministers since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement; and if he will publish the details of these guidelines.

Mr. Tom King *[holding answer 12 February 1988]*: No such formal guidelines exist.

TRANSPORT

M1

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the accident statistics for both the north and south-bound carriageways of the M1 between Luton and junction 1, broken down by type of vehicle and month of occurrence.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The total number of recorded accidents during the years 1985 to 1987 was 290 northbound and 278 southbound. Full details are in the following table:

M1 junctions 1-10 (Luton)
Vehicle numbers and type involved in all accidents

Year and month	Number of accidents		Motorcycles		Cars		Buses/Coaches		Light goods		Heavy goods		Total vehicles	
	North	South	North	South	North	South	North	South	North	South	North	South	North	South
1985														
January	2	4	—	1	1	9	—	—	1	—	2	—	4	10
February	4	11	1	—	8	25	—	1	—	1	—	2	9	29
March	5	7	1	1	10	9	—	2	—	—	2	7	13	19
April	4	6	—	1	9	8	—	—	—	1	—	3	9	13
May	6	5	1	—	4	5	—	—	2	—	1	3	8	8
June	7	7	—	—	8	10	1	—	1	1	3	—	13	11
July	7	7	1	1	6	7	1	—	2	—	3	2	13	10
August	10	12	1	2	27	15	—	—	4	—	6	2	38	19
September	7	11	—	1	14	18	1	—	1	1	3	4	19	24
October	14	8	1	2	30	16	1	—	1	4	3	1	36	23
November	6	7	2	—	10	12	—	—	—	1	—	2	12	15
December	8	8	—	1	24	12	—	1	3	—	1	5	28	19
Total	80	93	8	10	151	145	4	4	15	9	24	31	202	200
1986														
January	7	5	—	—	14	11	1	—	—	—	3	1	18	12
February	7	5	—	—	15	10	—	—	—	1	1	3	16	14
March	8	10	2	1	16	26	—	3	1	1	—	3	19	34
April	7	3	2	2	10	4	—	—	1	—	2	1	15	7
May	4	10	—	1	11	14	—	2	—	—	6	—	17	17
June	10	6	1	—	20	5	2	—	—	3	1	1	24	9
July	15	5	3	2	12	5	—	—	5	—	7	1	27	8
August	8	13	—	—	13	33	—	—	—	2	1	3	14	28
September	17	8	2	—	47	9	—	2	1	2	2	3	52	16
October	2	7	—	1	6	19	1	—	1	—	—	3	8	23
November	10	10	2	1	23	21	—	—	1	3	4	4	30	29
December	17	6	—	—	64	7	2	—	3	—	7	3	76	10
Total	112	86	12	8	251	164	6	7	13	12	34	26	316	217
1987														
January	2	6	—	—	2	4	—	—	—	—	1	5	3	9
February	3	6	—	—	6	10	—	—	—	2	—	2	6	14
March	13	6	—	—	21	7	—	1	1	—	9	2	31	10
April	9	5	—	—	19	4	—	1	3	—	3	—	25	5
May	11	9	—	1	18	14	1	—	—	1	—	1	19	17
June	6	8	—	1	7	13	—	—	—	1	1	2	8	17
July	11	11	1	1	24	15	2	1	1	2	4	2	32	21
August	17	11	2	1	31	23	—	—	3	—	13	2	49	26
September	12	9	1	1	38	25	—	—	—	—	1	3	40	29
October	8	10	—	1	17	21	—	—	1	1	2	3	20	26
November	6	18	1	2	10	43	—	—	2	1	4	3	17	49
December	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total	98	99	5	8	193	179	3	3	11	8	38	25	250	228
35 months total	290	278	25	26	595	489	13	14	39	29	96	82	763	640

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicles are using the southern end of the M1 from Luton to junction 1, and what is the design capability of the relevant sections of the motorway.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The current annual average daily flow of traffic on the M1 between the various junctions is as follows:

	Lanes	Vehicles per day (two way)
Junctions		
1-2	D3	42,000
2-4	D3	66,000
4-5	D3	77,000
5-6	D3	69,000
6A-7	N4-S3	127,000
7-8	D4	143,000
8-9	D3	117,000
9-10 (Luton)	D3	105,000

Departmental standards used in the assessment and design of roads give an upper design threshold for a new dual three-lane motorway of 79,000 vehicles per (annual average) day. There is no upper design threshold for dual four-lane motorways. The design flow for any road is less than its maximum capacity and many sections of existing motorway are currently carrying more traffic than the upper design threshold.

M40 Extension

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth on 4 February, *Official Report*, column *683*, on the relief to be given by the M40 extension to the M1, what percentage of traffic currently using the M1 he estimates will use the M40.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is estimated that between 13,000 and 15,000 vehicles per day will transfer from the M1 to the M40 in the first year after its opening. This would represent between 11 per cent. and 17 per cent. of the total traffic on the M1 between London and the M6 junction.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many civil servants are employed in his Department; what are their average weekly working hours; and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job-sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On 1 February 1988 there were 14,492 staff employed in the Department. Eight hundred and twenty three of these work part-time, including job-sharers. Separate figures for job-sharing schemes are not available. Non-industrial staff in central London work 41 hours per week (gross); elsewhere 42 hours. Industrial staff work 44 hours per week, gross. The average weekly hours of part-time staff is 19·7 hours.

Most full-time staff work a five-day week — except those working shifts. Numbers of staff working a four-day week or nine-day fortnight are not readily available.

Flexible working hours agreements operate on a local basis; there are currently some 90 local schemes in operation. Staff are free to participate in them, or not to do so, if they wish. Figures for participants are not held centrally.

All staff are entitled to retire on pension at age 60. Maximum pension rights normally accrue after 40 years' total service. A total of 2,578 of present non-industrial staff would have 40 years' service by age 60. Those with shorter service do, however, have the opportunity to purchase some additional qualifying years for pension purposes. Corresponding figures for industrial staff are not readily available.

Smoke Hoods

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions have taken place between his Department, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Federal Aviation Administration of the United States of America on the introduction of airline passenger protection smoke hoods.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Civil Aviation Authority has statutory responsibility for aviation safety. The authority has told me that the CAA has discussed airline passenger smoke hoods with the FAA during their annual meetings. Discussions have also been held with representatives of the Transport Canada and the French Directorate General for Civil Aviation.

Tristar-Tupolev Air Miss

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the air accidents investigation branch of his Department to report on the circumstances of the air miss between a British Airways Tristar and a Bulgarian Tupolev 154 on Saturday 6 February.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The final report will not be available for some months but relevant implications will be passed to the Civil Aviation Authority, which is wholly responsible for civil aviation safety regulation, as they arise.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has reached his conclusions with regard to surface access to Heathrow, following his consultations on the Howard Humphreys and Partners study; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: Howard Humphreys and Partners is currently considering the proposals put forward during the consultation period, and is due to make a further report to me shortly. We shall then announce how the project is to be taken forward.

Ryde-Portsmouth Catamaran Service

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if any of his Departmental surveyors inspected damage to the hull of the catamaran operating between Ryde and Portsmouth; what information he has as to the existence of any risk to passengers carried on the trip back to Portsmouth after the vessel was damaged; and whether he proposes to conduct any inquiry into the incident or to make any recommendations.

Mr. David Mitchell: It is assumed that the question refers to the incident on 31 January 1988 involving the catamaran ferry Our Lady Pamela. During the passage towards Ryde, heavy seas damaged the decking to the passenger accommodation, between the two hulls. There was some ingress of water—not, however, serious. The master, after personally inspecting the damage, decided that it was safe to complete the passage and then to return to Portsmouth at reduced speed, with the few passengers who were waiting to make the crossing.

Our Lady Pamela was taken out of service on her return to Portsmouth. Surveyors in the marine office, Southampton, investigated the incident and the craft did not resume operations until repairs were completed to their satisfaction. I do not propose any further inquiry into the incident.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Weapons (French Vessels)

6. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his French counterpart on the use of British ports by French vessels carrying nuclear weapons.

23. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his French counterpart on the use of British ports by French vessels carrying nuclear weapons.

65. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his French counterpart on the use of British ports by French vessels carrying nuclear weapons.

98. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his French counterpart on the use of British ports by French vessels carrying nuclear weapons.

Mr. Ian Stewart: None.

Frigates

10. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he makes of the number of frigates available for active service when publishing total figures of such vessels.

29. **Mr. John Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he makes of the number of frigates available for active service when publishing total figures of such vessels.

34. **Mr. Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he makes of the number of frigates available for active service when publishing total figures of such vessels.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he makes of the number of frigates available for active service when publishing total figures of such vessels.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Following the acceptance into service last Friday of HMS Cornwall, the current total of our destroyers and frigates is 49, of which 42 are available for operational deployment immediately or within a short period.

WE-177 Nuclear Bomb

15. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the replacement of the WE-177 nuclear bomb.

42. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the replacement of the WE-177 nuclear bomb.

47. **Mr. David Young:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the replacement of the WE-177 nuclear bomb.

95. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the replacement of the WE-177 nuclear bomb.

Mr. Younger: Some technical studies in this area have been and are being carried out. However, no decisions on a possible replacement have yet been taken.

Joint Projects

16. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the number of defence projects in which the United Kingdom and France are currently engaged in joint research, development or procurement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Britain and France fully support the initiatives of the Independent European Programme Group aimed at enhancing collaboration in defence research, and both countries are participating in efforts to launch 14 such projects with a variety of other partners. In development we are jointly participating in the RTM322 helicopter engine programme, and both countries participate with a variety of other partners in 13 other major development programmes.

Dog Training

17. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement on the future arrangements for dog training at the Royal Army Veterinary Corps, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire.

Mr. Freeman: Peat Marwick McLintock has been awarded a consultancy contract to cost the various options for dog training in the armed services and to recommend the most suitable arrangements for the future. The study started at the beginning of January 1988. The report is expected in the early summer.

TAVR (National Employer Liaison Committee)

18. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve national employer liaison committee.

Mr. Freeman: Since 1986 the Department has accepted a number of the committee's recommendations on the recruitment, conditions of service, training and organisation of TA officers and men. A number of other recommendations remain under consideration, notably a plan for a wide-ranging press and TV campaign to be undertaken to enlist further support from young people and employers. This proposal remains under consideration along with other measures for inclusion in the Department's programme and we hope to make a decision shortly.

Intermediate Nuclear Forces Agreement

19. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has made any further studies of the implications for the defence of Britain of the intermediate nuclear forces agreement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: NATO is still considering the force adjustments which might be required as a result of the elimination of GLCMs and Pershing missiles from Europe. No decisions have yet been taken.

Multiple Launch Rocket System

20. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is planned that a nuclear warhead will be developed for the multiple launch rocket system.

35. **Mr. Litherland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is planned that a nuclear warhead will be developed for the multiple launch rocket system.

68. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is planned that a nuclear warhead will be developed for the multiple launch rocket system.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) on Friday 19 February at column *757*.

Nuclear Strategy

21. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received from the French Government regarding nuclear strategy.

94. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received from the French Government regarding nuclear strategy.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond).

39. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received from the West German Government regarding nuclear strategy.

46. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received from the West German Government regarding nuclear strategy.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short).

Air-Sea Rescue Services

22. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has yet completed his consideration of privatisation of air-sea rescue services.

40. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has yet completed his consideration of privatisation of air-sea rescue services.

41. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has yet completed his consideration of privatisation of air-sea rescue services.

90. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has yet completed his consideration of privatisation of air-sea rescue services.

Mr. Freeman: As my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces announced in this House on 11 February, we have decided that, wherever there is a military requirement for search and rescue, the service will continue to be provided by the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force.

Our consideration of the most effective deployment of our military search and rescue helicopters continues, and we shall announce the outcome as soon as possible.

32. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is now in a position to give a decision on the proposals by Bristow Helicopters Ltd. to take over the search-and-rescue units currently operated by the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy.

Mr. Freeman: As my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces announced in this House on 11 February, we have decided that, wherever there is a military requirement for search and rescue, the service will continue to be provided by the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. Our consideration of the most effective deployment of our military search and rescue helicopters continues, and we shall announce the outcome as soon as possible.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends that the helicopters presently deployed at RAF Leuchars, for search and rescue operations, should be replaced by more modern equipment.

Mr. Freeman: Studies are continuing into the deployment of Royal Navy and Royal Air Force helicopters for search and rescue requirements. The results will be announced shortly.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many hours have been flown by each of the helicopters deployed at RAF Leuchars for search and rescue operations.

Mr. Freeman: During their time in service with the Royal Air Force, the helicopters currently deployed to RAF Leuchars for search and rescue (SAR) operations have flown 8,744 hours and 6,046 hours respectively (as of 19 February 1988). It is not possible to state precisely the proportion of time these have spent on SAR operations, but on average, Royal Air Force helicopters assigned to SAR operations in the United Kingdom fly for 470 hours each year, including training.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the dates of manufacture and of coming into service of all the helicopters deployed at RAF Leuchars for search and rescue operations.

Mr. Freeman: The in-service dates of the two aircraft currently deployed at RAF Leuchars are 1964 and 1968 respectively. The precise dates of manufacture are not readily available.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many helicopters, and of what make and type, are deployed at RAF Leuchars for search and rescue operations.

Mr. Freeman: Two Westland mark 2 Wessex helicopters.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to conclude current discussions on the future of air-sea rescue services.

Mr. Freeman: As my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, announced in the House on 11 February, we have decided that, wherever there is a military requirement for search and rescue, the service will continue to be provided by the Royal Navy and Royal Air

Force. Our consideration of the most effective deployment of our military search and rescue helicopters continues, and we shall announce the outcome as soon as possible.

Pilots

24. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current ratio of pilots entering training to those leaving the forces prematurely.

52. **Mr. Meale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current ratio of pilots entering training to those leaving the forces prematurely.

71. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current ratio of pilots entering training to those leaving the forces prematurely.

Mr. Freeman: In 1987 the ratio of students entering training as pilots to trained pilots leaving the services prematurely was approximately 2.2: 1. This ratio is derived from numbers of entries to and exits from the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force and the Army Air Corps.

87. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current ratio of pilots entering training to those leaving the forces prematurely.

Mr. Freeman: In 1987 the ratio of students entering training as pilots to trained pilots leaving the services permanently was approximately 1.3: 1. The ratio is derived from numbers of entries to and exits from the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force, and the Army Air Corps.

Nuclear Weapons

25. **Mr. Wall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to the number and nature of nuclear weapons accidents or systems malfunctions.

67. **Ms. Gordon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to the number and nature of nuclear weapons accidents or systems malfunctions.

92. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to the number and nature of nuclear weapons accidents or systems malfunctions.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise).

80. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to the extent to which the new generation of nuclear weapons will have a lower threshold of use.

85. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to the extent to which the new generation of nuclear weapons will have a lower threshold of use.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The British Government, like their NATO allies, remain firmly committed to nuclear deterrence and to the strategy of flexible response. Our policy is to ensure that deterrence is sufficiently effective to prevent any need for present nuclear weapons or future ones ever to be used. No change in strategy is contemplated which would increase the likelihood of nuclear weapons being used. In order to maintain deterrence at the minimum forces necessary, the Alliance must maintain nuclear forces which are effective, responsive and survivable.

Nuclear Test Veterans (Compensation)

26. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on proposed compensation to ex-service men following the recent report on United Kingdom nuclear test veterans.

28. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on proposed compensation to ex-service men following the recent report on United Kingdom nuclear test veterans.

30. **Mr. Snape:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on proposed compensation to ex-service men following the recent report on United Kingdom nuclear test veterans.

93. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on proposed compensation to ex-service men following the recent report on United Kingdom nuclear test veterans.

Mr. Sainsbury: The National Radiological Protection Board published a study on the health of British nuclear tests veterans on 28 January. In the light of the conclusions of that study, which I set out in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on 28 January at column *309*, the Ministry of Defence does not consider there is any basis for claims for common law compensation for damage to health from exposure to ionising radiation arising from participation in the British nuclear test programme. Claims for war pensions are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

59. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the effect of nuclear weapons testing upon ex-service men who served in previous contaminated areas.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the report published by the National Radiological Protection Board on 28 January, which I referred to in my answer on 28 January, at column *309*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key).

61. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received regarding the case of a judicial inquiry following the report of the National Radiological Protection Board on the incidence of cancer amongst ex-service men involved in nuclear tests; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: My noble Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement met a deputation of right hon. and hon. Members and two officers of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association on 16 February, at which this proposition was raised. My noble Friend made it clear that we do not consider that a judicial inquiry would be appropriate or would serve any useful purpose in this case particularly in view of the National Radiological Protection Board's recently published study.

Frigate Building Programme

27. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the frigate building programme.

Mr. Sainsbury: Since the answer I gave on 26 January, at columns *181-82*, the type 22 frigate, HMS Cornwall was delivered to Portsmouth by her builders, Yarrow Shipbuilders Ltd., on 19 February.

Nuclear Modernisation (Conference)

31. **Mr. Heffer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which representatives of his Department attended the Wehrkunde conference discussions on nuclear modernisation.

36. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which representatives of his Department attended the Wehrkunde conference discussions on nuclear modernisation.

37. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which representatives of his Department attended the Wehrkunde conference discussions on nuclear modernisation.

83. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which representatives of his Department attended the Wehrkunde conference discussions on nuclear modernisation.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The theme of this year's Wehrkunde conference was United States-Soviet disarmament

negotiations and their consequences. I attended, together with the permanent under-secretary of state (designate) and the deputy under-secretary of state (policy).

Trident

33. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications for the safety of the Trident missile programme of the recent test firing of a Trident 2 missile at Cape Canaveral.

57. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications for the safety of the Trident missile programme of the recent test firing of a Trident 2 missile at Cape Canaveral.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon).

38. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimated cost of the Trident missile project to date.

Mr. Sainsbury: As announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 21 January, at column *775*, the currently estimated total cost of the United Kingdom Trident programme is £9,043 million (at 1987-88 prices and £1=$1·62). Actual expenditure to the end of December 1987 was £1,370 million.

81. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the progress of the Trident programme.

Mr. Sainsbury: In total, fewer than 20 representations concerning the progress of the Trident programme have been received from members of the public since the general election.

Conventional Defence Improvement Initiative

43. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress in the conventional defence improvement initiative.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The conventional defence improvements exercise, which is fully supported by the United Kingdom, was reviewed by NATO Defence Ministers at their December meeting. Ministers welcomed the progress made in addressing key deficiencies in NATO's defence posture.

Military Personnel (Training)

44. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what countries are currently receiving help or advice on the training of military personnel from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The countries which have received military training from the United Kingdom, either through United Kingdom training courses or the loan of service personnel to their particular Governments, in the current financial year are as follows:

Algeria
Australia
Austria
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belgium
Belize
Bermuda
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Burma
Cameroon
Canada
Chile
China
Congo
Cyprus
Denmark
Dominica
Egypt
El Salvador
Federal Republic of Germany
Fiji
Finland
France
Gambia
Ghana
Gibraltar
Greece
Guyana
Hong Kong
India
Indonesia
Iraq
Iceland
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
KenyaKuwait
Lesotho
Luxembourg
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Malta
Mauritius
Mozambique
Nepal
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nigeria
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Philippines
Portugal
Qatar
Republic of Korea
Saudi Arabia
St. Lucia
St. Vincent
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Somalia
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Tanzania
Thailand
Trinidad
Tunisia
Turkey
Uganda
United Arab Emirates
United States of America
Yemen Arab Republic
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Nuclear Weapons (Modernisation)

45. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had about plans for the modernisation of short-range and of intermediate-range nuclear weapons in western Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has frequent meetings with his NATO colleagues during which a wide range of issues affecting the defence and security of the Alliance are discussed, including the need to maintain effective nuclear forces.

Staff Dispersal

48. **Mr. McTaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all current plans for relocation *(a)* within Greater London and *(b)* elsewhere of units of his Department.

49. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all current plans for relocation *(a)* within Greater London and *(b)* elsewhere of units of his Department.

76. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all current plans for relocation *(a)* within Greater London and *(b)* elsewhere of units of his Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith).

97. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many divisions within his Department have been relocated out of London since 1979; what plans he has for further relocation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is not possible to provide this information without undue cost and effort. However, the Glasgow dispersal programme has resulted in 1,330 jobs moving to Scotland and will meet its 1,400 target later this year. The overall number of civilian employees in London has fallen by over 10,000 since 1979, though this reduction also reflects the continuing search for efficiency and economy in the Department.

Future relocation possibilities will continue to be examined; but moves must be justifiable in both operational and economic terms.

AWRE Aldermaston

50. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of the A90 building at AWRE Aldermaston; and when he expects it to be ready for production.

63. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of the A90 building at AWRE Aldermaston; and when he expects it to be ready for production.

82. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of A90 building at AWRE Aldermaston; and when he expects it to be ready for production.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Members to the answers I have recently given to the hon. Members for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 20 January 1988, at column *763*, and for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) on 1 February 1988, column *446*.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of the A90 building at AWRE Aldermaston; and when he expects it to be ready for production.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I have recently given to the hon. Members for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 20 January 1988, at column *763* and for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) on 1 February 1988, at column *446*.

Tucano Aircraft

51. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the introduction of Short's Tucano into Royal Air Force service.

89. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the introduction of Short's Tucano into Royal Air Force service.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) and for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes).

"Discriminate Deterrence" (Report)

53. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom nuclear weapons policy of the United States Department of Defence report "Discriminate Deterrence."

54. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom nuclear weapons policy of the United States Department of Defence report "Discriminate Deterrence."

86. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom nuclear weapons policy of the United States Department of Defence report "Discriminate Deterrence."

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy, which produced the report entitled "Discriminate Deterrence", is independent of the United States Department of Defence. It remains the British Government's view that the NATO strategy of flexible response provides the best basis for Alliance security.

Jet Provost

55. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current cost of maintaining the Jet Provost planes in operation.

56. **Mr. McLeish:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current cost of maintaining the Jet Provost planes in operation.

96. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current cost of maintaining the Jet Provost planes in operation.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien).

Polaris

58. **Mr. Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent arrangements Her Majesty's Government have entered into with the United States Government governing the use of Polaris.

Mr. Ian Stewart: None.

Northern Ireland

60. **Sir John Biggs-Davison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the operations of the armed forces in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Military operations in support of the Royal Ulster Constabulary carried out by the armed forces continue to make an invaluable contribution to the fight against terrorism in Northern Ireland.

Following a review by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland of the deployment of security forces in the Province, a new brigade headquarters is to be established to improve anti-terrorist operations and patrolling in the border areas, leaving the existing two brigades responsible for supporting the police in the rest of the Province.

74. **Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the conditions in which soldiers are billetted in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Freeman: Some of the accommodation for the Army's permanent garrison in Northern Ireland is not up

to modern standards, and a modernisation programme is in hand. However, certain accommodation which is below the normal scaled provision has been provided specifically for personnel on short tours of duty. Single men serving in Northern Ireland pay no accommodation charges and charges for married quarters are abated by the single quartering charge appropriate to rank.

Dual-Capable Aircraft

62. **Mr. Allen Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft types there are in the Royal Air Force currently classified as dual-capable.

73. **Mr. Cabom:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft types there are in the Royal Air Force currently classified as dual-capable.

88. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft types there are in the Royal Air Force currently classified as dual-capable.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes).

Nuclear Forces (Modernisation)

64. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on developments in modernisation of nuclear forces.

99. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement about the programme to modernise NATO nuclear forces.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I have nothing to add to the replies given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on 24 March 1987 at column *162* and by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) on 26 January 1988 at column *167*.

Departmental Land

66. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much land in the United Kingdom is owned by his Department; and what were the comparable figures five, 10 and 15 years ago.

Mr. Freeman: As at 1 October in each of the years requested, MOD land holdings (freehold and leasehold) were as follows:

	Acres
1987	592,537
1982	609,908
1977	623,245
1972	656,634

Western European Union

69. **Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he proposes to meet representatives of the Western European Union; whether he supports enlargement of the Western European Union; and if he will make a statement on the defence implications of such enlargement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State next plans to meet his WEU colleagues in The Hague on 18-19 April. All member countries have agreed that the WEU is not a closed shop, but that any enlargement should strengthen, not jeopardise, its cohesion. We would therefore expect any new members to accept and give concrete expression to the obligations of both the Brussels treaty and the WEU's platform on European security interests, agreed by WEU Ministers at their meeting in The Hague last October.

Personnel Training (Fatalities)

70. **Mr. Ashdown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have died in service in the past 10 years as a result of training.

Mr. Freeman: The number of service personnel who have died in service in each of the last 10 years, as a result of training, is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1978	55
1979	32
1980	38
1981	25
1982	33
1983	32
1984	29
1985	29
1986	30
[1]1987	29

[1] Provisional figures only.

Cruise Missiles

72. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy not to permit the basing of air-launched cruise missiles in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I cannot add to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member on 26 January 1988 at column *155*.

French Defence Minister (Co-operation)

75. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on co-operation with the French Minister of Defence on nuclear weapons.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 18 December 1987 at column *752*.

Marconi (Contracts)

77. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the value of Government defence contracts placed with Marconi over the past five years.

Mr. Sainsbury: The overall value of contracts placed by my Department with the Marconi group of companies over the past five years is approximately £2·5 billion.

European Fighter Aircraft

78. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects the European fighter aircraft to enter service with the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) on 8 December at column *142*.

Racism (Armed Forces)

79. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further action he is taking to eliminate racism in the armed forces.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 8 February 1988, at column *82*. Any complaint of racial discrimination brought by a member of the armed forces would be fully investigated under redress of grievance procedures provided for in the Service Discipline Acts. If proven, appropriate action would be taken against those involved.

Warsaw Pact

84. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his North Atlantic Treaty Organisation country counterparts on a draft mandate for negotiations on conventional stability between the members of the Alliance and the Warsaw pact; what is the date for convening of negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the implications for United Kingdom defence expenditure.

Mr. Ian Stewart: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has regular discussions, which must remain confidential, with his NATO colleagues on a wide range of issues, including arms control. We hope that the proposed talks on conventional stability will begin this autumn. It would be premature to speculate on what the outcome of the talks might be or on the possible implications for United Kingdom defence expenditure.

Land Disposal

91. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will speed up the disposal of surplus Ministry of Defence land.

Mr. Freeman: It is MOD policy to keep its property holdings under review and to dispose of any properties for which there is no longer a defence requirement. We have a major disposal programme in hand and in the year ending 31 March 1987 we disposed of property worth about £75 million. We hope to do at least as well this year, and even better next year.

Sentries

Sir John Biggs-Davison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to ensure that sentries on duty outside the royal palaces and royal residences, and their horses, are not subjected to unpleasant attentions from tourists and others; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 19 February.

Arms Control

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much time has been spent by arms control officials in his Department on work specifically relating to naval arms control during the last six months.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Ministry of Defence does not record the time spent by officials on particular arms control issues.

Naval Operations

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what studies his Department has undertaken on the probability of forward naval operations during a time of heightened international tension, or during a war; if he will list the scenarios considered in any such studies; and if he will place a copy of such studies in the Library;

(2) if the Royal Navy has prepared any plans for attacks against Soviet ballistic missile submarines stationed in the Barent and Norwegian seas for use in the event of war.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The tasks of the Royal Navy in tension and war are described in paragraphs 404 to 406 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1987". My Department carries out a continuous programme of studies into the conduct of those tasks, but, in accordance with the practice of successive Governments, I am not generally prepared to disclose details of operational plans.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has had discussions with his counterpart in the United States about United States naval plans contained in the United States maritime strategy, which calls for major forward naval operations to be undertaken against Soviet ballistic missile submarines in the Barent and Norwegian seas in the event of war.

Mr. Ian Stewart: My right hon. Friend regularly holds discussions with the United States Secretary of State for Defence on a wide range of defence matters of mutual interest. It is not our general practice to disclose the details of such discussions.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if British nuclear submarines have exercised during the last five years in support of United States naval vessels practising the naval operations called for by the United States maritime strategy, including exercises against simulated Soviet ballistic missile submarines.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Royal navy nuclear-powered submarines regularly exercise with the navies of the United States and other NATO allies to practise their NATO wartime roles.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Health Authorities (Administration)

Mr. Wells: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the annual administration cost of the North West Thames regional health authority and of the North East Thames regional health authority since 1979.

Mr Newton: The following information is derived from the annual accounts of health authorities comprising the North West Thames and North East Thames regions it would be misleading to interpret regional health authority data in isolation from that for the districts they manage. Regions are managed in an integrated way and, therefore, to provide a more accurate picture, regional health authority and district health authority figures have been combined.

Expenditure on headquarters administration[1]

£ thousands

	Regional Health Authority	*District Health Authorities*[2]	*Total*
North West Thames Region			
1979-80	3,356	22,747	26,103
1980-81	4,096	28,413	32,509
1981-82	4,661	30,856	35,517
1982-83	5,122	27,730	32,852
1983-84	5,072	27,694	32,766
1984-85	5,665	28,012	33,677
1985-86[3]	5,240	23,758	28,998
1986-87	6,926	25,506	32,432
North East Thames Region			
1979-80	4,524	23,544	28,068
1980-81	5,638	29,990	35,628
1981-82	5,307	30,892	36,199
1982-83	5,845	32,766	38,611
1983-84	6,269	33,165	39,434
1984-85	8,113	33,221	41,334
1985-86[3]	9,167	29,950	39,117
1986-87	10,187	32,628	42,815

[1] Expenditure on headquarters administration includes all current expenditure on the pay and pay related costs of staff of all disciplines (including general managers) employed at regional and district/area headquarters levels and their office costs and overheads. It excludes the cost of secretarial and clerical support staff employed in departments at hospital and unit levels: such costs are regarded as operational.

[2] Predecessor area health authorities for the years prior to NHS restructuring (1 April 1982).

[3] Prior to 1 April 1985 many of the district/area health authorities within each region had an associated family practitioner committee (FPC) and those authorities' expenditure figures for the years before that date include elements relating to FPCs' administrative expenses which are not separately identifiable.

National Insurance

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how long it would take for *(a)* a married man, *(b)* a single man and *(c)* a single woman, all of whom retired on 31 December 1987, all of whom started work at the age of 16 years and all of whom were on the average national wage throughout their working life, to get back by way of retirement pension all the money they had paid in national insurance contributions, assuming that the current basic pension remains constant.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is in the table. Line 1 represents the time taken to recover in retirement pension the whole cash value of employee national insurance contributions paid by a man or woman on average manual earnings, if the whole NI contribution allocated to benefit purposes is assumed to be available for the purpose. Line 2 assumes that only the share of NI contributions required to fund retirement pensions is available for the purpose. The figures for a married man include pension paid to his wife on his contribution record.

(years)

	Line 1	*Line 2*
(a)	1·6	1·2
(b)	2·3	1·6
(c)	1·7	1·3

Hospital Beds

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the change in the number of beds in Northumberland district health authority for each year since 1982, including whatever data are available for 1987.

Mrs. Currie: The available information is given in the table. Over the period the number of in-patient cases treated increased by 11 per cent. from 24,973 to 27,713 and the number of in-patient cases treated per available bed increased by 23 per cent. from 6·5 to 8·0

Average daily available beds, Northumberland District Health Authority

Year	*Average daily number of available beds*	*Change* *Number*	*Per cent.*
1982	3,826·6	−43·8	−1·1
1983	3,766·1	−60·5	−1·6
1984	3,727·4	−38·7	−1·0
1985	3,664·3	−63·1	−1·7
1986	3,481·7	−182·6	−5·0

Community Care

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his policy towards elderly patients discharged from National Health Service hospital to be cared for in the community, either in a residential home at their own cost or with relatives, who refuse to enter a home or where the relatives refuse to care for them.

Mrs. Currie: The objective of all services for elderly patients must be to provide the right care to meet the individual's needs. The decision on whether and when a patient is ready for discharge is for the clinical judgment of the doctor in charge of the case, but we would expect the planning of the discharge to be based on co-operation between all the professions involved. We would also expect there to be a multi-disciplinary assessment of future care needs, involving both the patient and his or her family. The Department is currently working on a draft circular setting out the requirements for discharge and the planning to be undertaken.

The provision of good services depends on effective co-operation at the local level between the different professions, the patient and his or her family and, where appropriate, the local authority, voluntary agencies and the private sector. If a need for residential care is assessed, the local authority has a general duty, under part III of the National Assistance Act 1948, to provide residential care where this is not otherwise available.

Mr. Wall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the requirements for claimants of community care grants to give information on their social worker to his Department; and what kind of information social workers will be required to provide for his Department.

Mr. Scott: Applicants for community care grants are not obliged to give information on their social worker nor is there any requirement that social workers must provide information to the social fund officer. Social workers will not be asked to make decisions on applications nor to assess priorities between individual clients—that is for the social fund officer. Social fund officers may contact social workers with the agreement of an applicant but this will be done, subject to strict confidentiality rules, solely

to clarify or supplement information in cases where the social services are also involved, for example on resettlement into the community.

Mastectomy

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many mastectomies were performed in England and Wales for *(a)* female patients and *(b)* male patients in the latest two-month period for which figures are available.

Mrs. Currie: The information is not available centrally in the form requested. Statistics in respect of the last complete year for which information is available are given in the table. Information for Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Estimated number of mastectomies performed in NHS hospitals, by sex In-patients and day cases combined, England 1985

	Estimated Numbers	
	Male	*Female*
Partial Mastectomy[1]	730	35,630
Total Mastectomy	670	9,290
All Mastectomies	1,400	44,920

[1] Includes all excisions of breast tissue, local or otherwise (for example, removal of lumps and cysts), whether for malignant or benign conditions.

Hospital Referrals

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to rates of patient referral to hospitals by different general practitioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: While there has been some basic research into general practitioners' referral rates, no data are held centrally on rates of patient referral by different doctors.

Rates (Cleveland)

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services by how much he estimates the rates bill borne by his Department in Cleveland will be increased in money terms, consequent upon the increase in rates determined by Cleveland county council for 1988-89.

Mr. Portillo: I understand that any increase in the rates level in Cleveland for 1988-89 and, hence, the cost to this Department, has not yet been finally determined.

Royal Victoria Hospital (Newcastle)

Mr. Ted Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many consultants are employed in the department of ophthalmology at the Royal Victoria hospital at Newcastle-upon-Tyne; and what was the number five years ago.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that this information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may therefore wish to write to the chairman of Newcastle district health authority for the information he requires.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what measures he is taking to assess the effectiveness of the Government's publicity campaign against drug misuse.

Mrs. Currie: Each stage of the anti-drugs campaign in the mass media has been carefully developed to ensure credibility and effectiveness, through interviews with young people, and testing of ideas and creative materials on representatives of the target audience. The campaign has also been evaluated through a series of surveys of young people and parents.

A report of the most recent survey findings, a copy of which is available in the Library, shows that the 1986-87 stage of the campaign was very widely noticed across all media, with radio commercials having been particularly successful at reaching large numbers of young people. Awareness of the health risks of using heroin was broadly sustained, while there was an increase in awareness of adverse social consequences, particularly in the belief that heroin makes the user lose interest in the opposite sex. Overall, claimed resistance to trying heroin or cocaine remains high, with 93 per cent. of those interviewed in each case claiming that they would definitely not try the drug if offered it by a friend.

The 1987-88 stage of the campaign will be evaluated at the start of 1988, and results should be available in the spring.

Abortions

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether, assuming a continuation of the current rate at which abortion is performed, he will give an estimate of the total number of abortions which will have been performed under the Abortion Act 1967 by the 20th anniversary of the implementation of that Act.

Mr. Newton: The total number of notifications of abortions to resident and non-resident women, which will have been carried out under the Abortion Act 1967, from 27 April 1968 to 31 March 1988 in England and Wales is estimated at 2,648,000, assuming a continuation of the current rate at which abortions are performed. This estimate does not take into account any seasonal variation, nor other changes which may affect the numbers of notifications.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a breakdown by district health authority of the average number of abortions performed in that district on each working day of the latest year for which figures are available, in *(a)* National Health Service hospitals, *(b)* private clinics and *(c)* in total.

Mr. Newton: No, for reasons of maintaining confidentiality.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the total number of abortions under the terms of the Abortion Act 1967; how many of these abortions were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother; and what is the latter figure expressed as a percentage of the former.

Mr. Newton: The information is shown in the table, including all notifications received by 30 September 1987.

Total number of notifications of abortions performed under the terms of the Abortion Act 1967, and the number performed under Ground 5 of the Act, England and Wales, residents and non-residents

	Number
Total *(a)*	2,761,637
Ground 5 *(b)*	126
Percentage *(b)* of *(a)*	0·005

Ground 5 of the 1967 Abortion Act states that abortions may be performed in emergency to save the life of the pregnant woman.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the total number of abortions performed at 18 weeks or more gestation under the terms of the Abortion Act 1967, since the passage of the Act; how many of these abortions were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother; and what is the latter figure expressed as a percentage of the former.

Mr. Newton: I regret that the full information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, statistics already available are as follows: Between 1 January 1981 and 30 June 1987, 53,682 notifications were received of abortions performed at 18 weeks or more gestation. Of these, 15 (0·028 per cent.) were carried out in emergency in order to save the life of the pregnant woman.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a breakdown, by regional health authority in England and Wales, of the total number of abortions so far performed under the terms of the Abortion Act 1967, stating in each case how many of the abortions in each region were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother; and if in each case he will express the latter figure as a percentage of the former.

Mr. Newton: The information is shown in the tables. The pre-1974 hospital regions are not, with the exception of Wales and Birmingham (which became West Midlands), precisely the same geographical areas as the post-1974 regional health authorities. The data for the two groups of areas are thus presented separately.

Table A

Number of notifications of abortions performed by area of usual residence, and number of mentions of ground 5[1], Regional Health Authorities, England and Wales 1974-86

Area of usual residence	*(a) total*	*(b) mention of ground 5*	*Per cent. age (b) of (a)*
Northern	71,952	4	0·006
Yorkshire	92,749	4	0·004
Trent	119,990	7	0·006
East Anglian	47,996	2	0·004
North West Thames	183,077	4	0·002
North East Thames	181,097	4	0·002
South East Thames	138,139	2	0·001
South West Thames	105,935	3	0·003
Wessex	69,944	4	0·006
Oxford	69,087	3	0·004
South Western	78,973	3	0·004
West Midlands	172,779	5	0·003
Mersey	70,899	4	0·006
North Western	113,030	2	0·002
Wales	75,617	3	0·004

[1] Ground 5 of the 1967 Abortion Act permits abortions to be performed "in emergency in order to save the life of the pregnant woman."

Table B

Number of notifications of abortions performed by area of usual residence, and number of mentions of Ground 5, Hospital regions, England and Wales 1968-73[1]

Area	*(a) Total*	*(b) Ground 5*	*percentage (b) of (a)*
Newcastle	24,694	2	0·008
Leeds	21,377	7	0·033
Sheffield	31,880	3	0·009
East Anglian	14,010	4	0·029
North West Metropolitan	71,835	4	0·006
North East Metropolitan	34,857	5	0·014
South East Metropolitan	37,560	8	0·021
South West Metropolitan	49,272	3	0·006
Wessex	14,705	4	0·027
Oxford	16,962	1	0·006
South Western	25,963	2	0·008
Birmingham	46,708	7	0·015
Manchester	34,289	10	0·029
Liverpool	15,201	1	0·007
Wales	22,513	2	0·009

Note: Ground 5 of the 1967 Abortion Act permits abortions to be performed "in emergency in order to save the life of the pregnant woman."
[1] 1968 - 27 April to 31 December only (after the Act came into force).

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a breakdown, by regional health authority, using his estimate of the cost of an abortion in the answer of 26 October 1987, *Official Report*,

column *178*, of the total cost to the National Health Service of all the abortions performed in that region both in National Health Service facilities and through agency arrangements, under the terms of the Abortion Act 1967.

Mr. Newton: The estimated total revenue cost of abortions performed in each regional health authority area in 1986, including abortions performed in NHS facilities and through agency arrangements, on the basis requested is as follows:

Regional Health Authority of Termination	*Estimated Total Cost* £
Northern	911,370
Yorkshire	633,420
Trent	1,037,510
East Anglian	677,960
North West Thames	1,017,280
North East Thames	1,382, 440
South East Thames	891,140
South West Thames	745,110
Wessex	599,250
Oxford	612,340
South Western	875,160
West Midlands	1,288,770
Mersey	521,560
North Western	754,120

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he will make it his policy to introduce legislation to prevent the use of National Health Service resources for the termination of pregnancy in cases where the abortion is not performed for health reasons;

(2) if he will make it his policy to introduce legislation to make it an offence to receive payment for the performing of an abortion or for referring a woman for an abortion.

Mr. Newton: As my hon. Friend is aware, the Government's general policy is that legislation on abortion is for the initiative of private Members.

Health Authorities (Population)

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the estimated population for each of the last 10 years for *(a)* the South West Thames regional health authority area, *(b)* the North West Thames regional health authority area, *(c)* Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton district health authority area and *(d)* Hounslow and Spelthorne district health authority area; and what estimates are available for the future.

Mrs. Currie: The latest available information is given in the table. Population projections based upon the mid 1985 estimates have been produced for each year up to 2010. The projected figures for a selection of years are given in the table.

Persons (thousands)

Health Authority	*Estimated resident population at mid year*				
(a) *Actual*	*1977*	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*
South West Thames RHA	2,932	2,935	2,941	2,948	2,948
North West Thames RHA	3,468	3,463	3,455	3,454	3,454
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton DHA	237	235	233	232	232
Hounslow and Spelthorne DHA	297	297	297	297	297
	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
South West Thames RHA	2,946	2,948	2,954	2,962	2,965
North West Thames RHA	3,449	3,456	3,471	3,482	3,488
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton DHA	229	229	229	230	230
Hounslow and Spelthorne DHA	296	292	289	286	284
(b) *Projected (1985-based)*		*1991*	*1996*	*2001*	
South West Thames RHA		3,012	3,074	3,132	
North West Thames RHA		3,541	3,600	3,644	
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton DHA		229	230	231	
Hounslow and Spelthorne DHA		287	289	290	

Elderly People (Care)

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the percentage change in Department of Health and Social Security payments made in respect of people in private residential care homes or nursing homes for the elderly, since 1979 and in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that information is not available in the form requested. Information on expenditure for all client groups was given in my reply to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) on 17 December 1987 at column *704*. In that reply I gave the percentage change in expenditure since 1979 as 4,580 per cent. This should have been 4,490 per cent. Between 1984 and 1986 the increase was 129·5 per cent.

Hospital Admissions (West Midlands)

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in order of frequency the 10 most common forms of surgery for which patients are admitted to hospitals in the West Midlands regional health authority.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested is given in the table.

Estimated number of the 10 most common forms of surgery (in order of frequency) performed in NHS non-psychiatric, non-maternity hospitals, West Midlands regional health authority, 1985

Condensed[1] *list operation number*		*Operation*	*Estimated number of operations*
1.	080	Dilatation, Curettage, Biopsy and Excision of Lesion of Cervix	13,380
2.	093	Treatment of Fracture by Operations	10,200
3.	061	Cystoscopy (with Destruction of Lesion)	9,090
4.	038	Operations on Abdominal Wall, Peritoneum and Mesentery	9,010
5.	023	Tonsils and Adenoids	8,410
6.	092	Post-natal or Post-abortion Operations	7,440
7.	078	Hysterectomy	7,110
8.	039	Inguinal Hernia Operations	6,750
9.	100	Arthroplasty	5,770
10.	044	Operations on Appendix	5,580

[1] OPCS condensed list of surgical operations.
Source: Hospital In-patient Enquiry (HIPE).

Regional Health Authorities (Allocations)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the allocation to each regional health authority in each year since 1982-83, adjusted by the hospital and community health services pay and price deflator.

Mr. Newton: The table shows net revenue expenditure by each region in each year between 1982-83 and 1986-87 at 1986-87 prices as measured by the hospital and community health services pay and price deflator. Comparable figures for 1987-88 will not be available until after the end of the financial year.

Net revenue expenditure 1982-83 to 1986-87 expressed in 1986-87 prices as measured by the hospital and community health services pay and price deflator

(£ million)

	1982-83	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Northern	647·831	655·353	655·829	659·965	661·827
Yorkshire	723·166	730·179	732·431	742·156	742·884
Trent	864·674	877·279	888·487	897·057	910·134
East Anglian	356·701	367·017	372·521	379·397	385·890
North West Thames	780·766	781·037	778·043	769·287	769·150
North East Thames	986·170	986·690	977·813	964·913	965·116
South East Thames	864·084	868·345	857·396	852·994	847·591
South West Thames	657·089	659·274	653·518	645·461	645·521
Wessex	517·740	528·812	537·594	537·968	545·371
Oxford	412·533	414·130	423·446	424·674	427·887
South Western	629·645	637·660	637·083	640·741	645·921
West Midlands	1,004·986	1,016·644	1,025·778	1,034·512	1,043·458
Mersey	541·585	539·271	539·656	539·104	539·042
North Western	905·975	908·425	909·223	913·661	916·526

Source: Health authorities' summarised income and expenditure accounts.

Pensions

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to how many new applications for pensions have been made as a result of the publication by Thames Television of Paul Lewis's pamphlet, entitled "Pensions from the 1940s", and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available.

Shropshire Health Authority

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the capital expenditure on administrative buildings of the Shropshire health authority for 1986-87 and the figures projected in its capital expenditure programme.

Mrs. Currie: The 1986-87 annual accounts of the Shropshire health authority show capital expenditure relevant to administrative offices of the authority as £99,421. This sum represents about 1 per cent. of the year's total capital expenditure incurred on schemes within the district (£8·65 million) which is recorded mainly in the annual accounts of the West Midlands regional health authority.

For more detailed information and projected figures my hon. Friend may wish to contact the chairman of the Shropshire health authority, who may be able to assist.

Interpreters

Mr. Wall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what provision there is for full-time interpreters *(a)* at his Department's office in Manningham lane, Bradford, and *(b)* at other offices of his Department.

Mr. Portillo: As an experiment, an existing member of staff at Bradford (West) local office has acted as a full-time interpreter and liaison officer to the local Asian community. This has been a successful venture and we are considering whether it can be extended to similar offices in other parts of the country.

Social Fund Forms

Mr. Wall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what provisions have been made for social fund application forms to be available in languages other than in English.

Mr. Portillo: Claim forms for the social fund, in common with other social security claim forms, will be available only in English, apart from the customary separate provision for Welsh speakers in Wales.

Funeral Costs

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what will be the maximum grant or loan paid to applicants in respect of funeral costs after April 1988; and what will be the maximum period over which loans will have to be repaid.

Mr. Portillo: Regulations provide for a funeral payment from the social fund to cover the essential expenses of certain prescribed items commensurate with a simple funeral. After April 1988 provision will continue as before April, except that the claimant or his partner must be in receipt of income support or family credit (which replace supplementary benefit and family income supplement respectively), or housing benefit. The claimant or a member of his family must be responsible for the costs of a funeral but any payment made is recoverable from the estate of the deceased only if there is sufficient money in the estate once it is settled.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what criteria will be used to decide whether an applicant receives a grant or a loan to meet the funeral costs of a relative or close friend; how quickly decisions will be given on such applications; and whether there will be a right of appeal against refusal to make a grant or loan.

Mr. Portillo: Regulations [The Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Regulations 1987] prescribe the criteria for payment of funeral costs. The claimant or member of his family must be responsible for the funeral costs and the claimant or partner must be in receipt of certain qualifying income-related benefits. Capital over £500 held by the claimant and partner is taken into account in assessing the amount payable, as is other money available for funeral costs such as contributions from relatives or insurance settlements. Decisions are made by adjudication officers as soon as possible and are subject to appeal, in the first instance to a social security appeal tribunal.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many single childless people under the age of 25 years are on the householder rate of supplementary benefit.

Mr. Portillo: At February 1986, the latest date for which the information is available, the number was 129,000.

Rating Reform

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has made of the total cost of compensating claimants on *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit and *(c)* housing benefit for the 20 per cent. contribution to domestic rates following the implementation of the Social Security Act 1986.

Mr. Portillo: Estimates of additional public expenditure costs in 1988-89 are as follows:

	£ million
(a)	280
(b)	25
(c)	64
Total	369

Housing Benefit

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how much he estimates the case load for housing benefit will increase as a consequence of the proposals to deregulate the private rented sector in 1988-89 and 1989-90.

Mr. Portillo: It is not possible to make such estimates with any degree of precision.

Health Authorities (Amalgamation)

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has taken a decision on the proposal submitted to him by the North West Thames regional health authority to amalgamate the district health authorities of Brent and Paddington and North Kensington; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have today approved this proposal and am arranging for orders to be laid before Parliament. We are proposing that the new authority will come into being on 1 April 1988 and will be called the Parkside health authority.

In view of the comments made on the consultation document issued last autumn I am writing to the regional chairman indicating areas to which I wish special attention to be paid. A number of respondents drew attention to the problems posed to the City of Westminster by the configuration of health authority boundaries in this part of inner London. I think that it is important to try and find a solution to these difficulties, and I have therefore asked the chairmen of NE and NW Thames regional health authorities to see what might be done.

Manchester Royal Eye Hospital

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress has been made since the oral reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, from the Minister for Health on 16 December 1987, *Official Report*, column 1097, towards the institution of a day case cataract unit at the Manchester royal eye hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 17 February 1988]:* I understand that the Central Manchester health authority is discussing proposals for the unit with the regional health authority.

Medical Equipment (Maintenance)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will place in the Library the report on in-house maintenance of medical equipment in the National Health Service, compiled by David Fernandez; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* I am arranging for a copy of the report to be placed in the Library. The report makes a number of useful

recommendations on which action has been proceeding. Some of the recommendations relating to the allocation of responsibilities for equipment management and to the commercial arrangements for maintenance contracts need further examination and in some cases more detailed development of guidelines. Work is continuing under the direction of the director of NHS procurement.

Cervical Cancer Smear Tests

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many laboratories in the United Kingdom deal with cervical cancer smear tests; and what are their locations.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The available information for NHS laboratories in England is given in the table. Figures for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

ENGLAND—TOTAL 196

Northern Regional Health Authority
Hartlepool General Hospital
North Tees General Hospital
Middlesbrough General Hospital
Cumberland Infirmary
West Cumberland Hospital
Darlington Memorial Hospital
Shotley Bridge General Hospital
Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Gateshead
Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle upon Tyne
Newcastle General Hospital
Sunderland District General Hospital

Yorkshire Regional Health Authority
Castle Hill Hospital
Grimsby District General Hospital
Scunthorpe General Hospital
Northallerton Maternity Hospital
York New District General Hospital
Scarborough Hospital
New Harrogate District Hospital
St. Lukes Hospital, Bradford
Royal Halifax Infirmary
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary
General Hospital (Dewsbury)
Wharfedale Hospital (Otley)
Clarendon Wing General Infirmary Leeds
St. James Hospital
Pinderfields General Hospital, Wakefield
Pontefract General Infirmary

Trent Regional Health Authority
Chesterfield & North Derbyshire Royal Hospital
Derbyshire Royal Infirmary, Derby
The Leicester Royal Infirmary
Lincoln County Hospital
Pilgrim Hospital, Boston
Victoria Hospital, Worksop
Kings Mill Hospital, Sutton-in-Ashfield
Nottingham City Hospital
Barnsley District General Hospital
Doncaster Royal Infirmary
Rotherham District General Hospital
Northern General Hospital, Sheffield
The Jessop Hospital for Women, Sheffield

East Anglia Regional Health Authority
Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge
Peterborough District Hospital
West Suffolk General Hospital, Bury St Edmunds
Ipswich Hospital, Heath Road Wing
Norfolk and Norwich Hospital
The James Paget Hospital, Great Yarmouth
Queen Elizabeth District General Hospital, Kings Lynn

North West Thames Regional Health Authority
Bedford General Hospital (North and South Wings)
Luton and Dunstable Hospital
Lister Hospital, Stevenage
Queen Elizabeth II Hospital, Welwyn Garden City
Watford General Hospital-Shrodells Wing
Barnet General Hospital
Edgware General Hospital
Northwick Park Hospital, Harrow
Hillingdon Hospital
Mount Vernon Hospital, Northwood
West Middlesex Hospital, Isleworth
Ashford Hospital
Ealing Hospital-General Wing
Central Middlesex Hospital, London NW10
St. Marys Hospital, London W2
Charing Cross Hospital, London W6
Westminster Hospital, London SW1
St. Stephens Hospital, London SW10

North East Thames Regional Health Authority
St. Andrews Hospital, Billericay
Chelmsford and Essex Hospital, Chelmsford
Essex County Hospital, Colchester
Herts and Essex General Hospital, Bishops Stortford
Southend General Hospital
Oldchurch Hospital, Romford
Harold Wood Hospital
University College Hospital, London WC1
Middlesex Hospital, London W1
St. Pauls, London WC2
Royal Northern Hospital, Londn N7
St. Bartholomews Hospital, London EC1
St. Andrews Hospital, London E3
London Hospital Whitechapel, London E1
Chase Farm Hospital, Enfield
North Middlesex Hospital, London N18
King George Hospital, Ilford
Whipps Cross Hospital, London E11

South East Thames Regional Health Authority
Brighton General Hospital
Eastbourne District General Hospital
Royal East Sussex Hospital, Hastings
William Harvey Hospital, Willesborough, Ashford
Kent and Canterbury Hospital
Joyce Green Hospital, Dartford
All Saints Hospital, Chatham
Pembury Hospital, Pembury, Tunbridge Wells
Queen Marys Hospital, Sidcup
Greenwich District Hospital
Brook General Hospital, London SE18
Orpington Hospital, Orpington, Kent
St. Thomas' Hospital, London SE1
King's College Hospital, London SE5
Guy's Hospital, London SE1
Lewisham Hospital

South West Thames Regional Health Authority
St. Peter's Hospital, Chertsey
Friary Park Hospital, Camberley
New Royal Surrey County Hospital, Guildford
Epsom District Hospital
New East Surrey Hospital, Redhill
Royal West Sussex, Chichester
Cuckfield Hospital
Worthing Hospital
Kingston Hospital
Queen Mary's Hospital, London SW15
St. George's Hospital, London SW17
Reg Cell Path Unit Merton and Sutton

Wessex
Christchurch Hospital
Poole General Hospital
Dorset County Hospital, Dorchester

St. Mary's General Hospital, Portsmouth
Southampton General Hospital
Royal Hampshire County Hospital, Winchester
Salisbury General Hospital
Princess Margaret Hospital, Swindon
Royal United Hospital, Bath
Royal Isle of Wight County Hospital, Ryde

Oxford
Wexham Park Hospital, Slough
Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading
Stoke Mandeville Hospital
Wycombe General Hospital
Kettering and District General Hospital
Northampton General Hospital
Churchill Hospital, Oxford

South Western Regional Health Authority
Bristol Maternity Hospital
Southmead Hospital
Royal Cornwall Hospital (Treliske)
Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, Heavitree
Derriford Hospital, Plymouth
Torbay Hospital
Cheltenham General Hospital
Gloucester Royal Hospital
Taunton and Somerset Hospital, Musgrove Park Branch
Yeovil General Hospital

West Midlands Regional Health Authority
Bromsgrove General Hospital
Hereford County Hospital
Worcester Royal Infirmary (Castle Street Branch)
Royal Shrewsbury Hospital
Staffordshire General Hospital, Stafford
Central Outpatients Department, Stoke
Burton General Hospital, Burton-upon-Trent
St. Cross Hospital, Rugby
George Eliot Hospital, Nuneaton
Warwick General Hospital
Birmingham and Midland Hospital for Women
Birmingham Maternity Hospital
Good Hope Hospital, Sutton Coldfield
Selly Oak Hospital, Birmingham B29
Dudley Road Hospital, Birmingham B18
Walsgrave General Hospital, Coventry
Russells Hall District General Hospital, Dudley
Sandwell District General Hospital, West Bromwich
Solihull Hospital
Walsall Manor Hospital
The Royal Hospital, Wolverhampton

Mersey Regional Health Authority
The Countess of Cheshire Hospital, Chester
Leighton Hospital, Crewe
Halton General Hospital, Runcorn
Macclesfield D.G.H.
Warrington District General Hospital
The Womens Hospital, Liverpool 8
Royal Liverpool Hospital
Broadgreen Hospital, Liverpool L14
Whiston Hospital, Prescot
St. Helens Hospital (including Peasley Cross)
Southport General Infirmary
Walton Hospital, Liverpool 9
Fazakerley Hospital, Liverpool 9
Arrowe Park District General Hospital, Wirral
Clatterbridge Hospital, Wirral

North Western Regional Health Authority
Lancaster Moor Hospital
Blackpool Victoria Hospital
Royal Preston Hospital
Blackburn Royal Infirmary
Burnley General Hospital
Ormskirk and District General Hospital
Bolton General Hospital
Bury General Hospital
North Manchester General Hospital, Crumpsall
St. Mary's Hospital, Manchester 13
Wythenshawe Hospital, Manchester 23
Christie Hospital and Holt Radium Institute, Manchester 20
Oldham and District General Hospital
Birch Hill Hospital, Rochdale
Hope Hospital, Salford
Stepping Hill Hospital, Stockport
Tameside General Hospital, Ashton-under-Lyne
Royal Albert Edward Infirmary, Wigan

Special Health Authorities
The Royal Marsden Hospital Fulham Road
Hammersmith Hospital
Queen Charlottes Maternity Hospital
Chelsea Hospital for Women

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average period of time which each laboratory in the United Kingdom takes to send the results of cervical cancer smear tests back to patients.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* I regret that this information is not held centrally in the form requested. According to Health Circular (88)1 published on 12 January, the target for laboratories is that they should aim to send the result of a cervical smear to the doctor who submitted it within a maximum of one month of receiving it. Health authorities in England reported that in December laboratories serving 56 out of 191 districts were not achieving the target. The average processing time for these 56 districts was seven weeks. Where backlogs do exist they are being tackled mainly by the recruitment and training of more staff, by the use of other laboratories and by overtime working.

Orthotists

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to make a decision on his Department's report on the training and provision of orthotists in the National Health Service; what is his policy on the provision of additional orthotists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* There is no departmental report on this. Training of orthotists is a matter for the Orthotic and Prosthetic Training Council. I understand that the council's joint assessment panel has established a working party to consider the future of education and training. It is expected to present its final report to the council in March. Recruitment of NHS orthotists is a matter for individual health authorities. A small departmental team has undertaken a study of the arrangement for the delivery of the orthotics service, its efficiency and efficacy. Its report which considers management rather than manpower issues, is now being finalised.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 24 February 1988

NORTHERN IRELAND

Education for Mutual Understanding Project

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the education for mutual understanding project, in the light of the delay in granting maintained status to fully integrated schools.

Dr. Mawhinney: In addition to various initiatives designed to improve cross-community contacts I am continuing my support for the education for mutual understanding project under the auspices of the Northern Ireland Council for Educational Development. Work on an EMU guideline for teachers is at an advanced stage and should be published in time for the start of the 1988-89 academic year.

The operation of this project has no relationship to the granting of maintained status to integrated independent schools. In order to achieve this status, these schools must be able to prove their future viability.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many civil servants are employed in his Department; what are their average weekly working hours; and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job-sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

Mr. Stanley: There are some 23,800 non-industrial civil servants employed in the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments (excluding prison officer grades). The normal conditioned hours are 41 hours a week for staff in London and 42 for staff in Belfast inclusive of meal breaks.

Taking each of the elements *(a)* to *(d)* in the hon. Member's question in turn:

(a) about 12,300 staff work flexitime;

(b) 64 staff participate in job-sharing schemes;

(c) three staff are working a four-day week, but none works a nine-day fortnight; and

(d) information about the number of staff who would be able to accrue 40 years' reckonable service for pension purposes by the age of 60 is not readily available.

Children

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the number of four-year-olds in Northern Ireland, the number of three-year-olds and the proportion of the population which is under five years old.

Mr. Needham: The latest available figures, taken from the 1986 mid-year population estimates, are as follows:

	Number
Four-year-olds	26,594
Three-year-olds	26,753
Under five years old	[1]8·7

[1] Percentage of the population.

Children (Education)

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what figures are available to indicate the numbers of four-year-olds in Northern Ireland who attend *(a)* nursery education, *(b)* pre-school playgroups or *(c)* primary school;

(2) what figures are available to indicate the numbers of three-year-olds in Northern Ireland who attend *(a)* nursery education, *(b)* pre-school playgroups or *(c)* primary school.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is as follows:

Numbers of three and four-year-olds in education in 1986-87

	Age three		*Age four*	
	Full time	*Part time*	*Full time*	*Part time*
Nursery schools	1,232	1,464	1,321	715
Nursery classes in primary schools	1,017	361	783	215
Primary schools (primary classes only)	106	—	16,859	—

The information on pre-school playgroups is not available in the form requested. However, at 30 June 1987, the latest date for which figures are available, the total number of children under five years of age who attended pre-school playgroups, including playbuses, was 12,954.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the proportion of three-year-olds in Northern Ireland *(a)* in single parent families, *(b)* whose parents are unemployed and *(c)* whose parents receive family income supplement.

Mr. Needham: The information is not available. However the proportion of three-year-olds in families receiving one parent benefit is approximately one in 17 of all three-year-old children in families receiving child benefit.

Public Expenditure Commentary

Mr. Charles Wardle: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to publish the Northern Ireland public expenditure commentary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: The "Northern Ireland Commentary on Public Expenditure Plans 1988-89 to 1990-91" has been published today. Copies are available in the Vote Office. This is the first Northern Ireland commentary and it aims to improve the information available to Parliament and the public by amplifying the material in the Northern Ireland chapter of "The Government's Expenditure plans 1988-89 to 1990-91". (Cm. 288-II).

HOME DEPARTMENT

Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act 1985

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been taken and convictions made under the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act 1985, section 1.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not available from the records of court proceedings held centrally.

Licensed Premises

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions to date have arisen under the Licensed Premises (Exclusion of Certain Persons) Act 1980.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information held centrally, which may be incomplete, is given in the table.

Persons proceeded against and found guilty under s.2 of the Licensed Premises (Exclusion of Certain Persons) Act 1980
England and Wales

Year	Number of persons	
	Total proceeded against	Total found guilty
1981	1	—
1982	9	9
1983	3	3
1984	3	3
1985	2	2
1986	1	1

Police Pensions

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to rescind regulation C5 of the Police Pensions Regulations 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. Regulation C5 provides for the payment of modified pension benefits to the widow of a police officer who marries in retirement, on the basis of service after 6 April 1978. To extend the provisions to cover service before that date would breach the important principle that improvements in public service pension entitlements are not made retrospectively.

Immigration (Child Benefit)

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether child benefit is treated as support from public funds for the purposes of the immigration rules; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: No. The definition of "public funds" in the immigration rules deals with access only to those benefits that are means tested and non-contributory.

London (Crime Trends)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the trends in crime in London in 1987.

Mr. John Patten: I am very pleased to note that the Metropolitan police recorded 4 per cent. fewer crimes in 1987 than in 1986. The falls of 7 per cent. in theft of and from cars and 4 per cent. in burglary are an indication of what is possible and lend support to the efforts to persuade the public to take crime prevention measures. The drop of 11 per cent. in recorded rape offences is also encouraging. We are of course concerned about the increases in robbery (up 12 per cent.) and in violence against the person (up 11 per cent.), and we fully support the Commissioner's policy of concentrating resources on these types of crime.

Terrorism

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will provide a breakdown by nationalities of people currently held under section 12 or section 13 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984, or articles 4 or 9 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Order 1984;

(2) if he will provide a breakdown by nationalities of people currently held under section 12 or section 13 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984, or articles 4 or 9 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Order 1984.

Mr. Hurd: On 23 February 1988 no one was detained in Great Britain under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 or the Prevention of Terrorism (Supplemental Temporary Provisions) Order 1984. Examinations at ports under article 4 of the order are recorded only where a person is examined for more than one hour. On 23 February 1988 no one was examined for more than one hour.

Crime (International Co-operation)

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to furthering mutual assistance in criminal matters between the United Kingdom and other countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: At present the United Kingdom can provide only limited assistance to other countries in the investigation and prosecution of criminal offences. Unlike most other European states, we are not a party to any treaties or conventions establishing mutual assistance arrangements of wide scope. The assistance we receive from other countries is inevitably limited by our inability to offer them the full assistance which we would wish. The nature of much crime — terrorism, drugs, fraud, kidnapping, racketeering and so on — has become increasingly international and we must play our part in combating it.

In November 1986 my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary set up an interdepartmental group of officials to review the position. They have concluded that there are strong arguments in favour of legislation which would enable us to accede to the European convention on mutual assistance, implement the scheme relating to mutual assistance in criminal matters within the Commonwealth adopted at Harare in 1986, and enter into bilateral arrangements of a similar nature. Their proposals are outlined in a discussion paper which has been issued today. Copies have been sent to a wide range of interested organisations, and I have placed a copy in the Library. The Government would welcome the views of hon. Members and others on the group's proposals, and we shall be glad to receive comments by 30 April.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Wines and Spirits

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has to the current price of wines and spirits in the European Economic Community and the level of duty imposed on them; and what equivalent information he has for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lilley: Information on prices of wines and spirits in the EC member states is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Rates of excise duties and VAT in each of the member states, according to the latest information available, are set out in the table:

Country	*Wine Excise Duties*		*Vat*	*Excise Duty*	*Spirits VAT*
	Table wine not exceeding 12 per cent. alcohol by volume (pence per 70 cl bottle)	*Fortified wine at 18 per cent. alcohol by volume (pence per 75 cl bottle)*		*Spirits at 40 per cent. alcohol by volume (pence per 75 cl bottle)*	
			Per cent.		*Per cent.*
Belgium	17	33	25	273	25
Denmark	78	154	22	[1]956	22
France	2	93	18·6	233	18·6
Germany	0	26	14	258	14
Greece	0	1	6	8	[2]6,16
Ireland	125	194	25	524	25
Italy	0	7	9	47	18
Luxembourg	[3]0·7	[4]15,22	[5]6,12	183	12
Netherlands	17	34	20	285	20
Portugal	0	0	[6]8,17	43	[7]17,30
Spain	0	0	12	83	12
United Kingdom	69	127	15	473	15

Notes:
[1] Duty on spirits in Denmark consists of a specific element (£12·57 per litre of pure alcohol) and an ad valorem element (60 per cent. of taxable value).
[2] The higher rate of VAT applies to ouzo and brandy.
[3] The nil rate applies to Luxembourg produced wines.
[4] The lower rate applies to Luxembourg and Netherlands produced wines.
[5] The lower rate applies to still wine not exceeding 13 per cent. alcohol of volume.
[6] The lower rate applies to table wine.
[7] The lower rate applies to non-aged wine brandy and grappa brandy.
Rates of exchange as at 8 February 1988.
Source: EC Excise Duty Tables.

Royal British Legion (VAT)

Mr. Ted Garrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will exempt the Royal British Legion from value added tax on goods and services connected with its welfare activities.

Mr. Lilley: Decisions on changes in taxation are a matter for my right hon. Friend's Budget Statement.

Sherry

Mr. Whitney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to the policy of the European Community Commission on excise duty distinctions between sherries out of proportion to relative alcoholic strengths.

Mr. Lilley: Although the EC Commission has tabled certain proposals on the harmonisation of excise duties, the rates charged at present are a matter for individual member states.

Customs

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence there is of an improvement in the speed with which goods are cleared through customs since the adoption of the single administrative document.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The introduction of the single administrative document and the harmonised system of tariff classification on 1 January 1988 were designed to facilitate trade. The effect of the changes on customs staffing has been broadly neutral, but there should be savings in costs in the commercial sector.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with his European Community colleagues about evidence of the incidence of bribery of customs officers at internal borders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* None.

EC Budget Council

Mr. Wolfson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of the European Community Budget Council on 23 February.

Mr. Brooke: The Budget Council met in Brussels on 23-24 February. I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council reached agreement in principle, subject to a reserve by Italy and clarification of some technical details, on a draft Community budget for 1988. The Italian delegation agreed to signify its assent or otherwise by Monday 29 February. The proposed draft budget reflects the conclusions of the Brussels European Council on 11-12 February.

The proposed draft provides for total expenditure of 44·7 billion ecu (becu) (£31·0 billion) in commitment

appropriations and 43·4 becu (£30·1 billion) in payment appropriations, the latter being equivalent to about 1·11 per cent. of Community GDP. (All sterling equivalent figures are calculated at the rate of 1·44 ecu to the pound, used by the Commission in its latest budgetary proposals).

In keeping with the Brussels European Council conclusions, the proposed draft makes basic provision for agricultural guarantee expenditure of 27·5 becu (£19·1 billion), with a further 1·24 becu (£0·9 billion) for disposals of existing stocks and a monetary reserve of 1 becu (£0·7 billion) to be called up, as agreed at the European Council, only if changes in the ecu/dollar rate increase spending requirements by more than 400 million ecu (mecu) (£277 million). The Council agreed that budgetary provision would be adjusted if necessary later in the year to enable implementation of the new arrangements which are to be agreed for systematic depreciation of new stocks. On other compulsory expenditure, the draft provides for 3·9 becu of commitment and payment appropriations, equivalent to £2·7 billion.

On non-compulsory expenditure, the Council agreed on figures of 11·0 becu (£7·6 billion) for commitment appropriations and 9·8 becu (£6·8 billion) for payment appropriations. The increases over 1987 are 7 and 5·8 per cent. respectively, compared with the "maximum rate" of increase, calculated in accordance with the treaty, of 7·4 per cent. The European Parliament will have the right under the treaty to add a further half maximum rate "margin" to these amounts (some 380 mecu for commitment and 341 mecu for payment appropriations). The draft includes provision for the structural funds of 7·8 becu (£5·4 billion) in commitment appropriations, as agreed at the European Council, and 6·8 becu (£4·7 billion) in payment appropriations.

The Brussels European Council conclusions provided that, in order to cover the Community's 1988 budget requirements pending entry into force of the new own resources decision, member states would make available any necessary sums in excess of the existing own resources ceiling, after completion of the appropriate national procedures, in the form of non-repayable advances on payments due after entry into force of the new own resources decision.

In accordance with this, 11 members of the Council agreed to a provisional and indicative draft of an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA). This follows the precedent set after the 1984 Fountainebleau European Council. On the basis of the Commission's expenditure proposals, before amendment by the Council and the European Parliament, the indicative draft envisages that member states would pay a sum of some 7·7 becu (£5·3 billion) corresponding to the new fourth own resource, with a United Kingdom share of some 1,274 mecu (£884 million). This extra financing would be partially offset by smaller VAT payments, leaving total extra financing, compared with the maximum amount available under the existing own resources ceiling, of around 6·0 becu (some £4·2 billion). The intention is that member states should contribute to whatever extra financing is finally agreed in accordance with the amounts which they would have paid if the new own resources decision had taken effect immediately. I made it clear at the Council that the United Kingdom will not be able to pay over any of the additional sums unless and until the United Kingdom Parliament's approval has been obtained.

The Italian delegation argued that the GNP-based financing of the United Kingdom's abatement should be brought to account against the new fourth own resource (thus in effect increasing the proportion of the budget which would be financed in accordance with VAT shares) rather than (as proposed by the Commission) within the VAT ceiling. The delegation reserved its position accordingly on the draft budget and agreed to signify its agreement or otherwise by midnight on 29 February.

The final figures for the Inter-Governmental Agreement will be determined in the light of the total budget as adopted later in the year and of the own resources decision as finally agreed. Meanwhile, technical details are still under discussion in Brussels.

If the Italian delegation lifts its reserve, the draft budget will be sent forward to the European Parliament and the next step will be for the European Parliament to give the budget its first reading. If the Italian delegation does not lift its reserve, the German presidency hopes to arrange a further meeting of the Budget Council next week.

THE ARTS

Museums (Attendance)

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts, whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1987 reported by the national museums and galleries in England for which he is responsible, broken down into the individual institutions but comprising their outstations, with figures in each case of the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1986; and whether, in the case of such museums or galleries as charge for admission, he will in addition specify the number of tickets sold.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 18 January 1988]:* The estimated numbers of visitors during 1987 to the 11 national museums and galleries for which I am responsible are as follows:

	Estimated attendance in 1987	*Percentage change from 1986*
British Museum	4,007,885	+ 3·6
Imperial War Museum	1,184,959	+ 0·8
National Gallery	3,566,568	+12·1
National Maritime Museum	442,005	+16·3
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	1,328,844	+14·2
National Portrait Gallery	590,841	−14·5
Science Museum	4,732,784	− 1·9
Tate Gallery	1,742,156	+51·1
Victoria and Albert Museum	1,398,668	− 2·8
Wallace Collection	168,109	− 1·6

Note:
Figures for the British Museum (Natural History) are not yet available.

Museums record visitors by a variety of methods, which in most cases are regarded as being accurate to within 5 per cent. only. This limits the interpretation of apparent annual changes in attendance, which may also be affected by other factors including, for example, the numbers of overseas visitors to London at individual museums and galleries.

Information on the numbers of admission tickets sold is not held centrally. The numbers will depend on the policies and practices and practices of individual

institutions, for example as regards the number and nature of events for which admission is charged and the treatment of parties and family groups.

DEFENCE

Rapier

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to order a replacement for tracked Rapier.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is too early to say when, or with what, Tracked Rapier may be replaced. An improved mark of the existing equipment will shortly enter service to maintain the capability of the system against the threat.

Research and Development Contracts

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many contracts or agreements for research and development have currently been placed directly or indirectly with United Kingdom universities and other educational institutions by the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Burghfield; what is their total value; and with which United Kingdom universities or other such education institutions they have been placed;

(2) how many contracts or agreements for research and development have currently been placed directly or indirectly with United Kingdom universities and other educational institutions by the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Llanishen; what is their total value; and with which United Kingdom universities or other such educational establishments they have been placed;

(3) how many contracts or agreements for research and development have currently been placed directly or indirectly with United Kingdom universities and other educational institutions by the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Foulness; what is their total value; and with which United Kingdom universities or other such educational institutions they have been placed;

(4) how many contracts or agreements for research and development have currently been placed directly or indirectly with United Kingdom universities and other educational institutions by the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston; what is the total value and with which United Kingdom universities or other such educational institutions they have been placed.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Atomic Weapons Establishment has currently 41 contracts or agreements placed with 23 United Kingdom universities and other educational institutions, all arising from the work at Aldermaston. Their value is £2 million. It is not our policy to give further details of these arrangments.

Weather Forecasts (Inquiry)

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when, following his announcement on 20 October 1987, he intends to publish the findings of the internal inquiry conducted by the director general of the Meteorological Office into the weather forecasts that the Meteorological Office made in the period preceding the storms of Thursday 15 and Friday 16 October 1987 over southern England; when he intends to publish the report prepared by Sir Peter Swinnerton-Dyer FRS, and Professor Robert Pearce; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. George Younger: Sir Peter Swinnerton-Dyer and Professor Pearce presented their report in January. They considered the findings of the internal inquiry by the director general.

Their report found that the lack of adequate public warning occurred because uncertainty about atmospheric conditions in the Biscay area led to a lack of agreement between computer forecasts and, although no individual was seriously to blame for this, because the forecasters did not recognise that the computer forecasts would underestimate the speed of wind over Britain.

Their report recommends changes in training forecasters, the use of more senior staff for forecasting, enhanced computer and associated facilities, and changes in menthods of working (including the way in which weather information is presented by the media).

In saying all this, their report endorses the findings and recommendations of the director general's report which are concerned in particular with the need for more and better observations, for developments in the computer models and for a review of the procedures for handling severe weather warnings to the emergency authorities.

I have accepted all the recommendations of both reports, and where further action is required, it will be taken as soon as possible.

Copies of both reports are being published; and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

La Belle Discotheque

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, columns *540-41*, why he is unwilling to call for a report from the general officer commanding British Sector, West Berlin, on the progress of police investigations into the La Belle discotheque outrage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The case of La Belle discotheque bombing has already been thoroughly investigated. The Government remain satisfied that there is no evidence available implicating Syria or any country other than Libya.

Royal Navy

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy artificers left the following branches in each year since 1979; and how many left early *(a)* air engineering, *(b)* marine engineering and *(c)* weapon and electrical engineering.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The numbers of Royal Navy artificers who left the specified branches in each year since 1979 are as follows:

	Air engineer	*Marine engineer*	*Weapon/ Electrical engineer*
(a) Total numbers leaving			
1979	29	298	244
1980	31	340	169
1981	22	233	138
1982	33	208	131
1983	69	291	292
1984	62	312	314

	Air engineer	Marine engineer	Weapon/ Electrical engineer
1985	68	326	392
1986	70	371	444
1987	75	345	357
(b) Numbers leaving prior to completion of engagement			
1979	15	201	109
1980	13	257	87
1981	6	178	65
1982	5	152	83
1983	7	170	96
1984	14	144	119
1985	15	159	154
1986	18	189	184
1987	22	176	150

Notes:
1. Weapon and electrical engineers includes marine and air engineers with electrical engineering qualifications.
2. From April 1983, artificers include all mechanicians.
3. Promotions to officer are excluded from the above numbers.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy artificers qualified to serve in the following branches in each year since 1979 *(a)* air engineering, *(b)* marine engineering and *(c)* weapon and electrical engineering.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The numbers of Royal Navy artificers who qualified to serve in the trained strength of the specified branches is as follows:

	Air engineering	Marine engineering	Weapon and electrical engineering
1979	27	85	138
1980	21	114	152
1981	27	107	195
1982	13	107	183
1983	32	162	319
1984	41	169	417
1985	42	180	386
1986	63	119	311
1987	33	167	402

Notes:
1. From April 1983, artificers include all mechanicians.
2. Joining the trained strength has been based on advancement of artificers to petty officer artificer, (previously artificer 2). For mechanicians the equivalent rate was mechanician 2-3 rate.
3. Weapon and electrical engineers include marine and air engineers with electrical engineering qualifications.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy mechanicians qualified to serve in the following branches in each year since 1979 *(a)* air engineering, *(b)* marine engineering and *(c)* weapon and electrical engineering.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The numbers of Royal Navy mechanicians who qualified to serve in the trained strength of the specified branches are as follows:

	Air engineering	Marine engineering	Weapon and electrical engineering
1979	25	121	168
1980	23	140	189
1981	23	83	189
1982	22	109	158
1983	[1]	[1]	[1]
1984	[1]	[1]	[1]
1985	[1]	[1]	[1]
1986	[1]	[1]	[1]
1987	[1]	[1]	[1]

Notes:
1. Joining the trained strength has been based on advancement to the old equivalent of petty officer.
2. Weapon and electrical engineers include marine and air engineers with electrical engineering qualifications.

[1] No figures are available since the merger of mechanicians with artificers in April 1983.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy technicians qualified to serve in the following branches in each year since 1979 *(a)* air engineering, *(b)* marine engineering and *(c)* weapon and electrical engineering.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* There are no technicians in any of the branches quoted, and the term "technician" is therefore taken to refer to mechanics. The numbers of Royal Navy mechanics who qualified to serve in the trained strength of the specified branches in the years quoted is as follows:

Year	Air engineering	Marine engineering	Weapon & electrical engineering
1983	125	284	785
1984	50	382	708
1985	26	255	637
1986	85	329	744
1987	95	335	626

Notes:
1. Records for the years prior to 1983 do not reliably identify the groups specified.
2. Weapon and electrical engineers include marine and air engineers with electrical engineering qualifications.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy mechanicians left the following branches in each year since 1979; and how many left early *(a)* marine engineering, *(b)* air engineering and *(c)* weapon and electrical engineering.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The numbers of Royal Navy mechanicians who left the specified branches in each year since 1979 are as follows:

	Marine Engineer	Air Engineer	Weapon/ Electrical Engineer[1]
(a) Total numbers leaving			
1979	131	40	251
1980	67	27	172
1981	80	14	122
1982	104	26	101
1983	15	4	34
1984	[2]	[2]	[2]
1985	[2]	[2]	[2]
1986	[2]	[2]	[2]
1987	[2]	[2]	[2]
(b) Numbers leaving prior to completion of their engagement			
1979	72	18	103
1980	24	12	61
1981	18	3	37
1982	26	9	13
1983	2	[2]	4
1984	[2]	[2]	[2]

	Marine Engineer	Air Engineer	Weapon/ Electrical Engineer[1]
1985	[2]	[2]	[2]
1986	[2]	[2]	[2]
1987	[2]	[2]	[2]

[1] "Weapon/electrical engineers" include marine and air engineers with electrical engineering qualifications.
[2] Because of the merger of artificers and mechanicians in April 1983, no separate figures for mechanicians are available for the later years.
Note: Promotions to officer are excluded from the above numbers.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy technicians left the following branches in each year since 1979; and how many left early *(a)* marine engineering, *(b)* air engineering and *(c)* weapon and electrical engineering.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* There are no technicians in any of the branches quoted, and the term "technician" is therefore taken to refer to mechanics. The numbers of Royal Navy mechanics who left the specified branches in each year since 1979 are as follows:

	Marine engineer	Air engineer	Weapon/ Electrical engineer
(a) Total numbers leaving			
1979	1,180	251	1,266
1980	969	167	1,134
1981	662	142	736
1982	567	90	494
1983	547	98	496
1984	554	122	652
1985	825	275	912
1986	823	180	893
1987	715	178	839
(b) Numbers leaving prior to completion of their engagement			
1979	1,020	174	1,017
1980	847	125	942
1981	566	115	564
1982	459	71	358
1983	440	75	392
1984	433	97	465
1985	664	200	681
1986	621	96	666
1987	560	129	592

Notes:
1. Weapon and electrical engineers include marine and air engineers with electrical qualifications.
2. Promotions to officer are not included.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy officers graduated in the following branches for each year since 1979 *(a)* seaman, *(b)* supply and secretariat, *(c)* instructor, *(d)* weapons engineer, *(e)* marine engineer, *(f)* pilot and *(g)* observer.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The term "graduated" is taken to refer to those RN officers qualifying to join the trained strength. Numbers in respect of the specialisations and sub-specialiations listed were as follows:

	Seaman	Supply	Instructor	Engineers[1]	Pilot	Observer
1979	127	36	37	45	36	15
1980	187	43	56	134	53	18
1981	199	42	36	95	57	18
1982	207	30	35	63	40	22
1983	234	30	17	133	61	24
1984	133	31	32	99	45	29
1985	144	27	23	93	44	33
1986	181	30	24	107	42	42
1987	154	27	36	77	50	45

[1] All engineers join as engineer officers; separate figures for weapon and marine engineers are not available.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy officers left the following branches in each year since 1979; and how many failed to complete their engagement *(a)* seaman, *(b)* supply and secretariat, *(c)* instructor, *(d)* weapon engineer, *(e)* pilot and *(f)* observer.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The numbers of Royal Navy officers leaving the specialisations and sub-specialisations listed were as follows:

				Engineers			
	Seaman	Supply	Instructor	Weapon	Marine	Pilot	Observer
1979	274	53	55	68	62	71	33
1980	200	42	36	56	41	68	27
1981	236	63	44	48	37	80	36
1982	254	57	52	60	50	93	32
1983	290	69	74	63	48	86	43
1984	207	46	46	58	34	60	33
1985	192	46	46	76	48	55	35
1986	253	53	42	57	33	66	34
1987	250	57	50	46	42	74	64

The numbers leaving before the end of their commission were:

				Engineers			
	Seaman	Supply	Instructor	Weapon	Marine	Pilot	Observer
1979	181	40	16	42	46	49	26
1980	150	32	11	37	29	54	22
1981	167	46	21	33	18	67	30
1982	138	35	17	28	29	80	24
1983	151	43	38	36	27	63	34

	Seaman	Supply	Instructor	Engineers Weapon	Marine	Pilot	Observer
1984	119	23	18	30	20	44	28
1985	122	28	20	38	23	43	30
1986	152	33	14	42	17	48	24
1987	131	30	24	25	19	50	57

TRANSPORT

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been undertaken by his Department into any decrease in the value of properties adjacent to airports arising from the problems of aircraft noise.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: None.

Second Severn Bridge

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has made any estimates of the likely traffic flow over the second Severn bridge.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The consultant's study of the second Severn crossing showed that for a bridge of the kind proposed, that is at English Stones with links to the M4 and M5, the high growth forecast (16-hour average annual daily flow) for the year 2010 was 14,100 vehicles for the existing bridge and 41,200 vehicles for the second crossing.

Smoke Hoods

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what discussions have taken place between his Department, the Civil Aviation Authority and British industry on the specification for airline passenger protection smoke hoods;

(2) when he expects the Civil Aviation Authority to publish their draft specification for airline passenger protection smoke hoods.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Civil Aviation Authority is wholly responsible for aviation safety regulation. I will ask the chairman of the authority to write to my hon. Friend.

Road Maintenance (Hertfordshire)

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the underspending on road maintenance by Hertfordshire county council in *(a)* 1986-87 and *(b)* the current year.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Hertfordshire county council's expenditure on road maintenance in 1986-87 and its budgeted expenditure for 1987-88 are broadly in line with its share of Government provision for road maintenance as used in the calculation of its rate support grant entitlement. This grant-related expenditure assessment (GRE) is formula-based and represents the cost of providing a standard level of service in each authority.

Outturn (£ million)	GRE (£ million
18·731	18·752
[1]20·789	20·163

[1] Budget figure.

Flying Hours

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish draft regulations regarding the flying hours of two-pilot crews on long-distance flights.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Civil Aviation Authority is wholly responsible for aviation safety regulation. I will ask the chairman of the authority to write to my hon. Friend.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why no account is taken in the cost-benefit analysis for transport supplementary grant road schemes of benefits to be derived from new industrial developments occasioned by a road improvement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department requires local authorities to provide an assessment of the costs and benefits of highway schemes submitted for transport supplementary grant. In addition to an estimate of the benefits to traffic, the assessment should cover the effects of the scheme on the local community, local industry and commerce, road safety and the environment. Departmental circular 1/87, "Transport Policies and Programme Submissions for 1988-89" provides guidance to local authorities. A copy is in the Library.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in the *Official Report,* in terms of pounds sterling per mile, the net present value returns for each transport supplementary grant approved road scheme (i) in Lancashire and (ii) for the highway authorities in the west midlands economic region, for the financial years 1987-88 and1988-89.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The table lists all local road schemes supported with transport supplementary grant (TSG) in 1987-88 and 1988-89 for which the net present value is available in (i) Lancashire, and (ii) the West Midlands economic region. A number of other schemes in both Lancashire and the west midlands are similarly supported with TSG. Net present values for these are not available. It is not always practicable to calculate a net present value for a scheme, particularly in an urban area; other measures, such as first year rate of return, are often more relevant.

Authority and scheme	TSG support in	Net present value[1] (£ million)	Length (miles)
(i) *Lancashire*			
M65 Nelson—Colne	87-88 and 88-89	32·8	1·1
A6068 Shuttleworth Hall link road	87-88 and 88-89	10·5	1·1
A56 North Valley link road, Colne	87-88 and 88-89	9·3	0·7
Burnley inner relief road (phase II)	88-89	4·6	0·4
(ii) *Wolverhampton*			

Authority and scheme	TSG support in	Net present value[1] (£ million)	Length (miles)
Black country route (Section 3,4,5A, 5B)	87-88 and 88-89	7·9	2·1
Hereford and Worcester			
A422 Worcester Southern Link	87-88 and 88-89	1·3	2·9
A456 Bewdley bypass	87-88 and 88-89	8·4	3·2
Shropshire			
A49 Reabrook to Telford Way link	87-88 and 88-89	8·2	1·4
A591 English bridge gyratory	87-88 and 88-89	3·0	0·2
Staffordshire			
A525 Keele bypass	88-89	0·8	1·1
A460 Cannock eastern bypass	88-89	9·6	1·6
Warwickshire			
A4390 Stratford Southern relief road	87-88 and 88-89	4·8	0·9
A429 Wellesbourne bypass	88-89	0·4	1·3

[1] 1979 prices discounted to 1979.

Tyres (Safety)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the safety of tyres, tyre tread depths and acceptable tread depths across the tyres.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I have nothing to add to the answers I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) on 15 January, *Official Report*, columns *457-58* and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) on 22 February, *Official Report*, column *74*.

Passenger Transport Authorities (Financing)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, from the hon. Member for Hampshire, North-West (Mr. Mitchell), of 19 February, how many of the responses to the consultation paper support his Department's proposal; and when he expects to come to a decision on the proposal.

Mr. David Mitchell: The responses so far received are, in varying degrees, opposed to the proposal. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales will be making an interim statement to Standing Committee E on 25 February. I will take into account further comments and representations in coming to a final decision before the Report stage of the Local Government Finance Bill is reached.

Victoria Coach Station

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the present position on Victoria coach station.

Mr. David Mitchell: It remains the intention that Victoria coach station should be sold by the National Bus Company to London Regional Transport, so that it will stay in the public sector for the time being; as I have previously indicated, this will enable options to be kept open pending the outcome of the public inquiry into London Regional Transport's proposals for a new coach station at Paddington. The arrangements for this sale of Victoria coach station are now being made, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made a modification to the National Bus Company's disposal programme accordingly. A copy of the modification has been placed in the Library of the House.

ENVIRONMENT

Cleveland (Rates)

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the employment consequences of the 30p increase in rates in Cleveland.

Mr. Chope: The 30p in the pound charge in rates in Cleveland is a 12 per cent. precept increase. If the council had decided to budget in line with the Government spending assumptions the precept need have increased by only 1·4 per cent. Whilst it is not possible to make any specific estimate, it can only harm employment opportunities in businesses in the area.

Rate Support Grant (Sunderland)

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the rate support grant paid to Sunderland borough council in each of the financal years since 1979, expressed in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms expressed in 1987-88 prices; and what percentage of the council's total spending in each year this represented.

Mr. Chope: The figure requested are provided in the table.

Expenditure figures quoted are total expenditure as defined for the purpose of the rate support grant system. Comparable figures are not available for 1979-80 and 1980-81.

The rate support grant figures for 1979-80 and 1980-81 are not comparable with those for 1981-82 and 1987-88. For the earlier two years they comprise needs, resources and domestic elements, whereas from 1981-82 onwards they comprise block grant and domestic rate relief grant.

Figures for 1979-80 to 1982-83 are final entitlements. Figures for the later years are subject to change when RSG supplementary reports are implemented and when final entitlements to domestic rate relief grant are calculated. Real terms figures are cash figures uprated by the GDP deflator.

Sunderland

	Total expenditure £ million	Rate support grant		Rate support grant as a percentage of expenditure
		Cash terms £ million	Real terms £ million	
1979-80	—	65·646	114·158	—
1980-81	—	77·125	113·913	—
1981-82	97·280	63·787	85·219	65·5
1982-83	108·042	64·724	80·646	59·9
1983-84	106·321	65·252	77·650	61·3
1984-85	105·848	65·556	74·668	61·9
1985-86	106·650	67·012	72·037	62·8
1986-87	145·164	69·813	72·745	48·0
1987-88	149·881	79·761	79·761	53·2

Property Services Agency

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, further to his answer to the hon. Member

for Houghton and Washington, *Official Report*, 17 February, column 967, he will publish a table showing the cost of the use by the Property Services Agency of private contractors and consultants for each year since they were first used to the latest date for which data are available.

Mr. Chope: The costs of private contractors and consultants used by the Property Services Agency since 1981-82 are as follows:

£ million (cash)	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Private contractors						
new construction	520	599	793	968	1,051	1,109
maintenance	450	550	590	581	614	685
Consultants	50	61	80	125	155	171
Total	1,020	1,210	1,463	1,674	1,820	1,965

Information for earlier years would be obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Associations

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the increases in housing association rents which would be necessary on the level of housing association grant outlined in the report of his Department's senior economic advisor on "Grant Percentage and Rents Paid by Housing Association Tenants"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

West Midlands Councils (Planning Guidance)

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish planning guidance for the metropolitan district councils in the west midlands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have today written to councillor Peter Kellie, chairman of the west midlands planning and transportation sub-committee of the metropolitan borough councils, to convey the Secretary of State's strategic planning guidance for the west midlands, which will provide a framework for the preparation of unitary development plans. Copies have been sent to all local authorities in the region. The west midlands is the first metropolitan area for which we have issued strategic guidance and I welcome the co-operative, constructive approach of the local authorities and everyone else involved in this process. A commencement order enabling six of the seven metropolitan boroughs to begin preparation of their plans will come into force on 29 February. Dudley has been excluded from the order for the moment, at its own request, because it is completing local plans for parts of its area. The effect of a commencement order there would be to halt work on local plans not yet completed, and to require procedural stages to be repeated unnecessarily in the preparation of the unitary development plan.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Postal Communications (Russia)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he had an opportunity to raise the subject of postal communications with the Soviet Foreign Minister during his recent visit to Moscow.

Mr. Mellor: No. However, my right hon. and learned Friend spent some time discussing general human rights questions with Mr. Shevardnadze and pressed for a more humane Soviet approach. We have made our concern about Soviet interference with postal communications known to the Soviet authorities on several occasions, notably at the CSCE meeting in Vienna where we have tabled a proposal on the privacy and integrity of postal and telephonic communication.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Disarmament

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, during his recent visit to the Soviet Union, he specifically raised with Mr. Shevardnadze outstanding scientific verification problems related to the completion of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

Mr. Mellor: No. The scientific problems connected with verifying a comprehensive test ban are technical and complex. They must be solved by scientists rather than politicians. That is the purpose of the ad hoc group of scientists of the conference on disarmament which is working on precisely these problems.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, during his meetings with Soviet officials on his recent visit to the Soviet Union, he discussed the prospects for a joint Anglo-Soviet initiative to develop the 1963 partial nuclear test ban treaty into a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

Mr. Mellor: No. My right hon. and learned Friend discussed with Mr. Shevardnadze the progress of the United States-Soviet negotiations on nuclear testing which are aimed at step-by-step progress. It is this approach which we support rather than the impractical aim of an immediate ban on testing.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council held on 22 February.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend and I attended the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on 22 February. The Council confirmed agreement to the package of stabilisers for eight agricultural commodities

on which France had reserved its position at the European Council in Brussels. The adoption of these stabilisers, without amendment or reserve, enabled us, and our Netherlands colleagues, to confirm our agreement to all the other conclusions of the Brussels European Council and opens the way to their implementation.

The consolidated text of the European Council conclusions, distributed in Brussels on 22 February (Document SN 461/1/88), has been placed in the Library. Copies are also available in the Vote Office.

This Council thus concludes a further significant stage in the United Kingdom's long-standing campaign for effective Community action to deal with excess farm production and agricultural expenditure. The Community will now be able to concentrate on its major long-term goal; completion of the single market in goods and services by 1992.

The Council also approved textile arrangements with Egypt and Turkey and adopted a proposal, for discussion in the GATT multilateral trade negotiations, on reductions in obstacles to trade. In addition, the Council discussed preparations for the forthcoming meeting with Foreign Ministers of the Central American and Contadora group countries in Hamburg from 29 February to 1 March (San José IV). The Council also agreed to a ministerial meeting on European demographic issues; and expressed interest in a French proposal for a congress of young people to discuss European Community issues.

PRIME MINISTER

NATO

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if, during her recent visit to North Atlantic Treaty Organisation headquarters in Brussels, she discussed the military implications for NATO defences of developments in the bilateral discussions in Geneva between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on negotiating a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

The Prime Minister: No. The current negotiations are aimed at agreeing a verification regime which would permit ratification of the threshold test ban and peaceful nuclear explosions treaties. Their ratification would not have military implications for NATO defences. Any further restrictions will be scrutinised to ensure their compatability with NATO security.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if, during her recent visit to NATO, she discussed the commitments made by NATO member states under article VI of the non-proliferation treaty for future nuclear weapon modernisation and adjustments within NATO.

The Prime Minister: No.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if, during her recent visit to the NATO headquarters in Brussels, she made any initiative towards the updating of the Harmel report of December 1967 on redefining future tasks for NATO.

The Prime Minister: No. The course set out for the Alliance in the Harmel report in 1967 remains as valid today as it was then.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if, during her recent visit to NATO headquarters in Brussels, she raised the possibility of strengthening the role of the Eurogroup within NATO in terms of *(a)* nuclear weapons deployment, *(b)* conventional force deployment and *(c)* troop deployment in Europe and within European airspace and territorial waters.

The Prime Minister: No.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if, during her recent visit to the NATO headquarters in Brussels, she discussed NATO's cultural and scientific programmes and the specific benefits which accrue to the United Kingdom from these programmes.

The Prime Minister: The subjects did not come up during my visit.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if, during her most recent visit to NATO headquarters in Brussels, she raised the issue of the compatibility of the increase in warhead and strike capacity of the Trident II D-5 SLBM system with article I of the North Atlantic treaty of 4 April 1949.

The Prime Minister: No.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Discipline

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consideration he has given to evidence presented by the Professional Association of Teachers in the spring issue of the magazine *The Professional Teacher*, a copy of which has been sent to him, that 32 per cent. of teachers had suffered physical violence at the hands of pupils.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information provided by the association shows that 32 per cent. of the 1,500 members of the association who replied to their questionnaire which represents about 4 per cent. of the total membership, had been attacked by a pupil at some time. We are looking carefully at this and other available information in considering whether to establish a committee of inquiry into discipline in schools.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is satisfied that effective disciplinary procedures exist in schools to ensure proper teaching can take place; and if he will set out those procedures, together with any guidelines that may have been laid down by his Department for their cases.

Mrs. Rumbold: Disciplinary procedures within schools are primarily a matter for the headteacher and the governors of individual schools. The Education (No. 2) Act 1986, will strengthen their authority by giving them direct responsibility for maintaining discipline. A recently published report by Her Majesty's inspectorate, "Good behaviour and discipline in schools", which has been issued to schools, gives advice on best practice in maintaining discipline. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library.

Schools (Ministerial Visits)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the schools in the Inner London education authority area that he has visited since

becoming Secretary of State and the date of each visit; and if he will list separately the schools in the Inner London education authority area that have been visited by any other of the present Ministers in his Department since their appointment, and the date of each visit.

Mr. Dunn: Since his appointment my right hon. Friend has visited one school within the Inner London education authority area, Notre Dame high school on 14 January 1988. On 4 November 1986 I visited Paragon Hill school, an independent school in Hampstead. Visits by other present Ministers in the Department are as follows:

	Date
Minister of State (Mrs. Angela Rumbold)	
Alleyn's school (independent)	22 May 1986
Francis Holland school (independent)	13 November 1986
St. Luke's CE primary school	31 March 1987
St. Paul's girls school (independent)	6 May 1987
Mulberry girls school	25 January 1988

The Department does not maintain records for visits prior to 1986.

Schools (Collective Worship)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those organisations which responded to the consultative letter issued in July 1987 on collective worship in schools; how many of these organisations expressed a view on whether the requirement to take part in collective worship should be relaxed in the case of pupils over the school leaving age; and how many of those organisations who expressed a view on this issue *(a)* favoured such a change and *(b)* were opposed to it.

Mrs. Rumbold: Of the 34 bodies formally consulted, 28 responded. A list of those responding is given in the table. Fourteen expressed a view on the application of the law to pupils above compulsory school age. Five expressed support for a change in the law, so that the statutory requirement would no longer apply to pupils above the compulsory school age. Nine were against any change in the law. Copies of the responses are held in the Library.

List of bodies which responded to consultation letter

Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association
Association of Advisers and Inspectors of Religious Education
Association of Christian Teachers
Association of County Councils
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
The Bishops' Conference
Board of Education of the General Synod of the Church of England
British Council of Churches
Catholic Education Council
Chief Rabbi
Christian Education Movement
Free Church Federal Council
Islamic Cultural Centre
Methodist Board of Education
Muslim Education Trust
National Association of Governors and Managers of Schools
National Association of Head Teachers
National Association of Inspectors and Educational Advisers
National Association for Primary Education
National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers
National Council of Hindu Organisations
National Muslim Education Council for the United Kingdom
National Union of Teachers
Professional Association of Teachers
Professional Council for Religious Education
Religious Education Council
Sikh Education Council
Society of Education Officers

Pupil Records

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many of those organisations which responded to the consultation paper on the keeping and disclosure of pupil records and expressed a view on whether references should be disclosable stated that *(a)* they should be and *(b)* they should not.

Mrs. Rumbold: Sixty one organisations commented on the disclosure of references. Twenty four favour disclosure, 27 do not. The remainder did not express a preference.

Further and Higher Education (Student Fees)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recommendations have been issued by him about fees for students on courses of further and higher education in the academic year 1988-89.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: For the academic year 1988-89 I have recommended the following fee levels for home students and for students from other European Community countries on full-time courses (fees for 1987-88 are shown in brackets):

	£	£
Postgraduate courses	1,800	(1,730)
First degree and diploma courses	578	(556)

In relation to other courses I understand that the Council of Local Education Authorities has recommended fees for 1988-89 for home and EC students as follows (fees for 1987-88 are shown in brackets):

	Advanced further education		*Non-advanced further education*	
	£	£	£	£
Full-time	578·00	(556·00)	390·00	(360·00)
Sandwich/block release (weekly rate)	16·00	(15·50)	11·00	(10·00)
Part-time per course hour	0·54	(0·52)	0·37	(0·34)
Part-time annual fee for one session per week	57·80	(55·60)	39·00	(36·00)

The Government's policy is that students from outside the European Community should pay fees that reflect the full cost of their education here. It is for institutions and local authorities to determine the actual fees to be charged to overseas students in the light of this policy and of their own circumstances.

For the universities, the University Grants Committee has recommended minimum fee levels for overseas students on undergraduate and postgraduate courses in 1988-89 as follows (recommended minima for 1987-88 are shown in brackets):

	£	£
Arts courses	3,950	(3,690)
Science courses	5,180	(4,840)

	£	£
Clinical courses in medicine dentistry and veterinary science	9,590	(8,960)

For local authority institutions in England and Wales the Council of Local Education Authorities has recommended minimum fee levels as follows (recommended minima for 1987-88 are shown in brackets):

	£	£
Advanced courses	4,017	(3,720)
Non-advanced courses	2,226	(2,055)

Student Awards

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide for students attending international degree courses to receive mandatory awards.

Mr. Jackson: Subject to Parliament's approval of the necessary regulations, mandatory awards will be payable from the 1988-89 academic year to eligible students attending degree courses provided by an establishment in the United Kingdom in conjunction with a university or other institution in another country. Such courses will no longer require individual designation provided that they lead to a first degree of a United Kingdom university or of the Council for National Academic Awards.

Inspectors of Education

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list the number of inspectors of education in each of the outer London boroughs;

(2) how many inspectors are employed by the Inner London education authority; what areas of the curriculum they cover; how many inspectors are employed in total by outer London boroughs who administer education; and how many inspectors he estimates will have to be employed by the proposed inner London local education authorities in order to ensure effective monitoring of the delivery of the curriculum.

Mr. Dunn *[holding answer 18 February 1988]:* Figures on local education authority inspectors are not collated centrally. The structure of local inspectorates, including the allocation of inspectors to specialisms, is a matter for each local education authority. Inner London councils will be required to publish development plans during 1989, setting out the education service they propose to provide; these plans will be required to include their proposals for an inspectorate.

Education Reform

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which new bodies he expects to set up under his proposal to abolish the Inner London education authority; and what he expects them to cost to operate in 1988-90.

Mr. Bob Dunn *[holding answer 18 February 1988]:* My right hon. Friend has announced that he proposes to set up a staff commission to look after the interests of staff affected by the abolition of ILEA. The direct costs of the commission, which are not expected to be large, will be borne centrally.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Houghton and Washington (Grants)

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will indicate the amount of regional development grants and regional selective assistance grants made in Houghton and Washington constituency for each year from 1979 to the latest date available.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave on 26 January 1988, at column *148*.

Foreign Investment

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps and initiatives have been developed to encourage foreign investment in the United Kingdom with special reference to the car industry.

Mr. Atkins: My Department's Invest in Britain Bureau continues to promote the United Kingdom as a location for foreign investment and to assist individual companies to establish themselves in Britain. No specific initiatives have been undertaken by the IBB with regard to attracting foreign investment in the car industry, although my Department has provided assistance to a number of foreign companies wishing to invest in that market.

Broadcasting Services

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what consideration his Department has given to the effects on the growth of the mobile communications industry of any change in current Government policy regarding bands I and III of the VHF spectrum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The needs of the mobile communications industry, both current and future, helped to determine the Government's current policy in respect of bands I and III. If there is any change in that policy those needs will help to frame the nature of the change. At present, study of the technical scope for sharing use of these bands between mobile radio and broadcasting is continuing as part of the Government's wider review of the technical options for additional broadcasting services.

Furniture Foam

Mr. Conway: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what advice he has given to furniture retailers on the foam standards they should consider when forward ordering supplies; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he expects to lay before Parliament regulations relating to the safety standards of foam used in furniture; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what is the ignition source level selected for the consultation period on combustion modified high resilient foam for use in furniture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: Draft regulations will be issued for consultation in the very near future. They will contain proposals for specifying combustion modifed foam to be used in upholstered furniture.

Network Services Licences

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Worsley of 5 February, *Official Report*, columns *777-78*,

what information he has as to the names of companies and individuals operating value added services under the class licence granted on 30 April 1987.

Mr. Butcher *[holding answer 23 February 1988]*: Only limited categories of licensees operating under the class licence are required to register with the Office of Telecommunications. Their names are maintained on a list available from the Oftel library. No information is available on other operators under the licence.

Computers and Word Processors

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster why special permits are required to take a personal computer or word processor abroad if its capacity is greater than 128K; how many computers have been confiscated since 1985 in accordance with this provision; whether the restrictions are ever revised, and what discussions he has had with other countries regarding the lifting of these restrictions.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 23 February 1988]*: Controls on the export of such equipment in the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1987 reflect those agreed with COCOM partners. The order raised the "total internal storage" level above which export licences are required from 128K to 640K. However, computers with a lower capacity may still require a licence for other reasons. The COCOM control lists are subject to periodic multilateral review. Aspects of the computer controls are still under consideration.

Figures relating to the detention or seizure by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise of computers can be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

WALES

Regional Aid

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total regional selective assistance which he is committed to paying out under offer letters already issued expressed in outturn figures for each year from 1987-88 to 1990-91.

Mr. Peter Walker: Regional selective assistance grants normally paid in annual instalments related to progress on a project. The amount and timing of RSA expenditure is therefore dependent upon individual companies implementing their projects as originally intended and it is not possible to predict with precision the amount of expenditure which will arise in any future year from past RSA offers.

I am confident that planned provision for RSA over the next three years makes substantial allowance for both existing commitments and potential applicants who have yet to be offered grant assistance. I hope that industry in Wales will take full advantage of the additional RSA resources that have been provided.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total of regional development grant which he is committed to paying out under letters of offer already made, expressed in outturn figures for each year from 1987-88, to 1990-91.

Mr. Peter Walker: The amount of regional development grant paid depends on applicants meeting the conditions under which approval is given. The timing of payments is related to the progress of individual companies in the implementation of the project concerned and the submission of claims. It is not possible, therefore, to predict with precision the amount of expenditure which will arise in any future year from past RDG approvals. Total planned provision for regional development grants over the next three years makes substantial allowance for both present and potential applicants who have yet to receive RDG approval. I hope that industry in Wales will take full advantage of the period until 31 March 1988 during which RDG applications can still be made.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total expenditure on *(a)* regional development grant and *(b)* selective assistance in (i) the Shotton travel-to-work areas, (ii) the county of Clwyd and (iii) the eight counties of Wales, for each year from 1978-79.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 15 February 1988]*: The information requested is given in the following table.

Expenditure on regional development grant and regional selective assistance is as follows

£ million

	1978-79		1979-80		1980-81		1981-82		1982-83		1983-84		1984-85		1985-86		1986-87	
	RDG	RSA	RDG	RSA	RDG	RSA	RDG	RSA	RDG	RSA	RDG	RSA	RDG	RSA	RDG	RSA	RDG	RSA
Wales	71·5	30·3	50·7	18·8	103·5	10·7	122·2	9·2	121·5	15·5	72·1	18·2	92·7	25·1	84·4	28·0	88·7	35·6
Clwyd	9·5	0·9	4·9	1·0	8·6	1·4	15·8	1·5	17·8	3·5	12·2	3·2	23·4	3·2	22·8	5·1	27·9	6·3
Dyfed	5·7	0·5	8·1	0·5	29·1	0·5	21·9	0·1	20·0	0·3	13·0	0·6	8·8	0·5	4·9	0·7	4·8	1·7
Gwent	5·5	1·3	3·0	1·3	6·0	3·2	8·7	4·2	12·1	6·4	6·4	4·4	7·8	9·1	7·4	5·9	12·5	6·9
Gwynedd	0·3	0·1	0·7	0·2	1·1	1·2	0·5	1·0	0·9	0·2	0·4	0·9	0·8	0·1	0·9	0·5	2·3	0·5
Mid Glamorgan	8·7	0·7	6·9	1·8	18·5	1·2	15·8	1·0	10·2	1·0	7·7	3·0	9·3	3·5	9·9	4·6	13·8	6·4
Powys	0·4	0·2	0·3	0·2	0·7	0·2	0·5	0·2	0·4	0·6	0·3	0·5	0·1	0·5	0·1	0·2	0·4	0·1
South Glamorgan	4·7	26·4	3·6	13·4	7·7	2·7	8·4	1·0	7·6	1·3	2·8	1·4	2·9	0·7	2·9	3·3	4·7	3·7
West Glamorgan	14·4	0·2	5·3	0·4	8·9	0·3	26·7	0·2	22·6	1·1	7·8	1·2	15·8	1·5	14·1	2·3	5·1	1·9
Shotton TTWA	2·8	0·3	1·7	0·2	1·4	0·3	7·6	1·0	8·8	2·1	8·8	1·8	12·4	2·2	12·9	2·7	6·9	3·3

Notes

(1) Regional development grant expenditure represents payments under the original scheme (RDG I) and, since 1985-86, the revised scheme (RDG II). Records of RDG I expenditure at a sub-Wales level are kept on the basis only of individual payments exceeding £25,000 and by employment office areas. Expenditure has been apportioned on a county basis on the most accurate basis consistent with these records. The sum of the county figures will not equate to total RDG I expenditure on an all-Wales basis.

(2) Regional selective assistance expenditure for Wales represents industrial and training grants, loans until 1979-80, exchange risk losses on European loans and payments under the business improvement services scheme. Expenditure on the latter two elements cannot be broken down to a sub-Wales level and is therefore excluded from the county and TTWA figures.

(3) RDG I data for the Shotton TTWA are based on the pre-November 1984 boundary. RDG II data are based on the present Shotton, Flint and Rhyl TTWA.

Immunisation Co-ordinators

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if every health authority in Wales has now appointed an immunisation co-ordinator; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The Welsh Office circular on childhood immunisation issued in 1985 asked all district health authorities in Wales to designate an individual to co-ordinate immunisation activity. All Welsh health authorities have advised that these designations have taken place. Responsibility in most cases rests with a specialist in community medicine.

Howardian High School, Cardiff

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many written objections he has received *(a)* against and *(b)* in favour of South Glamorgan county council's proposal to close Howardian high school in Cardiff.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: There were 370 individual letters, 35 petitions and 28 letters on behalf of organisations, registering statutory and non-statutory objections to South Glamorgan county council's proposal to introduce tertiary education in the east of Cardiff and to close Howardian high school. The vast majority of the objections related to the part of the proposals involving the closure of Howardian high school.

Caravan Sites Act 1968

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of all county councils in Wales that have applied for designation under the provisions of the Caravan Sites Act 1968; and how many have been so designated.

Mr. Grist: Applications for designation, made jointly by the county council and the district council, have been received from Dyfed county council in respect of Dinefwr, Llanelli and Preseli districts; Gwynedd county council in respect of Aberconwy, Arfon and Ynys Môn districts; and Powys county council in respect of Montgomery district. No area in Wales has been designated.

Cash Limits

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to make any further changes to the cash limit on class XVII, Vote 5, for 1987-88.

Mr. Peter Walker: Yes. The cash limit for 1987-88 on class XVII, vote 5 is being reduced by £1,652,000 to £212,017,000. This reduction will offset, in part, an increase in class XII, vote 3 to facilitate the creation of a new university institution in Cardiff.

Morriston Hospital

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received, and on what dates, about the staffing needs of the neonatal and paediatric units at Morriston hospital; and what action he has taken.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* My right hon. Friend received representations about nurse staffing levels at the Morriston hospital special-care baby unit at a meeting with a delegation of Welsh Labour MPs on 18 January 1988, and during the course of the Welsh Grand Committee on 10 February 1988. No representations have been received concerning staffing needs of the paediatric unit. Detailed operational questions as to the proper level of nurse staffing are a matter which falls to the responsibility of the West Glamorgan health authority.

Rating Reform

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give his latest estimate for the community charge for district council areas in Wales.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* Average domestic bills, calculated as the estimated contribution made by domestic ratepayers to authorities' rate fund expenditure in 1987-88 (after allowing for domestic rate relief) divided by the number of hereditaments, are given in the following table. Estimated community charge figures for 1987-88 are also shown. These estimates are based on present expenditure patterns and aggregate levels of grant. They are given on two bases: first, community charges assuming the Government's proposals were implemented in full in 1987-88, with no "safety net", are provided; secondly, charges after allowing for the "safety nets" envisaged in the Green Paper. The average community charge per property including "safety net" will, by definition, be the same as the average domestic rate bill per property.

Rating Authority	*Average domestic rate bill per property*	*Community charge with "no safety net" per adult*	*Average per domestic property*	*Community charge including "safety net" per adult*
	£	£	£	£
Alyn and Deeside	329	132	268	163
Colwyn	336	144	258	188
Delyn	327	137	273	165
Glyndwr	263	138	258	141
Rhuddlan	326	134	269	163
Wrexham Maelor	292	140	274	149
Carmarthen	220	136	270	111
Ceredigion	232	128	243	122
Dinefwr	197	125	243	102
Llanelli	238	150	287	124

Rating Authority	Average domestic rate bill per property £	Community charge with "no safety net" per adult: £	Average per domestic property £	Community charge including "safety net" per adult £
Preseli Pembrokeshire	221	127	241	117
South Pembrokeshire	255	124	232	137
Blaenau Gwent	282	146	280	106
Islwyn	222	137	271	112
Monmouth	311	131	277	147
Newport	316	132	252	166
Torfaen	271	142	277	139
Aberconwy	292	127	239	155
Arfon	198	124	215	114
Dwyfor	225	128	200	145
Meirionnydd	218	127	198	140
Ynys Mon	256	123	224	141
Cynon Valley	174	135	252	93
Methyr Tydfil	206	149	284	108
Ogwr	266	142	294	129
Rhondda	144	151	283	77
Rhymney Valley	235	148	294	118
Taff-Ely	254	147	296	126
Brecknock	229	121	239	116
Montgomeryshire	213	108	201	114
Radnor	212	112	200	119
Cardiff	335	103	206	168
Vale of Glamorgan	320	117	247	152
Port Talbot	263	181	348	137
Lliw Valley	237	164	321	122
Neath	252	148	287	130
Swansea	331	172	342	166
Wales average	268	136	268	136

Motorways and Trunk Roads

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the amount of Government expenditure on the construction of motorway and trunk roads in Wales since 1979, the amount spent on improving motorway and trunk roads since 1979, and the estimated expenditure on motorway and trunk road construction during the next five years.

Mr. Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* Expenditure on new construction and improvement of motorways and trunk roads in Wales since 1979-80 is as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	63
1980-81	82
1981-82	87
1982-83	110
1983-84	136
1984-85	93
1985-86	85
1986-87	97
[1] 1987-88	111

[1] Estimated outturn.

Note: Since 1982-83 the definition of new construction and improvement has included structural renewal. Prior to that date it was classified as current expenditure.

Planned expenditure on new construction and improvement of motorways and trunk roads in Wales is as follows:

	£ million
1988-89	118
1989-90	120
1990-91	120

Notes:

1. In accordance with public expenditure convention the figures for 1989-90 and 1990-91 are rounded to the nearest £10 million. Also they are illustrative only, as no firm decisions have been taken on the Secretary of State's allocation of block resources for these years.
2. No figure is available for 1991-92.

Patient Expenditure

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the average annual expenditure per patient in Wales in 1986-87.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* For the latest year for which data are available, that is 1986-87, the information requested is as follows:

Average cost in pounds per	£
In-patient case	1,002·61
In-patient day	71·34
New out-patient	123·10
Out-patient attendance	27·41
New accident and emergency	26·05
Accident and Emergency attendance	18·83
New day patient	917·68
Day patient attendance	23·42
Day case attendance	62·48

However, care should be taken in making comparisons between countries on the basis of these figures as the costs incurred will have varied with the case mix, age and sex of

the patients, with the range of facilities available for treatment and as a result of other factors such as the costs associated with teaching. A more meaningful assessment can thus be made by comparing the costs of hospitals within roughly homogeneous groups, particularly where these have been related to case loads which have been statistically adjusted for differences in the specialty and age/sex mix of the patients concerned. To this end I would refer my hon. Friend to "Welsh Costings Returns" and "Key Statistical Indicators for NHS Management in Wales", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

WINvest

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many industrial companies new to Wales have commenced investment projects in Wales as a result of the work of WINvest on the years 1985-86 and 1986-87; and what is the estimated figure for 1987-88.

Mr. Peter Walker: The numbers of inward investment projects for the financial years 1985-86, 1986-87 and the latest available information for financial year 1987-88 are as follows. There are a number of potential inward investment projects considering Wales at the present time which I hope will come to fruition before the end of the financial year.

	Number of projects	*Jobs Initially*	*Jobs Safeguarded*	*Capital investment £ million*
1985-86				
New	40	3,851	1,080	77·320
Expansions	23	1,606	250	72·907
Acquisitions	3	10	103	0·825
Joint Ventures	3	29	0	0·640
Total	69	5,496	1,433	151·692
1986-87				
New	58	2,392	65	33·432
Expansions	27	1,889	1,231	144·439
Acquisitions	11	81	1,685	33·600
Joint Ventures	3	11	51	2·300
Total	99	4,373	3,032	213·771
1 April 1987 to 31 December 1987				
New	52	4,952	2	101·306
Expansions	24	1,508	593	62·827
Acquisitions	4	248	144	11·200
Joint Ventures	3	342	0	1·620
Total	83	7,050	739	176·953

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Facsimile Service

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will explain the reasons for the cost of using the facsimile machine in the Central Lobby post office; and whether there are any plans to provide faxing facilities for right hon. and hon. Members at a lower rate.

Mr. Wakeham: The Post Office provides a facsimile service within the House at the standard rate. With regard to any plans to provide faxing facilities for Members at a lower rate, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the exchanges in the House on 7 December 1987, at column 19. I can confirm that the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee of the Services Committee will subsequently be considering this matter again shortly.

Committee Rooms (Acoustics)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will take steps to engage consultants to examine the potential for improvements in acoustics of the Committee Rooms.

Mr. Wakeham: This matter has already been referred to the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee of the Services Committee, which expects to consider it at an early meeting.

Vote Office

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make it his policy to ensure that the service provided by the Vote Office meets the demands of right hon. and hon. Members for publications whether they collect them in person or delegate a member of their staff to do so on their behalf.

Mr. Wakeham: I have no evidence to suggest that the service provided by the staff of the Vote Office does not meet the requirements of hon. Members. However, I understand that where constraints of time, space, or the availability of documents arise, priority is necessarily given to supplying Members in person. It is not usually practicable to distinguish between priorities expressed by other callers.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Lord President of the Council on how many sitting days since the summer recess it has been possible for hon. Members to collect from the Vote Office at 8.30 am copies of both the full

Vote bundle and the *Hansard* for the previous day's sitting; and what percentage of total sitting days in the period this figure represents.

Mr. Wakeham: It has been possible for hon. Members to collect the Vote bundle, as supplied to Members, together with *Hansard* for the previous day by 8.30 am on 65 sitting days since the summer recess. This represents 90 per cent. of the total sitting days during the period.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Lord President of the Council (1) why the Vote Office refuses to deal with requests for publications made at the request of hon. Members by individuals working for hon. Members until 8.45 am;

(2) if he will seek to ensure that the Vote Office meets the demands of hon. Members for publications from 8 am whether made in person or where the request for publications is dealt with by a member of their staff on an hon. Member's instructions.

Mr. Wakeham: The Vote Office will always provide a service for Members whenever staff are on duty and in possession of the document required. This being said, the constraints of time and space preclude dealing with the generality of other callers until after the documents received from Her Majesty's Stationery Office have been sorted and despatched on the early morning delivery service to Members. I understand that, despite the Vote Office not being formally staffed to provide a service to other callers earlier than 9.30 am, the Deliverer of the Vote provides such a service from 8.45 am. This time is kept under review and it is hoped that, in due course, it may be brought forward again without detriment to the overall service provided.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed as representing the House of Commons Commission, how many people are currently employed in the Vote Office; on what salary scales; and to what other benefits they are entitled.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is set out in the following tables:

Staff in post	*Salary scale* £	*Effective date*
1 Deliverer of the Vote	20,313-26,862	1 September 1987
1 Deputy Deliverer of the Vote	15,054-19,790	1 September 1987
1 Assistant Deliverer of the Vote	11,512-14,405	1 January 1988
3 Superintending Clerks	10,014-12,473	1 January 1988
4 Vote Office Assistants	8,839-11,819	1 January 1988
9 Office Clerks-Senior Office Clerks	7,377-9,761	1 January 1988
15 Porters (25 part-time, 20·5 hours)	[1]2,915	

[1] Rises to £3,050 per annum after five years' service.

Staff in receipt of allowance	*Number and nature of allowances*	*Amount per annum* £
Deliverer and Deputy Deliverer of the Vote; Assistant Deliverer of the Vote; Superintending Clerk	Three nights' allowance	[1]3,045
Superintending Clerk Vote Office; Chief Office Clerks; Vote Office Assistants	Five nights' allowances	[2]2,535
Superintending Clerk (Sales Office) and junior staff	Four late duty	[1]1,510
Superintending Clerk; Vote Office assistant	Two morning duty	1,925
Superintending Clerk; Vote Office assistant	Two morning responsibility allowance	225
Junior staff	Nine morning duty as Vote Office porters (17 hours)	[2]2,415
Junior staff	One cleaning allowance	985

[1] Expressed as the amount paid for two nights' extra duty, some staff work only one night and therefore receive half of this amount.
[2] Rises to £2,535 per annum after five years service.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed as representing the House of Commons Commission, what is the total cost of running the Vote Office.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

The cost of the staff of the Vote Office, including employer's national insurance contributions, is estimated at £344,000 for the current year, including £31,500 for the cost of staff of the sale office. Separate figures are not available for the cost of accommodation and other office services (such as telephones and office machinery) used by the Vote Office.

EMPLOYMENT

Trainees

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many trainees have gone into *(a)* work, *(b)* further education and *(c)* training in (i) the Northwich travel-to-work area, (ii) the Chester travel-to-work area and (iii) the Runcorn travel-to-work area, in each of the past five years.

Mr. Cope: The information is not available in the form requested. The following table shows the destination of YTS leavers from schemes in Cheshire since June 1984:

	Leavers between:		
	June 1984 to March 1985	*April 1985 to March 1986*	*April 1986 to August 1987*
	Per cent.	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*
In work	57	55	56
On a full time course	4	3	4
On another YTS scheme	7	9	14

The Manpower Services Commission has conducted 100 per cent. follow-up surveys of YTS leavers since April 1985. Prior to that date the figures are estimates derived from a national sample survey.

Information from the follow-up survey is not available on a travel-to-work area basis, but I shall write to my hon. Friend with further information relevant to his question.

Community Programme

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many places on community programmes listed by geographical area or agency, were not taken up during the year 1986-87; whether he will in future take these figures into account in the allocation of places on such schemes, particularly with regard to future allocations to areas or agencies which were fully subscribed.

Mr. Lee: Information in the form requested could be obtained only at disproportionate costs. However, the table shows for each MSC area the amount by which filled community programme places on 31 March 1987 exceed or fall short of the area allocation. Past performance in filling places is one of the factors that is taken into account in the allocation of places, both to areas and to individual schemes.

Community programme—filled places at 31 March 1987

Region/area office	*Variance from area allocation*
South East Region	
Kent	+188
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	−151
Sussex	−90
Reading	−77
Surrey	−69
High Wycombe	−35
Essex	−366
London Region	
North London	+526
East London	−6
Inner London North	+471
Inner London South	−132
West London	−73
South London	−45
South West Region	
Devon	+89
Avon	+340
Cornwall	+45
Dorset/Somerset	−605
Gloucester	+62
West Midlands Region	
Worcester	+1
Coventry	+110
Dudley and Sandwell	−622
Wolverhampton	−41
Birmingham	−35
Staffordshire	−237
East Midlands and Eastern Region	
Ipswich	+20
Luton	+70
Norwich	+289
Derby	−296
Leicester	−159
Nottinghamshire	−37
Lincolnshire	−17
Northamptonshire	−135
Yorkshire and Humberside Region	
Leeds	−383
Bradford	−398
Sheffield	−165
Hull	−122
North Yorkshire	−123
Wakefield	−1
Grimsby	−92
Barnsley/Doncaster	−109
North-West Region	
Cumbria	—
South Lancashire	−139
Manchester North	−45
Manchester Central	−123
Manchester East	−71
Middleton	−60
Merseyside Inner	−302
Wirral	−105
Merseyside Outer	+3
Cheshire	−98
Lancashire North	−204
Northern Region	
North Tyne	−337
County Durham	−15
Teesside	−297
South Tyne	−278
Office for Wales	
Gwent	−2
Mid and South Glamorgan	−103
West Wales	+251
Clwyd/Powys	+11
Office for Scotland	
Glasgow	−320
Hamilton	−222
Paisley	−44
Ayr	−161
Highlands and Islands	+102
Tayside and Grampian	−33
Central and Fife	−109
Lothian and Borders	−67
Clydebank	−225

Enterprise Agencies

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a further statement on the performance of enterprise agencies.

Mr. Cope: As private sector led, wholly independent bodies, the performance of individual local enterprise agencies is primarily a matter for their boards and their supporters.

However, the Government are anxious to encourage greater professionalism among local enterprise agencies and one of the requirements of the local enterprise agency grant scheme is that agencies prepare a three-year business plan which includes performance targets.

This Department has also supported business in the community and a number of large private sector sponsors of local enterprise agencies who are working to develop guidelines to assist local enterprise agencies to evaluate their own performance and effectiveness.

Deaf People

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether his proposals for an adult training programme will include a communications service for deaf people.

Mr. Cope: Yes. This service will be along the lines of the provision made in YTS.

Quarrying

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what were *(a)* the total numbers of fatal accidents and *(b)* the total numbers of major accidents in the quarrying industry in each year since 1978;

(2) what was the incidence rate per 100,000 employees for fatal and major accidents combined in the quarrying industry in each year since 1978.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is as follows:

Year	Quarry accidents		Combined incidence Rate (Fatal and major) per 100,000 employees
	Fatal	Major injuries	
1978[1]	15	67	170
1979[1]	12	90	210
1980[1]	17	64	175
1981[2]	14	105	315
1982[2]	18	106	326
1983[2]	5	88	231
1984[2]	15	115	404
1985[2]	13	94	330
1986-87[3]	11	168	488

[1] Fatal and major injuries reported under the Mines and Quarries Act 1954.
[2] Fatal and major injuries reported under the Notification of Accidents and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1981, which widened the definition of major injury.
[3] Fatal and major injuries reported under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985, which further widened the definition of major injury. The figures for the three periods are not directly comparable.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of prosecutions brought by the Mines and Quarries Inspectorate in each year since 1978 for breaches of relevant health and safety legislation in the quarrying industry.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is as follows:

Number of prosecutions: Informations laid

Year	Number
1978	2
1979	2
1980	2
1981	0
1982	2
1983	0
1984-85	0
1985-86	0
1986-87	0
1987-88	0

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of *(a)* prohibition notices and *(b)* improvement notices brought in each year since 1978 by the Mines and Quarries Inspectorate in respect of the quarrying industry.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is as follows:

Year	Prohibition Notices	Improvement Notices
1978	3	—
1979	2	—
1980	4	2
1981	3	—
1982	3	—
1983	4	1
1984	2	—
1985	2	2
1986	3	—
1987	10	1

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to alter the duration of the enterprise scheme or the rules affecting eligibility to take part in it.

Mr. Cope: I have no plans to alter the duration of the enterprise allowance scheme or the rules affecting eligibility.

As part of its regular programme of value for money scrutinies the Efficiency Unit has recently examined the scheme. I am currently considering its report.

SCOTLAND

Industrial Policy

12. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss industrial policy.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such plans.

"The Way Forward"

13. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to hold discussions with Nirex concerning the executive's document, "The Way Forward."

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend has no present plans to meet Nirex again, but expects the executive to keep him informed of its progress.

Hospital Waiting Lists

14. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average waiting time for in-patient treatment in National Health Service hospitals in Scotland in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The figures show that there has been a dramatic reduction in waiting times from the peak of 95 days in 1983 following the industrial action of 1982 to 72 days in 1985, which is the latest year for which information is available.

Following is the information:

Mean waiting times for all specialties in Scotland 1976-85

Year	Mean waiting time (days)
1976	77
1977	75
1978	68
1979	80
1980	73
1981	71

Year	*Mean waiting time (days)*
1982	65
1983	95
1984	80
[1]1985	72

[1] The latest year for which information is available.

16. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average number of patients awaiting in-patient treatment at National Health Service hospitals in Scotland in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The figures show increases of 10,000 and over 20,000 caused by industrial action in 1979 and 1982.

Following is the information:

Persons awaiting in-patient treatment at NHS hospitals in Scotland at 30 September in each year

Year	*Number of patients*
1978	62,464
1979	71,247
1980	67,387
1981	65,228
1982	86,365
1983	88,338
1984	83,077
1985	77,677
1986	80,708
[1]1987	81,324

[1] Latest figure as at 31 March. (The figure for March 1986 is 81,250.

27. **Mr. Allan Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new measures he is taking to reduce hospital waiting lists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I regard reduction of the length of time patients have to wait for treatment as one of the most urgent tasks facing the Health Service. An additional sum of £3·6 million has been allocated to health boards for this purpose during the current financial year. Further measures to make more progress will be discussed with health board chairmen and general managers in the next few weeks.

Forth Road Bridge

15. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the cost of collecting tolls on the Forth road bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The collection of tolls on the bridge is the responsibility of the Forth road bridge joint board. However, I understand that collection costs for the year 1986-87 amounted to £571,000.

Road Building (Strathclyde)

17. **Mr. Lambie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he proposes to review the present road-building programme in the Strathclyde region; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We shall be announcing shortly the 1988-89 trunk road programme for Scotland, including Strathclyde. The construction programme for local roads is the responsibility of Strathclyde regional council, within its capital allocation for roads and transport.

Infrastructure

18. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what further steps he plans to take to improve communications between Scotland and England.

Mr. Rifkind: Feasibility studies are under way to consider the best way of implementing our manifesto commitment to upgrade the A74 trunk road to motorway standard.

Lanarkshire Health Board

19. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the capital expenditure plans, at current prices, for Lanarkshire health board for each of the next five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The board has submitted bids for capital expenditure of £8·6 million for 1988-89 and £10·5 million, £7·7 million, £5·5 million and £4·3 million for the four years thereafter. The board's capital allocation for 1988-89 and provisional allocations for the ensuing two years will be announced shortly.

Forestry

20. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding his policy towards commercial forestry planting in Scotland.

34. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received on forestry policy.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend has received many representations in recent months, particularly with regard to planting in Caithness and Sutherland.

29. **Mr. John M. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is satisfied that the Forestry Commission is paying sufficient regard to the need to sustain broadleaf woodland in its tree planting policy and its storm damage replacement plans and in advice concerning agricultural set-aside.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend is satisfied with the way in which the Forestry Commission are implementing the Government's policy on broadleaves, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) on 24 July 1985, *Official Report*, columns *557-62*.

Newbattle Abbey College

21. **Mr. Buchan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what further consideration he is giving to the future development of Newbattle abbey college.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend is not prepared to continue funding the college on the present basis. But he is prepared to consider proposals which would benefit significantly more people than attend Newbattle and which made better use of other existing means of entry to higher education.

49. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the representations he has received concerning the proposed withdrawal of funding from Newbattle abbey college.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have received 126 representations from hon. Members and others following announcment of my right hon. and learned Friend's decision to withdraw funding from Newbattle abbey college at the end of the 1988-89 academic year. My right hon. and learned Friend has met the hon. Members for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) and for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) to discuss his decision.

Public Expenditure

22. **Mr. Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the allocation for health contained in the document "Public Expenditure to 1991: A Commentary on the Scotland Programme."

Mr. Rifkind: I have received no representations concerning the substantial funds we are planning to provide for the National Health Service in Scotland. Gross expenditure this year is expected to be £2,334 million, an increase of 120 per cent. since 1979-80; and we plan to increase this figure still further by some £120 million in 1988-89 and by about £100 million in each of the following two years.

32. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet the National Farmers Union of Scotland to discuss the allocation for agriculture in "Public Expenditure to 1990-91—A Commentary on the Scotland Programme".

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My noble Friend the Minister of State meets the union regularly to discuss a wide range of issues of common interest.

The union has not asked for a meeting on the commentary, which gives details of planned increases in Government expenditure in support of Scottish agriculture over the three years to 1990-91, thus underlining the Government's continuing commitment to the industry.

Unemployment (TUC)

23. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has plans to meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss unemployment in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I have no plans to do so in the near future. I am delighted to say that seasonally adjusted unemployment in Scotland fell byover 42,000 between January 1987 and January 1988 and is now at its lowest level since April 1983.

Competitive Tendering

24. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many responses he has received from health boards in Scotland to his circular on competitive tendering; and how many have been entirely supportive of his proposals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: All health boards have agreed to proceed to implement the programme of competitive tendering set out in the Scottish Home and Health Department's letter of 11 December.

Labour Statistics

25. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the decrease in Scottish unemployment since January 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Between January 1987 and January 1988 seasonally adjusted unemployment in Scotland fell by over 42,000 and is now at its lowest level since April 1983.

Hospital Building

26. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of hospital building projects completed since 1979 and the numbers either at the building stage or planned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: Since 1979, new capital investment in the National Health Service in Scotland has resulted in the completion of 51 major new hospital developments providing some 5,770 beds. A further 34 major developments are in planing, under construction or in course of being commissioned. These will provide 4,484 more new beds. This represents a substantial and continuing capital investment programme in the National Health Service in Scotland.

School Closures

28. **Mr. Millan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had on his recent decision to introduce new regulations relating to school closures.

Mr. Rifkind: Since the Education (Publication and Consultation Etc) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1988 were made, I have received 1,676 representations supporting my decision to make these regulations. However, before I made those regulations I had received some 2,000 representations asking me to take action.

Elderly People

30. **Dr. Bray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what means he has to ensure that admissions to private institutions for the elderly infirm, at the expense of the National Health Service, accommodate the most needy, whether in National Health Service hospitals or privately.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend has no locus in relation to admissions to private institutions. Where a health board funds in-patient treatment for the elderly infirm in a private institution, the patient's health needs should be assessed before admission.

Investment

31. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to how much is spent per capita on attracting initial investment to Scotland and the northern region, respectively.

Mr. Lang: I regret that comprehensive information in the form requested is not available.

Tourism

33. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent developments there have been in promoting the Scottish tourist industry.

Mr. Lang: I refer my hon. Friend, to the Government report "Tourism '87" which was published last year and which includes information on major developments in Scottish tourism. Copies are available in the Library.

Two of the most important recent initiatives are the Scottish tourist board's successful classification and grading scheme for accommodation and the board's overseas promotion activities, especially in the key north American market.

Avalanche Monitoring and Warning System

35. **Mr. Buchanan-Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consult chief constables and mountain rescue organisations on the feasibility of establishing an avalanche monitoring and warning system for Scottish mountains during the winter period; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: I am happy to consider the views of chief constables and mountain rescue organisations to see what improvement is practicable in the availability of local information about avalanche risks.

The nub of the problem is to secure access to authoritative local information. General warnings are often of limited relevance because the risk of avalanche depends on slope aspect, temperature, wind and precipitation and may therefore vary widely on and between individual hills.

The best insurance against avalanche accidents is to encourage all those who go on the hills to learn to recognise the conditions which can cause avalanches and to seek local knowledge and advice which is readily available in popular winter climbing areas such as Lochaber and the Cairngorms.

NHS Funding

36. **Mr. Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the health service trades unions to discuss the funding of the National Health Service in Scotland; and what plans he has for the future meetings.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend has not met representatives of the Scottish Health Service trades unions to discuss the funding of the National Health Service in Scotland and has no immediate plans to do so.

NHS Ancillary Services (Privatisation)

37. **Mr. McLeish:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail the response received from Fife health board to his most recent circular on the contracting out of hospital ancillary services.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Fife health board has indicated that after some minor delay in the issue of invitations to tender, it will be undertaking the required programme of competitive tendering. it is preparing the necessary tender documents and has said it will use its best endeavours to complete the programme in line with other health boards.

57. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet Lanarkshire and Greater Glasgow health boards to discuss Government policy in respect of the privatisation of services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have no plans to meet these boards to discuss competitive tendering. Both boards are pressing ahead with the programme of competitive tendering which I have asked them to undertake. I shall, however, discuss progress with chairmen collectively when I meet them next month.

Hospital and Community Health Services

38. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the expenditure on the hospital and community health services in Scotland for each of the years from 1982-83 to date, at constant prices, using the hospital prices index.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No separate price index is maintained for hospital and community health services in Scotland.

Greater Glasgow Health Board

39. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the projects initiated as a result of joint funding between Greater Glasgow health board and Strathclyde regional council; what projects have been agreed to start in the near future; and if he plans to increase the funding to Greater Glasgow health board to enable the board to expand this field of its work.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally. Since 1979 gross expenditure on the National Health Service in Scotland has grown by 28 per cent. in real terms. In addition, the planning figure for current expenditure on local authority social work services for 1988-89 is 36 per cent. greater in real terms than for 1979-80. The allocation of these very substantial resources is a matter for health boards and local authorities.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what communication he or any of his representatives had with Mr. L. Peterkin, general manager of Greater Glasgow health board, on Thursday 4 February.

Mr. Rifkind: My Department is in contact with the general manager of the Greater Glasgow health board over a wide range of issues on an almost daily basis.

Manufacturing

40. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what increase there has been in Scottish manufacturing productivity since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Between 1979 and the first half of 1987 manufacturing output per employee in Scotland increased by an average of 5·6 per cent. per annum. Over this period, Scottish manufacturing productivity growth was higher than in any of the seven major OECD economies.

Maternity and Neonatal Services

41. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received

about proposals published by Grampian health board and its consultative document, on maternity and neonatal services in the region.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Twenty-six. The consultation period set by Grampian health board does not, however, expire until 29 February 1988 and within this period, representations should be made to the board.

Glasgow Royal Infirmary

42. **Mr. McTaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those departments within Glasgow royal infirmary which are refusing out-patient referrals due to shortages of medical staff; what effect this is having on patient care; what steps are being taken to remedy the situation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It has proved necessary to curtail the number of out-patients seen in the ophthalmology department of Glasgow royal infirmary because of a shortage of medical staff. Alternative arrangements have been made for patients to be seen either at Stobhill hospital or the Glasgow eye infirmary. The Greater Glasgow health board has recently appointed two junior doctors to the department, and is taking steps to increase the number of consultant sessions there. Temporary difficulties in the out-patient urology department have been resolved by the appointment of a senior registrar.

Unified Business Rate

43. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he now has any further proposals for the introduction of a unified business rate in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: No. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 14 January to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) at column *367*.

Ayrshire and Arran Health Board

44. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many ancillary staff are employed by Ayrshire and Arran health board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A total of 1,879 as at 30 September 1987.

Rating Reform

45. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the current stage of consultations between his Department and relevant bodies in Scotland with regard to the registration of severely mentally handicapped people for poll tax purposes.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend has consulted widely on the procedures required to identify severely mentally handicapped persons to be exempted from liability to pay the personal community charge. Responses to this consultation are currently being considered.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he proposes to take to prevent the evasion of the standard community charge through the registration of one spouse at a married couple's main residence and the other at a second home.

Mr. Lang: The standard community charge is payable only in respect of dwelling houses which are not the sole or main residence of any person. The question where a person is solely or mainly resident will depend on the facts and circumstances of each case. It will be for community charges registration officers, in making up the community charges register, to satisfy themselves in each case as to whether a person is solely or mainly resident in particular premises: their decisions will be subject to appeal under the provisions of Section 16 of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987.

South of Scotland Electricity Board

46. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his policy on the proposal of the South of Scotland Electricity Board to go out to tender for coal purchases and its effect on the Scottish coal mining industry.

Mr. Lang: The purchase of coal for electricity generation is essentially a commercial matter for the two industries and not one in which it would be appropriate for the Government to intervene. However, I do recognise the importance to British Coal's operations in Scotland of securing further orders for supplying coal to the South of Scotland Electricity Board when the existing contract terminates at the end of March and I remain hopeful that agreement will be reached on terms acceptable to both parties.

50. **Mr. O'Neill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will next be meeting the chairman of the South of Scotland Electricity Board to discuss the importance of foreign coal.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend meets the chairman of the South of Scotland Electricity Board from time to time to discuss matters of mutual interest. However, he has no plans for a meeting on this matter, which is for the commercial judgment of the board.

Council House Sales

47. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a further statement on the progress of sales of council houses under the right-to-buy legislation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Since 1979 some 83,000 local authority house sales have taken place, and more than 30,000 applications to purchase have been made during 1987.

56. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the proceeds from sales of public sector housing in Scotland since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As at December 1987, sales of public sector houses to sitting tenants in Scotland since 1979 total £1,016 million. Some 10 per cent. of public sector stock has been sold, and since the receipts generated are available to enhance housing capital programmes it is very much in the housing agencies' interest to continue to encourage tenants to buy.

Royal College of Nursing

48. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with representatives of the Royal College of Nursing.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I met the college's Scottish board on 5 February and discussed waiting lists, competitive tendering and nurse education and training. I took particular note of its views that action to reduce waiting lists required adequate nursing support, and assured it that savings from competitive tendering would be retained by health boards for patient care and that there was every opportunity for existing staff to compete for tenders. We agreed to meet regularly in future.

Health Care

51. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what meetings *(a)* his Department and *(b)* any public body for which he has responsibilities have had with any member of the AMI group of companies, The Murrayfield plc., Whatlings plc., and any other operator of private health care in order to discuss the provisions of health care in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have had one meeting with AMI representatives, at their request, and have subsequently visited Ross Hall hospital. There have been two other meetings at which representatives of AMI and the Scottish Home and Health Department were present, to discuss health matters. Meetings are also held from time to time with the bodies which represent private nursing and residential homes. Certain health boards have held discussions about the contribution which private hospitals can make to their own needs and the Common Services Agency has regular discussions with private hospitals about their requirements for blood products.

NHS (Internal Inflation Rate)

52. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the National Health Service internal inflation rate in Scotland in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No records of inflation in the NHS in Scotland are kept. Financial provision for the NHS is planned and made on a cash basis.

Health Services (Privatisation)

53. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will discuss his proposals for privatisation of National Health Service services with the National Union of Public Employees, the Confederation of Health Service Employees, and other trade unions representing hospital workers.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: If events up to and including the "day of action" on 24 February demonstrate a genuine attempt by the trade unions to protect patients I would be prepared to consider a meeting.

54. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to meet the chairmen of the health boards in order to discuss his plans for the privatisation of certain services and functions.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans for privatisation. Competitive tendering for support services has been discussed with health board chairmen on a number of occasions. Boards are now proceeding with a limited programme of tendering and I propose to discuss progress when I meet chairmen next month.

Health Boards (Funding)

55. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to ensure that the present level of funding for Scottish health boards is sufficient to allow them to achieve the priorities set out in the report entitled, "Scottish Health Boards-Revised Priorities for the Eighties and Nineties."

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The SHARPEN report — the "Scottish Health Authorities Review of Priorities for the Eighties and Nineties"—is a report by a working group set up by the Scottish Health Service Planning Council which is at present considering the recommendations made in it. The priorities for the NHS in Scotland remain those set out in the report "Scottish Health Authorities Priorities for the Eighties". With the very substantial resources made available to them — resources which have increased by about 28 per cent. in real terms since 1979-80 — health boards in Scotland are expected to develop these priority services.

NHS (Efficiency Savings)

58. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the efficiency saving made within the ancillary services of the National Health Service since 1983.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Savings from in-house efficiency measures reported by health boards and the Common Services Agency since 1983 on catering, domestic and laundry services represented 0·6 per cent. of the total expenditure on these services in 1984-85, 1·9 per cent. in 1985-86 and 5·7 per cent. in 1986-87. The total savings by September 1987 were £16·1 million in cash terms.

NHS Ancillary Services (Privatisation)

59. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had in the past three months with private contractors on the subject of ancillary services in the National Health Service.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many civil servants are employed in his Department; what are their average weekly working hours; and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job-sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

Mr. Malcolm Rifkind: At 1 February 1988, the number of civil servants employed in the Scottish Office, excluding the Scottish prison service, was 6,496. The great majority of non-industrial staff work 37 hours (net); most industrial staff work 39 hours per week (net). On the basis of a recent survey, it is estimated that some 3,600 staff participate in the flexible working hours arrangements. There are 10

staff on job-sharing schemes and four staff working four-day weeks. All staff are able to retire with pension rights at age 60; to receive full pension rights an officer has to have accrued 40 years' reckonable service (actual service or purchase of added years).

Museums

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will respond to the report by a working party of the Museums and Galleries Commission on museums in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have written today to the chairman of the Museums and Galleries Commission to thank Professor Miles and his working party for a thorough and interesting piece of work. The Government have responded positively by increasing grant to the Scottish Museums Council by over 13 per cent. to £500,000. The Secretary of State and I look to Scotland's national museums and galleries to give continuing priority to their national responsibilities. We hope that the report will encourage museums and galleries throughout Scotland to improve their management, widen their appeal and raise more income.

Copies of my letter to the chairman of the Museums and Galleries Commission and the Scottish Museums Council containing the Government's responses to the working party's 96 individual recommendations are being placed in the Library.

Queen's College, Glasgow

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the development of Queen's college, Glasgow.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My Department has today written to Queen's college, Glasgow, indicating that after consultation with the Greater Glasgow health board, I am prepared to agree to the proposed transfer of radiography, chiropody and occupational therapy courses from the board to the centrally funded higher education sector.

The college is being asked to confirm that it wishes to assume responsibility for these courses. If so, I am prepared to make capital funds available in 1988-89 for the adaptation, after consultation with the governors of Jordanhill college of education, of accommodation at Jordanhill to allow its use for Queen's college's purposes.

Given the availability of good quality accommodation at Jordanhill, I will not now be making funds available for the development of the Eldon street site, and I am asking the governors to make arrangements for its early disposal.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning the system of notification of sites of special scientific interest; what discussions he has had with the Nature Conservancy Council on the subject; and whether he will institute a review of current practice.

Mr. Rifkind *[holding answer 11 February 1988]:* In addition to the hon. Member's letter to me dated 11 November 1987, I have received representations from four persons within the past 12 months including the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) about the current system. Two of these suggested that there should be a right of appeal against notification and two expressed concern about the size of individual areas that may be notified. Discussions on various aspects of SSSI notification arrangements have been held from time to time mainly at official level between the relevant Government Departments and the Nature Conservancy Council. With regard to current practice I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) *Official Report*, 20 January 1988, at column *747* concerning consultation arrangements.

ENERGY

Plutonium

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, in assessing the commercial advantages of an international trade in plutonium, the costs of the physical protection of the plutonium have been taken into account.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel by British Nuclear Fuels plc is carried out under contract for its customers on a commercial basis. BNFL's customers have to take into account all the costs involved including the costs of protection.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the expected annual cost to Her Majesty's Government for the transport of reprocessed plutonium being transported from Sellafield to Japan in the 1990s.

Mr. Michael Spicer: None.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what action he proposes to take in response to the report by Price Waterhouse, relating to the electricity tariff offered by the Central Electricity Generating Board to private producers; and if he will make its conclusions available to private producers.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Electricity tariffs are the responsibility of the electricity supply industry and it is therefore for the industry to consider the relevant recommendations in the Price Waterhouse report. It is for area boards, not the CEGB to publish purchase tariffs. Since the Price Waterhouse report was made to the Electricity Council, any question of making its conclusions available to private producers is for the council to consider.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Quarantine Regulations

Sir John Farr: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what effect the Single European Act will have on existing animal quarantine regulations.

Mr. Donald Thompson: We intend to retain our quarantine regulations as long as they are necessary to protect the United Kingdom.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the receipts from profits on the sale of milk quotas in the current financial year.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I regret that this information is not available.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, further to the statement on the meeting of the European Council, *Official Report*, 15 February, columns 710-11, if he will provide the evidence for the statement that the United Kingdom would need enormous deficiency payments or considerable price increases in other directions through the imposition of even heavier levies at the port of entry, to which products this refers; and why such payments or price increases would be necessary.

Mr. MacGregor: The prices available on world markets for agricultural products supported by the CAP are mostly well below existing support levels. For example, for wheat and butter world prices are about a quarter of the CAP support level; for sugar they are about a third and for skimmed milk powder they are about two thirds of the CAP support price.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why he agreed to the European Economic Community decision to pay farmers not to produce; and whether such payments will be debited to the agricultural budget.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear in her statement on 15 February that the scheme to take agricultural land out of production was agreed by the European Council as a complement to the stabiliser arrangements and as a further discouragement to overproduction. A proportion of the costs to member states of making payments under the scheme is to be carried by the Community's agricultural fund.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing *(a)* European Economic Community spending on the common agricultural policy and for non-agricultural purposes in the year before the Dublin and Fontainebleau summits respectively, *(b)* the estimate for 1987, *(c)* the forecast for 1992 and *(d)* gross United Kingdom contributions on each occasion.

Mr. MacGregor: The information requested is set out in the following table:

Mecu

	1983	[1]*1987*
EC expenditure on the CAP (guidance and guarantee)	16,637	24,101
EC expenditure excluding the CAP	7,720	12,067
United Kingdom contribution to EC budget (before abatement)	5,084	6,938

[1] The estimate for CAP expenditure in 1987 excludes some 4,512 mecu of expenditure in November and December 1987 which will fall on the 1988 Budget.

Figures are not available for 1992.

Source:
1983 EAGGF financial report, Court of Auditors report.
1987 Supplementary and amending budget.

Natural Mineral Waters

Ms. Quin: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all the natural mineral waters produced in the United Kingdom which are officially recognised by the European Economic Community under the terms of Council directive 80/7775/EEC.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The following natural mineral waters have been recognised by the responsible authorities in the United Kingdom under the provisions of the Natural Mineral Waters Regulations 1985, which implement in the United Kingdom EC Directive 80/777, and have been notified to the Commission for publication in the Official Journal of the European Communities:

Abbey Well
Bath Natural Mineral Water
Braeuisge Spring
Buxton Water
Campsie Spring
Caithness Spring
Chiltern Hills
Cwm Dale Spring
Decantae
Dorset Spring Water
Glendale Spring
Highland Spring
Hilden Natural Mineral Water
Kingshill Forest Glade
Malvern
Mountain Spring
Northumbrian Spring
Penryddlan, Llandinam
Prysg Spring
Scottish Spring
Strathmore Spring

Wool

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is able to announce the guaranteed price for wool for the 1988 clip; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Together with the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, I have reviewed the state of the wool market and prospects for the 1988 clip. We have decided to maintain the price guarantee for the 1988 wool clip at 129p/kg.

The prices achieved by the British Wool Marketing Board for United Kingdom wool continued to improve in 1987. Average market prices for the 1987 clip rose above the prevailing guarantee, enabling the board to make repayments to the stabilisation fund from August last year. This brings the outstanding deficit down to about £17·8 million.

Stocks of wool are low; demand continues to be good; and the Wool Board is confident of the prospects for 1988.

Agricultural Land Classification

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress his Department has made in revising the agricultural land classification system for England and Wales.

Mr. Gummer: With the assistance of other experts in the field, my Department has now completed its work. A

consultation document on the revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land is being issued to external practitioners and other interested bodies today. I have placed a copy of the consultation document in the Library of the House. Comments are invited by 25 April 1988.

Bees

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to ban the import of foreign honey bees.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* I have no plans at present to ban imports of honey bees which are permitted only under licence. However, our bee import controls are kept under constant review to ensure minimum risk to bee health in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to prevent the spread of varroasis among bees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* Imports of bees into the United Kingdom are strictly controlled by licence. Licences are issued only for queen bees, with attendant workers, from countries with a high bee health status. They are not issued for imports coming from countries where varroasis is known to exist. To minimise the risk of accidental or illegal import of bees we are again writing to port authorities in England drawing their attention to this disease and asking them to display a warning poster which the national beekeeping association have prepared.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about the number of cases of varroasis among bees in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* Selective searches which my Department has undertaken in October in each of the last three years in eastern and south-eastern regions of England have found no evidence of varroasis. Nor has varroasis been found in any of the hive debris which beekeepers have themselves sent to us for free examination as part of our campaign to encourage greater vigilance against this disease.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Health Services (Administration Costs)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the most recent information he has as to the administration costs of *(a)* the National Health Service and *(b)* private insurance-based schemes.

Mr. Newton: The 1986-87 annual accounts of health authorities, family practitioner committees, and so on, comprising the National Health Service in England show that 3·72 per cent. of their total revenue was incurred on headquarters administration. We do not collect comparable information for the private sector.

Surgical Operations

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the 10 most frequently performed surgical operations carried out in *(a)* the Crewe, *(b)* the Chester and *(c)* the Halton health district: and what estimates he has of the average cost of each type in each area.

Mrs. Currie: The table shows estimates from a 10 per cent. sample of hospital records for 1985. The operations shown are those from OPCS condensed list of operations — third revision — which identify specifically groups of related procedures. No information is available for Halton, as Halton district general hospital opened during 1985.

Estimated number of the 10 most common forms of surgery (in order of frequency) performed in NHS non-psychiatric, non-maternity hospitals, Chester and Crewe district health authorities, 1985

	Condensed[1] list operation number	*Operation*	*Estimated number of operations*
Chester			
1.	093	Treatment of fracture by operations	680
2.	080	Dilatation, curettage, biopsy and excision of lesion of cervix	580
3.	023	Tonsils and adenoids	560
4.	092	Post-natal or post-abortion operations	330
5.	044	Operations on appendix	310
6.	078	Hysterectomy	310
7.	014	Operations on lens	290
8.	039	Inguinal hernia operations	260
9.	061	Cystoscopy (with destruction of lesion)	250
10.	100	Arthroplasty	250
Crewe			
1.	093	Treatment of fractures by operations	680
2.	080	Dilatation, curettage, biopsy and excision of lesion of cervix	640
3.	061	Cystoscopy (with destruction of lesion)	470
4.	039	Inguinal hernia operations	360
5.	078	Hysterectomy	340
6.	036	Mastectomy	310
7.	044	Operations on appendix	290
8.	014	Operations on lens	260
9.	023	Tonsils and adenoids	240
10.	= 092	Post-natal or post-abortion operations	210
10.	= 100	Arthroplasty	210

[1] OPCS condensed list of surgical operations.

Health Districts (Administrative Staff)

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give *(a)* the number of administrative staff employed and *(b)* the total sums each years spent on administrative salaries in (i) the Crewe health district (ii) the Chester health district and (iii) the Halton health district in each of the past five years.

Mrs. Currie: Staff-in-post figures are shown in the table. Comparable information on staff costs is not available centrally and my hon. Friend may care to contact the appropriate district chairmen.

National Health Service administrative and clerical staff in post[1] Crewe, Chester and Halton health authorities at 30 September

Year	Whole Time Equivalents[2] Crewe	Chester	Halton
1982	344	[3]305	100
1983	350	501	123
1984	364	486	135
1985	372	408	165
1986	372	409	173

Source: DHSS Annual Census of Non-Medical Manpower

[1] Includes General Managers.

[2] Figures independently rounded to nearest whole time equivalent.

[3] Figures do not include 222·7 (WTE) administrative and clerical staff who continued to provide support to supra district services to the five Cheshire health authorities after NHS Reorganisation.

NHS (Expenditure)

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the expenditure per head in real terms on the National Health Service *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the Mersey region, *(c)* in the Crewe health district, *(d)* in the Chester health district, and *(e)* in the Halton health district in each of the past 10 years.

Mrs. Currie: Figures of expenditure per head (based on total populations) for the years since the establishment of district health authorities on 1 April 1982 are shown in the table.

Hospital and community health services[1]—total expenditure per head (at 1987-88 prices)

	1982-83 £	1983-84 £	1984-85 £	1985-86 £	1986-87 £
(a) England	151	167	186	207	231
(b) Mersey region	155	170	189	209	237
(c) District health authorities					
Crewe	107	119	134	141	155
Chester	191	204	217	233	257
Halton	70	84	85	105	118

[1] Includes revenue and capital expenditure on hospital, community health, ambulance, blood transfusion and other services.

Sources:

1. Annual accounts of:
   (a) regional and district health authorities in England and those of the London post-graduate teaching hospitals
   (b) the regional health authority and district health authorities comprising the Mersey region
   (c) the district health authorities shown.
2. Mid-year estimates of population 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986 (Office of Population and Censuses Surveys).

Notes:

1. The figures have been expressed at 1987-88 prices by the use of the Gross Domestic Product deflator.
2. Expenditure on family practitioner services is excluded: such expenditure is accounted for by family practitioner committees (FPCs) and cannot be attributed to particular regions or districts. However, prior to 1 April 1985 some 90 district health authorities in England (including Chester and others within the Mersey region) had an associated FPC and those authorities total expenditure figures for the years before that date include elements relating to FPCs' administration expenses which are not separately identifiable.
3. Expenditure by special health authorities and other bodies providing central services to the National Health Service and expenditure met centrally by the Department is also excluded.
4. Prior to 1 April 1982 the district health authorities' predecessor health districts formed part of the Cheshire Area Health Authority and district based figures were not collected centrally.
5. The expenditure figures used for each district health authority include both revenue and capital expenditure together with sums in respect of capital schemes within each district recorded in the annual accounts of the Mersey Regional Health Authority. Revenue and capital expenditure incurred by the latter authority for the region as a whole is included in the figures for Mersey region but excluded from the districts' figures.
6. Significant variations in figures of expenditure per head at district level arise principally because:—
   (a) people travel across district boundaries for treatment and sub-regional resource allocations reflect the pattern of service provision locally;
   (b) the population figures used make no allowance for people resident in one district who receive treatment in another or for the differences in morbidity and age/sex structure of particular populations.

AIDS

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress has been made with the National AIDS Trust; and how much public money has been committed to it.

Mr. Newton: The National AIDS Trust has made considerable progress since its inception last year. A director has been appointed, advisory committees to help determine policy priorities set up, and systems are in place for distributing grants to voluntary organisations throughout the United Kingdom. The Government have made a grant of £500,000 to the trust for distribution to the voluntary sector, and have also contributed towards the trust's administrative costs in 1987-88.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many civil servants are employed in his Department; what are their average weekly working hours, and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job-sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

Mr. Portillo: The number of civil servants employed in the Department on 1 January 1988 was 101,920; their conditioned hours of service are mainly 41 hours per week in the London pay area and 42 hours elsewhere:

(a) the opportunity to work flexible working hours is available to most staff apart from those on shift work. No record of the number of staff who work such hours is kept;

(b) 662 staff participate in job-share arrangements.
(c) there is no scheme for an option to work a four-day week or nine-day fortnight in the Department.
(d) awards of pensions are based on the length of reckonable service and pensionable pay at the time of retirement; full pension rights are available to all staff retiring at 60 years of age who have 40 years' reckonable service.

Foetal Material

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if parental consent is required before supplying foetal material to medical schools; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will place in the Library the regulations governing the supply of foetal material to medical schools for use in experiments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The use of foetuses and foetal material in research is covered by the code of practice recommended by the Peel report on the use of foetuses and foetal material for research, 1972, a copy of which is in the Library. This code of practice which has been commended to all health authorities recommends, inter alia, that research should only be carried out with the direct sanction of the local ethical committee and that where the Human Tissue act does not apply, a pre-condition of the research should be that there is no objection on the part of the parent. There are no additional specific regulations governing the supply of foetal material to medical schools.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the figures for the Northern regional health authority's in-patient waiting lists for each of the years from 1979 to the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Newton: The available information is given in the table.

In-patient waiting lists, Northern Regional Health Authority, at 31 March

Year	Total cases
1979	47,642
1980	36,470
1981	34,070
1982	34,475
1983	47,566
1984	40,390
1985	36,221
1986	35,711
1987	37,334

Hospital Social Workers

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many social workers working in hospitals are employed by district health authorities.

Mr. Newton: The National Health Service (Transfer of Social Services Staff) Order 1974 transferred NHS hospital social workers to the employment of local authorities. We are therefore not aware of any in the employment of district health authorities.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social workers are estimated to be working in hospitals; and what is the approximate number per 100,000 population in each health region.

Mr. Newton: I regret that the information needed to make these estimates is not available centrally.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will instruct the regional health authorities to monitor the withdrawal of local authority social workers from hospitals resulting from local authority spending reductions.

Mr. Newton: There is a duty on health authorities and local authorities to collaborate in the provision of services and we would expect them to be in close touch about changes which would have an effect on those services.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what figures he has as to how many hospitals have or are threatened with loss of the services of social workers because of the local authority spending reductions.

Mr. Newton: Information on the number of hospitals affected is not available centrally. In London, however, six boroughs (Brent, Camden, Haringey, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark) are known to have made, or to be planning, reductions in their hospital social work service.

Children's Heart Surgery

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many hospitals specialise in children's paediatric heart surgery; in which regions they are located; by what percentage their revenue allocation has increased since 1984; and what is the current urgent in-patient waiting list for each one.

Mrs. Currie: All regional health authorities have cardiothoracic units which undertake cardiac surgery on children. Cardiac surgery on neonates and infants is funded as a supraregional service. The nine designated supraregional centres are located in the following regions: Northern, Yorkshire, South East Thames, Wessex, South Western, West Midlands and Mersey and at the Brompton hospital and the hospital for sick children, Great Ormond Street, which are administered by special health authorities. We are aware that some cardiac surgery on neonates and infants is carried out in non-designated centres but comprehensive information on these is not held centrally.

The total revenue allocation for the designated centres has risen from £7,121,000 in 1985-86 to £8,933,000 for 1988-89, an increase of approximately 25 per cent. The allocation of funds to surgery on children over the age of one year is a matter for the health authorities.

I regret that the information requested on waiting lists is not held centrally. Waiting list statistics are collected centrally by consultant department, not by age of patient or intended method of treatment.

Ear, Nose and Throat Departments

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* the latest figures available for the in-patient waiting lists of ear, nose and throat departments in each of the English regional health authorities to update the table published in his answer to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South of 16 December 1986, *Official Report*, columns *469-70*; and if he will indicate the percentage changes over the preceding year and since December 1984.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is given in the table. I regret that the waiting list figures for 31 December 1984 and the changes in waiting list between 31 December 1984 and 31 March 1986 given in my earlier reply were incorrect. Amended figures are given in the table.

In-patient waiting lists NHS Ear, nose and throat departments

Regional Health Authority	*Number of cases on list*			*Percentage change*		
	31 December 1984	*31 March 1986*	*31 March 1987*	*December 1984-March 1986*	*March 1986-March 1987*	*December 1984-March 1987*
Northern	6,137	4,311	4,742	−29·8	10·0	−22·7
Yorkshire	9,755	8,373	8,817	−14·2	5·3	−9·6
Trent	8,544	8,977	8,509	5·1	−5·2	−0·4
East Anglian	4,740	3,946	3,565	−16·8	−9·7	−24·8
North West Thames	6,002	7,658	7,363	27·6	−3·9	22·7
North East Thames	11,649	14,134	13,653	21·3	−3·4	17·2
South East Thames	6,541	8,420	9,056	28·7	7·6	38·4
South West Thames	5,256	5,111	4,630	−2·8	−9·4	−11·9
Wessex	6,904	5,846	5,195	−15·3	−11·1	−24·8
Oxford	4,556	4,564	4,437	0·2	−2·8	−2·6
South Western	5,272	4,790	4,931	−9·1	2·9	−6·5
West Midlands	14,422	14,346	14,745	−0·5	2·8	2·2
Mersey	3,838	3,982	3,268	3·8	−17·9	−14·9
North Western	9,870	10,525	11,042	6·6	4·9	11·9
All Regional Health Authorities	103,486	104,983	103,953	1·4	−1·0	0·5

Calder Girls School

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what specific study has been undertaken *(a)* by his Department, *(b)* by his Department in collaboration with the environment and health departments, *(c)* by consultants to his Department, *(d)* by the National Radiological Protection Board, *(e)* by the Medical Research Council, *(f)* by COMARE and *(g)* by the Black committee, of the comparative health of girls who attended the Calder girls school in Seascale from 1952 to its closure, with cohorts of girls from different regions over the same period.

Mrs. Currie: A study of children who attended schools in Seascale, but were born elsewhere, commissioned and part-funded by this Department following a recommendation of the Black advisory group, was undertaken by Professor M. J. Gardner of the MRC epidemiology unit, Southampton, and colleagues, and reported in the *British Medical Journal* of 3 October 1987.

The study compared deaths from any cause, and non-fatal cancer incidence among the pupils, with that expected on the basis of national rates. Calder girls' school was amongst those whose pupils were included in the study. We know of no other similar studies on the health of this group.

Lorazepam

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to restrict further or to introduce a ban on the prescribing of lorazepam or any other benzodiazepine; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We have no such plans. Our present advice is that benzodiazepines, including lorazepam, have a place in medical practice if prescribed with appropriate care. The Committee on Safety of Medicines has recently advised doctors on the use of these drugs in "Current Problems No. 21"; a copy is being placed in the Library. Companies have been asked to change their data sheets in line with the CSM's advice.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list those organisations which have made representations to him since the beginning of 1987 about the represcribing of lorazepam; and what his response has been.

Mr. Newton: No organisation has made such representations but we have received a number of letters from hon. Members and individuals on the matter.

Tranquilliser Abuse

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list those organisations engaged in combating tranquilliser abuse which have been either totally or partially funded by his Department in each of the years 1981 to 1987; and if he will give the amounts provided in each case.

Mrs. Currie: The following organisations catering for those dependent on tranquillisers have received grants under the central funding initiative set up by the Government in 1983 to pump-prime services for drug misusers.

Organisation	*Amount £*	*Duration of funding*
TRANX (Harrow)	89,483	1983 to 1986
TRANX Release (Northampton)	28,592	1984 to 1986
MIND (Copeland)	94,367	1985 to 1988
NECA (North East Council on Addictions)	124,241	1985 to 1988

Many of the other 184 projects funded under this scheme also provide a service to those dependent on tranquillisers.

Radiotherapy Services

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when his Department's review of its

guidance to health authorities on the organisation of radiotherapy services will be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: The guidance on the organisation of radiotherapy services issued to health authorities in 1978 has been reviewed with the help of our cancer experts in order to take account of subsequent epidemiological and scientific developments. The review has concluded that the minimum combination of equipment and staff for a viable unit has not significantly altered. However, the use of radiotherapy has increased substantially, and is likely to continue to increase. Furthermore, the importance of access to a unit may have been underestimated.

Accordingly the minimum catchment population needed to generate sufficient demand for a viable unit has fallen from the 1 million previously recommended. The precise figure for each unit will depend on local factors, including transport facilities and clinical practice. However, in normal circumstances the minimum would now be about two thirds of a million.

The review nevertheless concluded that units larger than the minimum remain the ideal; they permit greater specialisation, which is especially valuable in this time of rapid change and development in cancer therapy; they are necessary for teaching purposes; and they reduce costs by making fuller use of ancillary equipment.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 25 February 1988

WALES

Hospital Referrals

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to rates of patient referral to hospitals by different general practitioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Surveys of out-patient referrals in a six-week period were conducted at hospital out-patient clinics throughout Wales in spring 1985, autumn 1985 and autumn 1986. The information for 1985 has been used to calculate an indicator of the referral rate for each general practice. Some practices have been made aware of their referral rates by medical officers of the regional medical service, who are based in the Welsh Office. This information by practice is not appropriate for general release, but an article giving broader figures for districts for the spring 1985 survey was published in the *British Medical Journal* (volume 295, 19 September 1987). Information for autumn 1986 is currently being processed and it is intended to publish results when ready at a broad level.

NHS Consultants

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to the different frequencies and the number of times individual consultants see National Health Service patients in respect of the 10 most common hospital treatments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: This information is not held centrally.

Hospital Closures

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, by health authority in Wales, the numbers of beds in each and the types of hospitals closed since 1978.

Mr. Grist: During this period, when 11 new hospitals and more than 2,000 beds have been opened, the following beds have been closed.

Wales: Hospitals closed since 1978

Health authority/hospital	*Number of beds*[1]	*Type of hospital*	*Date of closure*
Clwyd			
Prince Edward Memorial	31	Othopaedic	31 May 1980
Llangwyfan	201	Mainly long stay	7 August 1981
Chatsworth House	29	GP Maternity	27 August 1985
Colwyn Bay Maternity	12	Maternity	20 October 1985
Chirk[2]	26	Acute	October 1987
East Dyfed			
Cilymaenllwyd	32	Pre-convalescent	13 January 1984
Allt-y-Mynydd	46	Mental handicap	16 December 1986
Pembrokeshire			
Kensington	68	Long stay	14 June 1978
Pembroke County War Memorial	166	Acute	31 December 1978
St. Thomas	87	Partly acute	31 December 1978
Gwent			
Snatchwood	25	Geriatric	9 November 1980
Cefn Mably	76	Geriatric	18 April 1983
Gwynedd			
Gors Maternity	17	Maternity	28 November 1980
Minffordd	37	Acute	17 July 1984
Eryri	67	Orthopaedic	14 September 1984
Caernarvonshire and Anglesey General	193	Acute	28 September 1984
Gulltysil	32	Geriatric	1 March 1985
Mid Glamorgan			
Abertysswg	12	Acute	28 February 1978
Merthyr General	126	Acute	30 March 1978
Bedwellty	25	Geriatric	24 May 1978
Glyncornel	45	Geriatric	27 October 1979
St. Tydfils	103	Mainly long stay	28 June 1980
Blackmill Isolation	32	Infectious diseases/pre-convalescent	9 October 1985
Bridgend and District	27	Ear, nose and throat	12 October 1985
Cefn Hirgoed	59	Mainly long stay	12 October 1985
Powys			
Adelina Patti	63	Mainly long stay	25 March 1986

Health authority/hospital	Number of beds[1]	Type of hospital	Date of closure
West Glamorgan			
Llwynderw	21	Pre-convalescent	20 May 1979
Drymma Hall	68	Mental handicap	10 May 1986
Cwmdonkin	24	Pre-convalescent	21 August 1987

[1] This figure is based on the hospitals' complement at approximately one year before closure as hospitals are usually closed gradually over a period.
[2] Temporary closure for building work.

Cervical Cytology

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the total cervical cytology examinations carried out by family medical practitioners in each of the health authorities in Wales were reimbursable directly under the item-of-service payment in each of the last five 12 month periods for which figures are available.

Mr. Grist: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional measures he proposes to take to improve the cervical cytology uptake in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The cervical cytology screening service, including any action necessary to improve uptake, is the responsibility of the individual district health authorities. Over the last two years some £800,000 of recurring central funding has been allocated to health authorities to help them improve the service. Uptake rates are being monitored by the Welsh Office.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be the non-domestic rate for Wales in 1990, based on current prices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: The current average non-domestic rate poundage in Wales is 236·5p. A decision on the level for 1990 will be announced at the appropriate time.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from business ratepayers in Wales as to the progress towards the establishment of a unified non-domestic rate for Wales in 1990.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have received comments on our proposals from a number of organisations and individuals.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made in the revaluation of business property in preparation for the introduction of a unified non-domestic rate for Wales in 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: The Valuation Office has issued forms of return and consideration is now being given to the appropriate level of value as at 1 April 1988.

Radiation (Sheep)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 22 February, whether in the period before May and October 1986 any live monitoring machines for testing radiation in sheep were available but not in use; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: Apart from a limited field trial of one machine no live monitoring machines were available for use in north Wales prior to the beginning of October 1986.

Legislation (Publication)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what difficulties his Department has experienced in publishing legislation laid by him in the present Session; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: My Department has not experienced any difficulties in pubishing legislation laid by me in the present Session.

Welsh Language

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the amount of Government financial assistance for the Welsh language in both cash and real terms since 1979; and what was the proportion of this which has been educational expenditure.

Mr. Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* The information is as follows:

Total Government support for the Welsh language under section 21 of the Education Act 1980 and section 26 of the Development of Rural Wales Act 1976

	Cash terms (£ thousands)	Real terms (£ thousands)	[1](Percentage age)
1979-80	237	412	—
1980-81	893	1,310	[2]58
1981-82	1,615	2,158	49
1982-83	1,766	2,200	49
1983-84	2,011	2,394	51
1984-85	1,987	2,264	51
1985-86	2,422	2,605	54
1986-87	2,528	2,635	57
1987-88	2,899	2,899	60

[1] Proportion of expenditure in respect of educational projects under section 21 of the Education Act 1980.
[2] First year of grant.

The above does not include expenditure by other agencies, such as the Welsh Arts Council, not directly funded by my Department whose work involves activity related to the Welsh language, or the expenditure on S4C, which has increased as follows:

	£ million
1982-83	20
1983-84	24
1984-85	28
1985-86	34
1986-87	37
1987-88	40

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Attorney-General how many civil servants are employed in his and the Lord Chancellor's Department; what are their average weekly working hours; and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job-sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor's Department employs 9,947 full-time, 1,155 part-time and 961 casual staff. Full-time staff in central London work 41 hours per week (gross); elsewhere, 42 hours. Part-time staff work, on average, 24 hours a week. The decision to take part in a flexitime scheme is a personal one and no central record of numbers is kept. However, 208 offices operate a flexible working hours scheme, while 218 offices have elected to continue with fixed hours. Forty-six members of staff job share and four applications are pending. No applications have been refused. Details of the individual patterns of work are not kept centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost, but 1,040 staff work between 10 and 30 hours a week and 104 between 31 and 35 hours a week. A total of 11,075 are entitled to retire with a pension at the age of 60, the amount of pension payable being calculated on the period of reckonable service completed.

Eighteen civil servants are employed in the Law Officers' Department. All are full-time and work 41 hours per week (gross). None is on flexitime, on job-sharing schemes or on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight. All are entitled to retire with a pension at the age of 60, the amount of pension payable being calculated on the period of reckonable service completed.

Mr. Freddie Andrews

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Attorney-General why fraud squad investigations into the case of Freddie Andrews were reopened in 1987; and on whose instruction there has been further investigation.

The Attorney-General: Investigations into this matter were not reopened in 1987. An investigation by an officer of the fraud squad of the Royal Ulster Constabulary commenced in August 1981. A preliminary report was submitted by the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland on 26 February 1982. Since that date, thorough and complex police investigations have continued and a number of further reports have been received in the office of the Director from the Chief Constable. On 10 June 1987 a direction to prosecute an individual for an offence contrary to section 15 of the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 was issued to the Chief Constable.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Attorney-General if he will publish details of all properties inherited by Freddie Andrews *(a)* on the death of his father and *(b)* still in his ownership when the Official Solicitor assumed responsibility for his affairs (No. 516 1978); if he will publish dates of transfer of each property transaction and the value of each transaction; and if he will provide a copy of each audited annual account for the affairs of Freddie Andrews since his affairs became the responsibility of the Office of Care and Protection, with details of the use to which moneys raised were put.

The Attorney-General: It is not appropriate to publish details of the affairs of any patient without leave of the court, as such matters must be treated in the same confidence as that enjoyed by any other person. An application may be made to the court by any person concerned about a particular case for disclosure of any information in respect of which the applicant can demonstrate a legitimate interest.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Attorney-General why the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland originally directed no prosecution in respect of all matters raised by the late Detective Constable Patterson which included information on Freddie Andrews' case; and why investigation papers in the Andrews case were subsequently submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions (Northern Ireland).

The Attorney-General: A direction to prosecute an individual for an offence contrary to section 15 of the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 was issued on 10 June 1987. An investigation by an officer of the fraud squad of the Royal Ulster Constabulary commenced in August 1981. A preliminary report was submitted by the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland on 26 February 1982. Since that date thorough and complex police investigations have continued and a number of further reports have been received in the office of the Director from the Chief Constable. The direction of 10 June 1987 was issued having regard to the various reports made by police, the last of which was submitted on 13 May 1987.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Attorney-General what discussions there have been between the relatives of Freddie Andrews and the office of the Official Solicitor on the handling of his affairs, since he was placed under the Office of Care and Protection at his relatives' request.

The Attorney-General: Following the appointment of the Official Solicitor on 11 January 1979 to assume responsibility for the affairs of Mr. Frederick Andrews there were numerous meetings between him and the individual members of the patient's family and their legal representatives. In the course of a review directed by the court in September 1983 the newly appointed Official Solicitor and counsel engaged by her had further discussions with the legal representatives of members of Mr. Andrews' family. At the conclusion of the review the judge directed that the Official Solicitor should discontinue investigations unless new or additional evidence was forthcoming.

Mentally Handicapped People (Care)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Attorney-General if he will publish details of the steps to be followed where relatives wish to have a mentally handicapped person returned wholly to the care of his relatives from the Office of Care and Protection.

The Attorney-General: Part VIII of he Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 provides that where a person is found to be incapable, by reason of mental

disorder, of managing and administering his property and affairs the High Court may exercise general powers and make specific orders in respect of such a person's property and affairs. Such a person is referred to as a patient. A patient may be restored to management of his own affairs where the court is satisfied that the patient has become capable of managing and administering his property and affairs.

Plymouth Land Registry

Mr. Speller: To ask the Attorney-General what is the average delay in dealing with inquiries relating to registration of title at the Plymouth land registry; what has been the longest during the last year; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Telephoned inquiries to the Plymouth district land registry are generally replied to within 24 hours and postal inquiries within 48 hours, or, if information has to be obtained from records, in up to five working days. However, replies to postal inquiries on plans matters are currently taking about three weeks on average because of the large number received. Extra resources have been allocated to this work to restore the normal response time. Information about the longest time taken to reply to an inquiry is not available.

Drug Damage (Class Actions)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Attorney-General if he has any plans to seek changes in the law which would permit class actions in drug damage cases, and to enable victims of drug disasters to win compensation in the courts more quickly and more cheaply.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor has no immediate plans to introduce a system of class actions but he will be considering the possible scope for reform in this area of law. In the meantime, the Lord Chancellor will be moving amendments to the Legal Aid Bill which could facilitate the funding of multi-party actions; and the Civil Justice Review is considering how time and expense can be saved in personal injury litigation generally.

PRIME MINISTER

Official Information (Leaks)

Q15. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to her answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *682*, for what reasons she does not accept the premise on which was based the question about her policy towards setting up formal inquiries into the improper leaking of official information in cases where the salient facts appear to be known in advance of such an inquiry; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the reply that I gave to the hon. Gentleman on 4 February, at column *682*.

Crumlin road Prison

Q17. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Her Majesty's prison Crumlin road, Belfast

Q58. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Her Majesty's prison, Crumlin road, Belfast.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Crown Estates Act 1961

Q121. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to seek to amend the Crown Estates Act 1961.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Gentleman on 17 December 1987, at column *621*.

Hospital Matrons

Q170. **Mr. Lord:** To ask the Prime Minister what assessment she has made of the implications for the quality of patient treatment as well as efficiency, of reintroducing the post of matron in National Health Service hospitals; if she will take immediate steps to restore this post; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Government's aim is to see that the NHS provides cost effectively a high standard of health care for all who use it. Heath authorities are free to use the title of matron, and some do so. The Government are the first to recognise that for many people such a post is held in high esteem by the patients.

Dorset

Q176. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit Dorset.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Economic League

Q179. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to her answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *683*, what information she has as to whether any non-departmental organisations for which Ministers are responsible have used the resources of the Economic League in considering job applications; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Individual non-departmental public bodies are responsible for their own recruitment arrangements. Information on these arrangements is not held centrally.

Where the Civil Service Commissioners recruit on behalf of such bodies, I am advised that the commissioners have not used the services of the Economic League.

Hong Kong (Animal Welfare)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to her reply of 26 January, *Official Report*, columns *171-72*, if the total ban of the sale of rhinoceros products within Hong Kong from July will include all medical substances with an ingredient from any rhinoceros product.

The Prime Minister: The Hong Kong Government intend that the ban should include all medical substances with an ingredient from any rhinoceros product.

Departmental Co-ordination (Correspondence)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Prime Minister if she will take steps to improve co-ordination between the Departments of Employment and Health and Social Security, with particular regard to replies to correspondence for hon. Members on behalf of their constituents in the light of the transfer of a letter for the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth dated 3 December 1987 from the Department of Employment to the Department of Health and Social Security, then back to the Department of Employment; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Departments concerned regret the delay in dealing with this particular case, to which a response will be sent very shortly. Co-operation between the Department of Health and Social Security and the Department of Employment is normally satisfactory and does not lead to delay in replying to correspondence.

Engagements

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many civil servants are employed in his Department; what are their average weekly working hours; and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job-sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department currently employs some 2,541 staff, including 477 in Her Majesty's Inspectorate. Conditioned hours are 41 a week in London and 42 a week elsewhere, including meal breaks.

There are 553 staff taking part in the flexible working hours arrangements in operation at the Department's Darlington office. Sixteen staff are currently job sharing.

Of the 131 staff employed part-time, 22 work the equivalent of a four-day week or nine-day fortnight.

All members of staff who complete at least five years (two years with effect from 1 April 1988) pensionable service are entitled to a pension on retirement at age 60. As such they all receive their individual full pension rights based on length of service and salary. Statistics are not readily available on the number of staff who might complete the full 40 years pensionable service required to achieve the maximum level of pension entitlement.

Religious Instruction and School Collective Worship

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of parents withdrew their children from *(a)* religious instruction and *(b)* school collective worship in the last academic year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Rumbold: This information is not collected by the Department.

Secondary School Libraries

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer of 10 November 1987, concerning secondary school libraries, how the £10 million provided for 1988-89 by his Department will be allocated to schools; if any guidelines will be issued on how this money is to be spent; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The £10 million for secondary school library provision was identified within the expenditure plans for 1988-89 in response to representations from local authorities that there was a particular need in this area. It will now be for local authorities themselves to decide individually on the priority which they wish to give to secondary school library provision from within the resources available to them.

Education Reform

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received seeking greater protection and encouragement of drama, music, art and design within the core in the national curriculum as currently proposed.

Mrs. Rumbold: Under the Government's proposals in the Education Reform Bill, art and music are foundation subjects within the national curriculum. They will therefore form part of the curriculum for all pupils of compulsory school age in maintained schools. We have received a number of representations stressing the importance of drama and design and asking that they be included in the national curriculum. We have also received a number of suggestions that the expressive arts subjects should all be included in the national curriculum through the means of integrated arts courses.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Energy Conservation

Mr. Barry Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his policy towards the promotion of energy conservation schemes in inner cities, in the light of the Association of the Conservation of Energy's report "Regenerating the Inner Cities — The Energy Dimension".

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Government believe that there should be effective energy conservation in inner cities and elsewhere. Pilot schemes to improve conservation have been supported by the Government's urban

programme and other initiatives. The Department of the Environment is considering changes to the building regulations designed to raise standards of insultation, and is consulting the Association for the Conservation of Energy, among others.

Motor Trade (Abuse)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what response he has made to the recommendations of the joint local authorities' associations on "Tackling Abuses in the Motor Trade", published in October 1987; and what consequential consultations he expects to have with interested parties.

Mr. Maude: Many of the recommendations of the joint local authority associations' report "Tackling Abuses in the Motor Trade" were discussed at a meeting on 15 December 1987 at which my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for roads and traffic and I met a delegation led by the Director General of Fair Trading. At that meeting it was agreed that it was desirable to amend section 60 of the Road Traffic Act 1972, to make it easier for trading standards officers to deal with the sellers of unroadworthy vehicles. Also, as a result of that meeting, it was agreed that a number of other suggestions to help combat the sale of unroadworthy vehicles and the fraudulent alteration of odometers would be examined further. My Deprtment and the Department of Transport are keeping in touch with the Office of Fair Trading and the various interested parties will be kept informed of progress on this matter.

Matthew Brown (Takeover)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to receive the report from the stock exchange surveliance department into alleged insider dealing in the shares of Matthew Brown prior to the takeover by Newcastle Breweries.

Mr. Maude: The stock exchange will no doubt submit a report to me if it considers it appropriate to do so.

ENERGY

Dounreay Nuclear Establishment

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) in view of the reduction in support by European utilities for fast reactor development, what he estimates are the prospects for future public funding of the Dounreay nuclear establishment over the next *(a)* two, *(b)* five and *(c)* 10 years;

(2) if he will make a statement with regard to his policy on the future of the Dounreay nuclear establishment after the privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The European collaboration is currently considering the research requirements for the development of a common fast reactor design. The Government and the utilities, as joint customers, will consider the implications of this work for the fast reactor research programme. The UKAEA is responsible for the allocation of work between its individual sites.

Fast Reactor Programme

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the recent decision by the European fast reactor utilities group to build only one fast reactor on the timing, scale and viability of the EDRP proposal.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Assessment of the impact on the EDRP proposal of decisions taken by the European utilities about future fast reactor orders is a matter for the applicants.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

World Bank

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the size of the general capital increase recently agreed by the executive board of the World Bank and the accompanying recommendations.

Mr. Chris Patten: Her Majesty's Government warmly welcome the recommendation by the executive directors of the World Bank that the board of governors should be invited to approve an increase in the bank's capital of US$74·8 billion—nearly 80 per cent.—with a 3 per cent. paid-in element. This increase would enable the bank to raise its annual level of lending from around $14 billion now to over $20 billion by 1992.

We also welcome that part of the executive directors' report which concerns the bank's future policies. In particular, the report reiterates the importance of the bank's role in assisting Governments to alleviate poverty; and there will be a growing concern with the social and environmental aspects of development. The bank will also continue to assist heavily indebted countries, both in designing structural reform programmes and in providing finance. The report also recognises the importance of promoting the private sector in developing countries.

As soon as the capital increase has been approved by the bank's governors, I shall invite the House to authorise my Department to subscribe to the United Kingdom's allocation of 30,450 new shares. The cost of the 3 per cent. paid-in element of these shares will be around $110 million, which we expect to pay over five or six years beginning in 1988-89. The remaining 97 per cent. of the value of the shares will be callable, and as such will represent only a contingent liability.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council

47. **Sir John Biggs-Davison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on his discussions with Irish Ministers within and without the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council itself last met in November 1985. Since then I have had regular opportunities to meet Irish Ministers at meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council and other meetings of the European Communities, when I have been able to discuss matters of mutual interest.

In addition my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is the co-chairman, with the Irish Foreign Minister, of the Intergovernmental Conference established by the Anglo-Irish Agreement, within the framework of the AIIC.

China (Claims Agreement)

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline the arrangements for the distribution of the moneys received from the People's Republic of China under the claims agreement of 5 June 1987.

Mr. Eggar: The Foreign Compensation (People's Republic of China) Order 1987 was laid before Parliament on 8 January and is due to enter into operation on 1 March. It provides for the Foreign Compensation Commission to register and evaluate claims by those who satisfy the British nationality requirements of the order in respect of bonds issued or guaranteed by the Chinese authorities before 1 October 1949 and in respect of property or other assets expropriated in China between 1 October 1949 and 1 January 1980. The order also sets out arrangements for the distribution of compensation to successful claimants.

Following a public tender the firm of Ernst and Whinney has been engaged to assist the Foreign Compensation Commission in its administrative and executive tasks. Advertisements will appear in the national press on 28 and 29 February indicating how detailed information may be obtained by potential claimants under the order.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Bail

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of those charged with crimes were granted bail in 1987; how many of those granted bail had been charged with theft; and what percentage of those granted bail were *(a)* subsequently found guilty, or *(b)* subsequently found not guilty or *(c)* awaiting trial at the end of 1987.

Mr. John Patten: Information on the numbers of persons finally dealt with by the courts who had been remanded on bail by the police, magistrates' courts or the Crown court, by offence type and outcome, is published in chapter 8 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1986" (Cm. 233), a copy of which is in the Library. Information is not available on the number remanded on bail at any particular time.

Westminster Children's Hospital (Break-in)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the circumstances of the break-in at Westminster children's hospital paediatric research laboratory on the night of 6 and 7 February and as to the progress of police investigations into this incident.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that an inquiry was instituted following a report from the Children's Medical Charity that premises occupied by the charity in Vincent square might have been unlawfully entered on the night of 6-7 February, but that this inquiry has now been terminated at the request of the charity, which no longer wishes to pursue the matter.

Mr. and Mrs. F. Gow (Member's Correspondence)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston can expect a reply to his letters of 10 December and 13 December 1987 regarding Mr. and Mrs. F. Gow, of Glasgow G32.

Mr. Renton: I wrote to the hon. Member yesterday.

London Police Stations

Mr. Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each of the London police stations at which *(a)* men and *(b)* women were being held in police cells on 15 February.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A record of the London police stations at which men and women held in police cells on 15 February is not available and the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Remand Prisoners (Newham)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to how many remand prisoners have been held in Newham police stations during the past year; how many are currently being held; what is the average cost per person per day; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Reliable information as to the number of remand prisoners held in police stations in the borough of Newham during the past year is not available. There were six remand prisoners held in police cells at north Woolwich police station on 23 February and no such prisoners held in any other police stations in the borough of Newham on that date. The average cost of holding a prisoner in a police cell in London is £163 per day.

Murderers (Release)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement as to the circumstances in which Private Thain was released from prison after serving three years of a life sentence for murder;

(2) how many prisoners convicted since 1979 of murder and serving life sentences have been released within three years or less.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Private Thain was released on life licence in February 1987 after three and a half years' detention (including time spent in custody before his trial). His case was dealt with under the normal procedures for considering the release of life sentence prisoners. The date of the first formal review by the Parole Board machinery was fixed after consultation with the judiciary on the requirements of retribution and deterrence for the offence in accordance with the revised arrangements announced in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) on 30 November 1983, at columns 505-7, and Private Thain's release was subsequently authorised following a favourable recommendation by the Parole Board.

One other prisoner convicted of murder since 1979 has been released on life licence after three and a half years or less (including time spent in custody before trial). He was convicted at the age of 15.

Mordecai Vanunu

Mr. Walters: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the light of fresh evidence as to the identity of Mordecai Vanunu's fellow passenger on flight BA 504 to Rome on 30 September 1986 and her presence in London at the time of Mr. Vanunu's disappearance, he will institute an inquiry into the case, to establish whether any crime was committed in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hurd: Any investigation by the police would have to start from evidence that a criminal offence had been committed in the United Kingdom, but no such evidence has been received. If anyone has such evidence, he should contact the police.

Special Event Radio

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about special event radio.

Mr. Renton: In 1986 my right hon. Friend announced an experiment in licensing low-powered transmitters to provide information or a commentary to those attending the sites of festivals, sporting events and so on. During the period of the experiment a total of 31 licences were issued covering 59 separate events. The experiment has generally been welcomed.

In answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) on 19 January 1988, we announced that we intend to bring forward legislation based on the Green Paper "Radio: Choices and Opportunities" to establish a new Radio Authority, which will have responsibility for licensing radio services, including special event radio. Pending new legislation, we have decided to continue with the licensing of special event radio on broadly the same basis as during the experiment. It has, however, been possible to reduce the licence fee to £100 for transmissions not exceeding 50 milliwatts maximum radiated power on the MF band. A fee of £450 will continue to be payable for services using a higher power, where this is deemed to be necessary to provide adequate coverage to the site, and an additional supplement will be payable for assignment of VHF frequencies. Full details of the general and technical conditions and the licensing procedure are set out in notes for the guidance of prospective licensees, available from the Home Office, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

DEFENCE

Job Dispersal

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any further plans to transfer Ministry of Defence jobs to Scotland.

Mr. Sainsbury: Apart from the very recent selection of the final tranche of 70 posts, to complete the MOD dispersal commitment of 1,400 jobs, to Glasgow later this year there are no current plans for any major relocation of jobs to Scotland. But we remain anxious to improve the geographical spread of defence employment, particularly in areas of high unemployment. However, all moves must be justifiable in both operational and economic terms.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civil servants are employed in his Department; what are their average weekly working hours, and how many are *(a)* on flexitime, *(b)* on job-sharing schemes, *(c)* on a four-day working week or nine-day fortnight and *(d)* able to retire with full pension rights at 60 years.

Mr. Sainsbury: The number of United Kingdom-based civilian staff employed by the Ministry of Defence on 1 January 1988 was 146,814, comprised of 87,650 full-time and 1,816 part-time non-industrial staff and 55,101 full-time and 2,247 part-time industrial staff. Data relating to the other information requested are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

RAF Search and Rescue, Chivenor

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his programme for replacement of the helicopter in use by the Royal Air Force search and rescue unit at Chivenor.

Mr. Freeman: Studies are continuing into the deployment of Royal Navy and Royal Air Force helicopters for search and rescue requirements. The results will be announced shortly.

Hazardous Loads (West Yorkshire)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military vehicles carrying nuclear and conventional explosives have travelled on public roads within west Yorkshire in each of the last five years; if the appropriate local authorities and the police were informed in all cases; what representations he has received about such matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to comment on the movement of nuclear weapons or the associated operational procedures. Over the past year five letters have been received about the alleged movement of nuclear weapons in West Yorkshire.

Nuclear Tests (Radiation Victims)

Mr. Churchill: to ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the evidence supplied by his Department to the National Radiological Protection Board in respect of the levels of radiation to which certain members of Her Majesty's forces had been exposed in the course of the British atmospheric nuclear weapon test and experimental programme.

Mr. Sainsbury: As my hon. Friend will be aware, the National Radiological Protection Board was provided with radiation dose information from the "Blue Book" listings and AWRE "health physics records". A sample test of the records provided was made to check that the information given had been accurately extracted. Information concerning the dose records of individuals

cannot be published because of personal confidentiality, but any individual may apply to have his own dose record if he so wishes.

Murder

Mr. Mullin: to ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving members of the British armed forces have convictions for murder.

Mr. Freeman: One.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government (Capital Debts)

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the capital debts owed by each of the district and metropolitan district councils in England.

Mr. Chope: Figures for outstanding advances for capital purposes for each local authority in England are published in the CIPFA publication "Capital Expenditure and Debt Financing Statistics". Copies for each year up to 1985-86, the latest year for which this information has been published, are held in the Library of the House.

Highway Authorities (Abolition of Powers)

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to lay the order abolishing the powers vested in the local highway authorities under article 12 of the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1977.

Mr. Waldegrave: As I said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) on 4 February, at columns *711-12*, we hope to lay the new consolidated general development order a short time after the end of the two-month period for comment on the proposals in the consultation paper which we issued that day.

Darenth Park

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce the name of the inspector who will preside over the reopened Darenth park planning application; and when the inquiry will commence.

Mr. Waldegrave: The reopened inquiry will be conducted by Mr. J. J. Parkinson, MSc, CEng, MICE, MIHT, ACIArb, who presided over the original inquiry in February 1987.

The applicants' agents have asked for time in which to prepare their evidence and we are in contact with them and Dartford borough council about possible dates in June or July. I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as the arrangements have been finalised.

Howbury Grange-Dartford North Marshes

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the result of the inquiry on the Howbury grange-Dartford north marshes development.

Mr. Waldegrave: A decision on these proposals is expected shortly. I shall inform my hon. Friend of the Secretary of State's decision as soon as it is made.

Bees

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what conclusions he has reached on the Green Paper on environmental pollution, published in 1986, in so far as it relates to the control of bees in urban areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: We are considering the representations made in response to the consultation paper on air pollution control.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much, by weight or cubic capacity, radioactive waste is stored in Great Britain; whether any such waste is stored in the county of Durham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: One thousand three hundred and fifty cu m of heat-generating radioactive waste and 41,800 cu m of intermediate-level radioactive waste are currently stored in Great Britain. None of this waste is stored in county Durham. A further 2,430 cu m of low-level radioactive waste is in temporary storage in Great Britain pending its disposal at British Nuclear Fuels' site at Drigg, in Cumbria.

Badgers

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received for the amendment of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to make it a criminal offence to dig out or otherwise destroy a badger's sett; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 12 February, at column *381*.

Southwark (Rate Limitation)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much of the extra 2·98p offered by him to the London borough of Southwark in increased rate limitation for 1988-89 was *(a)* in respect of storm damage, *(b)* in respect of block grant losses, and *(c)* to create a working balance.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend's offer to the London borough of Southwark of a maximum rate of 101p—an extra 2·98p over the maximum he had proposed earlier — was made in the light of all the borough's circumstances which were known to him, and he has now prescribed a maximum of that level.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the next London Docklands development corporation financial report will be published.

Mr. Chope: The corporation will publish its annual report and accounts for 1987-88 in July 1988 and these will then be laid before Parliament.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will order an inquiry into the operations of the London Docklands development corporation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The remarkable achievements of the LDDC are self-evident. No inquiry is necessary.

Office Building, Richmond Terrace

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in what respect the quality of furnishings and fittings in the new Department of Health and Social Security building in Richmond terrace differs from the standard laid down in the design brief published in the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), third report Session 1983-84, appendix 1.1. (HC 571).

Mr. Chope: The furniture and fittings in Richmond House are to normal Civil Service standards, with the exception of those in the fine room suites, which have been provided in a style compatible with their restoration. The design brief published in the Select Committee report does not detail furniture standards in a form for comparison to be made.

Urban Programme

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a breakdown of expenditure on the urban programme annually from 1979-80 to 1987-88 according to outturn expenditure in *(a)* partnership, *(b)* programme authorities, *(c)* other designated districts, *(d)* urban development grants, *(e)* traditional urban programme, *(f)* Merseyside task force and *(g)* any others.

Mr. Chope: The information is in the table. This updates a table "The Urban Programme 1986-87: A Report on its operations and achievements in England" which was published by the Department in October 1987.

Urban programme resources (England) 1979-80 to 1987-88

(£ million, cash)

	Outturn expenditure							*Estimated outturn 1986-87*	*Initial allocation 1987-88*
	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*		
Partnerships	110	116	118	143	133	131	125	122	120
Programme Authorities	32	47	50	77	86	97	96	103	140
Other Designated Districts	3	6	5	9	8	8	10	9	—
Traditional Urban Programme	30	33	42	47	53	47	44	37	10
Urban Development Grant/ Urban Regeneration Grant[1]	—	—	—	—	7	15	22	22	30
Other (includes Merseyside Task Force)	10	—	—	19	23	23	20	19	24
Total	185	202	215	295	310	321	317	312	324

[1] Urban Regeneration Grant was introduced on 1 April 1987.

Partnership and Programme Authorities (Expenditure)

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the estimated outturn expenditure on each partnership and programme authority annually from 1979-80 to 1987-88, estimated.

Mr. Chope: The figures are shown in the table. The table records outturn expenditure for 1979-80 to 1985-86, estimated outturn for 1986-87 and the initial allocations for 1987-88, since outturn data are not yet available.

Urban programme resources (England) 1979-80 to 1987-88

£ million, cash

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*Estimated outturn 1986-87*	*Initial allocations 1987-88*
Partnerships									
Birmingham	13·2	17·3	16·9	25·6	24·3	25·5	25·9	25·9	25·0
Hackney[1 2]	11·8	15·4	15·0	12·1	12·6	13·0	10·4	11·3	10·8
Islington[1 2]				9·7	9·5	11·1	10·3	9·3	10·0
Lambeth	6·8	9·0	9·2	10·4	10·9	12·4	12·1	11·3	12·8
Liverpool	12·6	17·6	17·4	24·6	25·2	23·2	21·3	23·0	20·0
Manchester/Salford	13·0	17·5	16·8	23·6	23·9	23·7	23·2	22·0	23·8
Newcastle/Gateshead	9·1	12·9	14·0	19·8	21·1	21·0	19·6	19·0	17·2
Docklands	20·5	26·2	28·3	17·0	5·9	3·3	—	—	—
Programme authorities									
Barnsley	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·50
Blackburn	—	—	—	—	1·6	3·7	3·8	3·7	4·00
Bolton	1·66	2·11	2·56	2·99	4·3	3·2	3·9	3·8	4·00
Bradford	2·63	3·33	3·12	5·97	5·8	5·5	4·1	3·5	4·50
Brent	—	—	—	—	1·1	4·2	3·8	3·8	4·00
Bristol	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·50
Burnley	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·00

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	Estimated outturn 1986-87	Initial allocations 1987-88
Coventry	—	—	—	—	1·5	4·4	4·2	3·8	5·00
Derby	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·25
Doncaster	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·75
Dudley	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·25
Greenwich	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·50
Halton	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·43
Hammersmith and Fulham	2·63	3·33	4·27	4·78	5·7	5·2	5·0	4·5	5·00
Haringey	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2·00
Hartlepool	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·75
Hull	2·06	2·62	3·40	3·89	6·2	4·6	4·6	4·5	5·00
Kensington and Chelsea	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·25
Kirklees	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·82
Knowsley	—	—	—	—	1·0	3·2	3·5	3·6	4·00
Langbaurgh	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·75
Leeds	2·70	3·56	3·75	4·63	4·7	4·1	4·3	4·0	4·50
Leicester	2·78	3·83	4·16	5·77	6·7	5·7	5·2	4·7	5·43
Lewisham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·50
Middlesbrough	2·06	2·71	3·43	4·98	5·6	5·1	4·5	5·4	5·50
Newham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·75
North Tyneside	1·57	2·25	2·34	3·07	3·5	3·1	3·2	3·8	3·50
Nottingham	2·62	3·41	3·75	4·98	5·6	5·0	4·7	5·3	4·50
Oldham	1·78	2·43	2·85	4·36	4·5	3·4	3·7	3·7	4·00
Plymouth	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·36
Preston	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·23
Rochdale	—	—	—	—	1·6	3·4	4·4	3·6	4·00
Rotherham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·75
St. Helens	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·50
Sandwell	—	—	—	—	3·0	4·6	3·7	4·5	5·00
Sefton	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·50
Sheffield	2·65	3·44	3·49	4·86	4·5	4·2	4·5	5·5	5·50
South Tyneside	1·90	2·51	2·99	4·82	4·5	4·2	4·2	4·6	4·50
Southwark	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·75
Stockton	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·25
Sunderland	1·77	2·6	2·68	2·95	3·5	3·2	3·3	4·3	4·00
Tower Hamlets	—	—	—	—	1·0	4·3	4·2	4·8	4·50
Walsall	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·50
Wandsworth	—	—	—	—	1·5	4·6	4·9	4·2	4·50
Wigan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·50
Wirral	2·07	2·67	2·79	4·42	3·5	3·3	3·3	4·3	3·50
Wolverhampton	1·76	2·93	3·22	5·52	5·9	5·0	5·0	5·1	5·50
The Wrekin	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·56

[1] The Docklands joint partnership was dissolved after the London Docklands Development Corporation was set up in 1981. Expenditure since then was to meet continuing commitments.
[2] Hackney and Islington formed a joint partnership until March 1982.
— No programme authority expenditure in these years because authority did not have programme authority status.

Rates

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the likely average household increase in rates in cash terms of ratepayers living in the borough of Eastbourne and the district of Wealden for 1988-89.

Mr. Chope: None. This information is not available as East Sussex county council, Eastbourne borough council and Wealden district council have not yet set their rates for 1988-89.

MOD Properties (Sales)

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list Ministry of Defence properties placed with the Property Services Agency for disposal in the southern and eastern regions: and if he will list those properties already disposed of since 25 November 1986 in the same regions.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The following lists show those MOD properties currently with PSA southern and eastern regions for disposal, and those sold since 25 November 1986:

Properties with PSA for Disposal

Description	Area (hectares)
Southern Region	
Land at Jacobs Field, Bramley	3·140
Land at Westcott, Bucks	3·320
Land at Sopley, Christchurch	15·090
Flowerdown, Winchester	14 houses
Land at The Meadows, Camberley	30·890
Land at Barton Stacey	0·343
Land at Kingsley Village	0·861
Land at former Infants School Site, Tadley	0·333
Land adjoining Range End, West End, Woking	0·291
Land at Arncott, Bicester	60·700
Land at Pirbright Common, Guildford	26·890
Hamcroft, Portland	9 houses
Aldermaston	5 houses
Land at Bicester (possible development site)	3·290
Allotments, Shrivenham	0·630
Land at Hawley Green, Camberley	0·280
Land at Bisley (Queens Road)	1.2·09
Land at Bricksbury Hill, Farnham	0·105
Land at Bramshott Common, Liphook	0·760
Land at Royal Navy Depot, Botley	0·506
Site of former Nos. 1 and 2 The Woods, Hawley	0·700
Land at Frimley Fuel Allotment	1·200

Description	*Area (hectares)*
Land at Normandy Common, Hants	8·502
Site of 18 houses, Bordon	18 houses
68 houses, Bordon	68 houses
Former Access Track, Bordon	0·146
Ewshot Recreation Ground	1·149
Land at Hillclose, Bovington	0·009
9 houses, Barrack Road, Christchurch	9 houses
Agricultural Land, Abingdon	13·310
Land at Bicester (adjoining owner)	0·324
Land at Bicester (balancing pond)	2·630
22 houses, Hawkins Way, Abingdon	22 houses
Bowsey Hill Training Area, Henley	3·581
5 Riley Road, Reading	1 house
Jubilee Playing Fields, Littleton	4·253
Land at Station Road, Bordon (Water Board)	1·012
Land at Cody Road-Beverley Crescent, Cove, Farnborough	0·193
Houses at Barton Stacey	6 houses
Land for Refuse Amenity Point, Station Road, Bordon	1·246
Artington Cold Store, Guildford	4·144
Bassingbourne Church Crookham-Oakbridge Road, Basingstoke	5 houses
Balmore House, Reading	1 house
Woolston, Southampton	161·870
Queens Quarters, Lynchford Road, Farnborough	0·810
Civil Enclave, Farnborough	20·240
Sandy Lane, Church Crookham	1·310
RAE Farnborough	3 houses
CAD Bramley	404·685
Eastern Region	
Bushey	2 houses
Land at Felixstowe	0·890
Land at Lethe Grove, Colchester	3·120
Bawdsey	1 house
Bury St. Edmunds	38 houses
South Drive, Cardington	3 houses
Land at Molesworth	3·800
Land at Cardington	14·800
Land at Waltham Abbey	0·480
Leavesden Airfield, Watford	107·240
RAF Watton, Norfolk	40 houses
Oxendon Close, Leighton Buzzard	18 houses
Land at RAF Bentwaters	0·190
Land at Duxford	2·500

Properties sold since 25 November 1986

Description	*Area (hectares)*
Southern Region	
Land at Shortheath Common, Bordon	2·080
"Springhill", Normandy	1 house
Land at Hartford Bridge, Minley	1·690
Land at Shenley Brook end, Bletchley	7·900
Land at Brizewood, Brize Norton	0·080
Land at Liphook	0·780
Land at West End Common	50·180
Bordon	205 houses
Boreholes, Barton Stacey	0·199
Warnford Road, Tilehurst	1 house
9 houses, Whitley Wood, Reading	9 houses
2 Pattison Road, Reading	1 house
24 Coningham Road, Reading	1 house
Building Plot, Calcot	0·032
Land at Ewshot Lane, Ewshot	0·079
Land at Brook Cottage, Thursley	0·467
32 Cody Road, Cove	1 house
194 Sandy Lane, Cove	1 house
Stoneleigh Drive, Brize Norton	3 houses
Ampney Orchard	15 houses
Building Plot adjoining 31 Halton Village	0·100
Land at RAF Bicester for road improvements	1·841
Land at Bordon (Church site)	0·500
Land at Parsons Barracks, Aldershot	0·850
Childrens Playground, Mercury Close, Bampton	0·146
Land at Hutton Road, Ash	0·145
Land for Prison, Bicester	4·010
31 Halton Village	1 house
Land adjoining 32 Hillside, Cove	0·478
Building Plot at Whitley Wood	0·085
Land for Sub-station, Bovington	0·280
Hamcroft, Portland	7 houses
Aldermaston	41 houses
Burghfield	11 houses
Houses at Barton Stacey	15 houses
Latymer, Bucks	80 houses
Vauxhall Barracks, Didcot	76 houses
RAE Farnborough	40 houses
Cove, Hants	2.870
Rafborough Estate	51 houses
Farnborough Road	10 houses
Mytchett Place, Surrey	4·800
Land at Cupids Corner, Shoeburyness	0·093
Eastern Region	
Land at Bushey	0·070
Land at Shoeburyness	0·080
Shoeburyness	2 houses
Shoeburyness	2 bungalows
Land at Pinner	0·014
Bawdsey	1 house
Shortstown, Cardington	58 houses
Land at Wattisham	0·700
Land at Sculthorpe	5·820
Land at Cardington	17·200
Spixworth	11 houses
Clapham, Beds	2 houses
Land at Abbotts Road, Colcherter	12·600
Land at South House, Colchester	1·480
Marlborough Park, Kempston	1 house
Woodhurst Road, Peterborough	1 house
Wadham Road, Abbotts Langley	1 house
Land at Bounstead Road, Colchester	0·110
Land at Marham	1·820
Sharnbrook, Beds	1 house
Homefield Road, Colchester	12 houses
Land at Enfield	0·120

SCOTLAND

Schools (Books and Equipment)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what additional moneys he intends to allocate to education authorities in Scotland for spending on school books and equipment; and how he will monitor the situation so as to ensure that these moneys are spent on books and equipment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Provision is made for local authorities' expenditure on non-teaching costs (including books and equipment) within the total planned for local authority current expenditure, on which the determination of rate support grant is based. For 1988-89 planned provision for non-teaching costs is £466·2 million, an increase of 4·6 per cent. over the corresponding amount for 1987-88. Authorities have complete discretion to spend these resources as they think fit.

The Government have enhanced provision for local authority capital allocations by £2 million in 1987-88 and £3 million in 1988-89, specifically to support the introduction of secondary school science and technology courses. Authorities will be asked how these allocations have been used. It is intended to increase the specific grant

available for expenditure on education in deprived areas in 1988-89 by £1·1 million for the purchase of books and equipment. This expenditure will be monitored under arrangements to be agreed.

"Fines and Fine Default"

Mr. McTaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received a copy of the report by the Association of Directors of Social Work entitled "Fines and Fine Default"; and if he will implement any of the recommendations made in that report.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 11 January 1988.

Long-stay Mental Hospital Patients

Mr. McTaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many long-stay mental hospital patients have been released into care in the community in each of the last five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) on 19 November 1987. Information for 1987 is not yet available.

Blood Transfusion Service

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he is giving to income generation within the blood transfusion service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I encourage the Scottish national blood transfusion service to generate income in appropriate ways. In particular, income is generated through commercial companies contracting to meet the costs of research projects which are of value also to the National Health Service. Income is received from private medical establishments to meet the cost to the blood transfusion service of handling and processing blood and blood products supplied. Because the blood is freely given by blood doners, no charge is made for the blood itself.

Orthopaedic Surgery (Senior House Officers)

Mr. McTaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the filling of posts of senior house officer in orthopaedic surgery in Scottish health board areas; and if he will list the number of such posts unfilled.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on the number of vacant senior house officer posts is not held centrally. Recruitment of hospital medical staff is a matter for individual health boards, but I am aware that some posts at senior house officer grade in orthopaedic surgery are difficult to fill from time to time. I am not aware of any serious problems on the delivery of service.

Nursery Education

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many three and four-year-old children in each local education authority area in Scotland are in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time education in private nursery schools; and what percentage of the estimated three and four-year-old population in each local education authority area this represents for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many three and four-year-old children in each local education authority in Scotland are in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time nursery education, in nursery schools and nursery classes of primary schools, but excluding any children in reception classes in primary schools and any children in private schools; what percentage of the estimated three and four-year-old population in each local education authority area this represents; and what is the average hourly attendance, per week, of these children in (i) full-time, and (ii) part-time nursery education for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The provisional numbers of three and four-year-old pupils in education authority nursery schools and departments in September 1987 and these numbers expressed as percentages of the estimated numbers of three and four-year-olds in the population in mid 1986 are set out in the table.

	Full-time		*Part-time*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Borders	0	0·0	390	16·5
Central	9	0·1	2,483	36·8
Dumfries and Galloway	1	0·0	427	12·2
Fife	184	2·1	4,009	45·1
Grampian	258	2·0	2,420	18·9
Highland	5	0·1	612	11·1
Lothian	769	4·5	7,196	42·2
Strathclyde	1,088	1·8	16,463	27·1
Tayside	471	5·0	1,873	20·1
Orkney	0	0·0	83	17·0
Shetland	0	0·0	110	17·2
Western Isles	0	0·0	0	0·0
Scotland	2,785	2·2	36,066	28·0

Information on hourly attendance is not available.

Maternity Units (Costs)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what estimate his Department has made of the average cost of delivery in maternity units in Scotland; (2) if he will list in the *Official Report* those maternity units where the cost per delivery is estimated as being less than £500.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I regret that the information requested is not held centrally.

Electricity Generation (Coal Burn)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated annual burn of coal for electricity generation in Scotland for each of the next five years.

Mr. Lang: I am advised by the South of Scotland Electricity Board that the annual consumption of coal over the next five years is expected to be in the range 4·5 million—5·5 million tonnes, although this is subject to a number of uncertainties.

School Leavers

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give in tabular form the numbers of young people aged *(a)* 16, *(b)* 17 and *(c)* 18 years who left school in each year from 1983 to the most recent date; and if he will give his projections for school leavers in each age bracket till 2000.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on the numbers of school leavers in school sessions 1982-83 to 1986-87 is set out in the table. Revised projections of school leavers are currently being prepared by officials. I shall reply to the hon. Member on this point as soon as possible.

School[1] leavers: by age[2]: Scotland

Age	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87[3]*
15	38,473	37,643	35,193	33,817	32,281
16	31,040	31,098	30,607	29,613	28,793
17	19,678	19,387	18,862	18,610	18,269
[4]18	1,797	1,609	1,157	1,036	1,001

[1] All schools.
[2] Age at 31 December of the school session.
[3] Provisional.
[4] Or over.

Torness Power Station

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest estimated time taken for power generation at Torness power station.

Mr. Lang: I am advised by the South of Scotland Electricity Board that it has made formal application to the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate for permission to raise power on reactor 1 at Torness. The board anticipates receiving the required consent shortly and this will allow commissioning tests to proceed at up to 23 per cent. of the thermal rating of the reactor. Thereafter, it is planned to shut down the unit for computer adjustments before commencing delivery of power to the grid in May.

Tied Houses

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to a policy of exempting owners in small island communities from the requirement to sell tied houses; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The "right to buy" provisions in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 do not require owners to sell tied houses. The tenants' choice provisions in the current Housing (Scotland) Bill do not apply to houses exempt from the right to buy.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are his projections of youth unemployment for the years 1987 to 2000; and what estimate he has of the likely impact of youth training schemes in reducing unemployment for those in the age bracket 16 to 20 years.

Mr. Lang: The Government make no projections of youth unemployment. It is known, however, that there will be a demographic decline in the number of young adults up until the mid-1990s.

No young people up to the age of 18 need be unemployed, as they are guaranteed a place on YTS. YTS is, however, a training rather than an employment measure and its purpose is to provide training to equip young people for entry into the labour market.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the number of *(a)* people registered as unemployed in Scotland for each month between June 1979 and December 1987, *(b)* employees in employment in Scotland for each month between June 1979 and December 1987 and *(c)* occupied places on special training and temporary work programmes in Scotland for each month between June 1979 and December 1987.

Mr. Lang: The information is not available in the precise form requested.

Table 1 shows the number of unemployed claimants in Scotland between June 1979 and December 1987. Due to changes which have taken place in the compilation of the statistics since 1979 these figures are not comparable over the whole period. This information is available in the Library.

Table 2 shows the number of employees in employment in Scotland on a quarterly basis from June 1979 to September 1987 (the latest date for which information is available). This information is also available in the Library.

Table 3 gives available data on filled places for YTS and the community programme and Table 4 on starts on adult training schemes.

Table 1

Unemployed claimants: Scotland
(not adjusted for seasonal factors)

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
January	—	188,016	266,290	323,735	352,757	353,641	362,196	371,117	380,446
February	—	188,928	268,438	319,671	347,393	351,293	357,173	367,198	372,524
March	—	185,268	268,349	311,357	341,502	343,498	351,909	359,318	363,781
April	—	186,254	269,857	309,579	337,301	337,429	354,710	356,676	363,456
May	—	181,283	266,869	303,140	326,252	331,793	347,908	351,572	346,140
June	166,986	201,874	269,733	302,318	324,058	329,270	345,635	351,359	340,341
July	171,653	214,415	282,495	312,704	330,507	336,667	352,262	358,988	342,845
August	171,239	220,959	290,336	316,423	328,840	336,763	350,026	358,570	336,054
September	163,585	221,598	302,183	327,930	339,992	349,193	355,763	363,037	332,684
October	165,292	227,407	302,362	327,045	333,425	343,110	353,311	359,236	325,462
November	166,673	235,694	303,201	329,097	333,400	343,409	351,463	360,125	321,451
December	167,463	243,317	303,571	333,203	332,715	343,117	353,249	365,217	324,007

Table 2
Employees in employment: Scotland
(not adjusted for seasonal factors)

thousands

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
March	—	2,073·8	1,998·1	1,932·6	1879·2	1,879·8	1,892·2	1,875·0	1,862·4
June	2,102·3	2,082·3	2,001·8	1,950·1	1,899·0	1,901·2	1,904·1	1,887·7	1,886·4
September	2,107·8	2,068·9	1,985·3	1,931·9	1,898·6	1,903·9	1,912·4	1,885·9	1,881·8
December	2,094·1	2,036·8	1,958·3	1,903·2	1,890·8	1,902·0	1,897·5	1,874·6	—

Table 3
YTS and Community Programme Filled Places: Scotland

	YTS	Community programme
March 1984	29,433	15,525
December 1984	32,321	17,537
December 1985	31,019	24,177
December 1986	34,201	31,689
1987		
April	36,805	30,006
May	35,813	30,076
June	39,341	29,921
July	40,330	29,828
August	43,568	30,403
September	45,658	30,826
October	45,486	30,687
November	45,034	30,443
December	43,706	30,147

Table 4
Adult Training Starts: Scotland

	Number
1985-86	22,745
1986-87	42,005
1987	
April-June	10,316
July	3,425
August	3,558
September	4,467
October	6,253
November	5,237
December	3,157

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the total number of employees in *(a)* full-time employment and *(b)* part-time employment in Scotland for each month between June 1979 and December 1987.

Mr. Lang: Monthly estimates of employees in employment in Scotland are not available. The table gives quarterly estimates, which have not been adjusted for seasonal variation. The number of male part-time employees is only available from the census of employment: it was 58,000 in June 1978, 59,000 in September 1981, and 61,000 in September 1984.

Employees in employment in Scotland
(not seasonally adjusted)

Thousands

	Males all	Females full-time	Females part-time
1979			
June	1,205	565	332
September	1,205	571	331
December	1,197	563	334
1980			
March	1,184	560	330
June	1,186	561	335
September	1,178	558	332
December	1,158	547	332
1981			
March	1,133	535	330
June	1,128	538	336
September	1,113	534	338
December	1,095	526	338
1982			
March	1,084	517	332
June	1,090	523	337
September	1,083	508	340
December	1,067	502	334
1983			
March	1,055	495	329
June	1,060	502	337
September	1,058	503	337
December	1,045	501	345
1984			
March	1,040	499	341
June	1,043	511	347
September	1,053	505	346
December	1,045	501	356
1985			
March	1,039	501	352
June	1,040	502	362
September	1,044	505	363
December	1,032	500	366
1986			
March	1,020	494	361
June	1,022	501	365
September	1,020	499	367
December	1,007	493	375
1987			
March	998	490	375
June	1,006	501	379
September	1,003	494	384

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will give the total number of *(a)* male employees in employment and *(b)* female employees in employment in Scotland in each month between June 1979 and December 1987;

(2) if he will give the total number of employees in *(a)* manufacturing industry and *(b)* service industry in Scotland for each month between June 1979 and December 1987.

Mr. Lang: Monthly estimates of employees in employment in Scotland are not available. The table gives quarterly estimates, adjusted for seasonal variation.

Employees in employment in Scotland
Thousands (Seasonally adjusted)

	Males	Females	Manufacturing (2-4)	Services (6-9)
1979				
June	1,201	893	605	1,215
September	1,200	898	601	1,221
December	1,199	897	595	1,224
1980				
March	1,192	899	580	1,234
June	1,182	891	565	1,235
September	1,173	886	549	1,235
December	1,160	879	531	1,239
1981				
March	1,141	874	521	1,231
June	1,124	869	511	1,223
September	1,107	868	502	1,226
December	1,097	863	496	1,220
1982				
March	1,091	858	487	1,218
June	1,087	855	478	1,218
September	1,077	845	469	1,210
December	1,069	836	459	1,201
1983				
March	1,062	833	451	1,202
June	1,058	833	445	1,207
September	1,052	838	440	1,209
December	1,047	846	436	1,216
1984				
March	1,047	848	433	1,222
June	1,041	853	435	1,222
September	1,046	849	432	1,225
December	1,047	856	433	1,234
1985				
March	1,045	861	432	1,242
June	1,038	860	432	1,236
September	1,038	866	428	1,247
December	1,033	865	422	1,252
1986				
March	1,026	863	417	1,251
June	1,020	862	411	1,253
September	1,014	864	407	1,257
December	1,008	867	403	1,260
1987				
March	1,004	872	398	1,265
June	1,004	876	396	1,271
September	997	876	392	1,269

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the total number of people in self-employment in Scotland for each month between June 1979 and December 1987.

Mr. Lang: Annual estimates only are prepared on the basis of information from the 1981 census of population and the labour force surveys: these are given in the table. These figures are subject to sampling variation.

Employers and the Self-Employed in Scotland

	thousands
June	
1979	160
1980	154
1981	149
1982	164
1983	179
1984	185
1985	200
1986	205
1987	194

Labour Statistics

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are employed in *(a)* manufacturing, *(b)* mining, *(c)* engineering, *(d)* electronics, *(e)* textiles, *(f)* shipbuilding, *(g)* iron and steel and *(h)* transport in 1979, 1983 and 1987; and how many jobs have been lost in each of these sectors since 1979 and as a percentage of the 1979 figure.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The most relevant figures for employment come from a variety of sources, and are set out in the table.

	1979	1983	1985	1987	Net change between 1979 and 1985	Net change as per cent. of 1979 employment
			Thousands			
Total manufacturing[1]	603·9	443·9	430·5	395·5	−173·4	−29
Total manufacturing[2]	577·0	419·9	392·2	—	−184·8	−32
Engineering[2]	237·9	174·8	156·5	—	−81·4	−34
Textiles[2]	50·1	31·0	31·0	—	−19·1	−38
Shipbuilding[2]	30·6	24·8	20·8	—	−9·9	−32
Iron and Steel[2]	22·7	11·2	9·7	—	−13·0	−57
Electronics[4]	41·5	42·7	43·9	42·8	+2·4	+6
Mining[3]	25·0	23·7	14·3	—	−10·7	−43
Transport and communication[1]	135·3	118·5	115·2	108·3	−20·1	−15

[1] Figures from the Census of Employment.
[2] Figures from the Annual Census of Production. The latest available figures from this source relate to 1985. Figures for 1986 are due to be released later this year.
[3] Estimated figures include all employees of British Coal in Scotland.
[4] Derived from the IDS Regional Data System.

Isle of Islay

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any proposals to designate all or any part of the Isle of Islay as an environmentally sensitive area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No.

Catering and Domestic Service Contractors (Meeting)

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to the answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *664*, he will indicate which organisation or individual organised the meeting held on 2 October 1987; and if he will list all those who were invited to attend, and the basis on which they were so invited.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The meeting was organised by the Scottish Home and Health Department. Since the subject of the seminar was competitive tendering for domestic and catering services, invitations were issued to the trade associations representing domestic and catering firms and to the chairmen and general managers of health boards and the Common Services Agency in view of their responsibilities for managing the Health Service. Grant Thornton Management Consultants were invited because of their considerable experience of the process of competitive tendering in the NHS in England.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to the answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *664*, he will indicate where the meeting of 2 October 1987 was held.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Health Service centre, Edinburgh.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to the answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *664*, he will indicate which organisations and individuals made presentations at the meeting held on 2 October 1987; and if he will arrange for copies of any written material to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Presentations were made by the Contract Cleaning and Maintenance Association, the British Hotels Restaurants and Caterers Association and Grant Thornton Management Consultants. I am placing in the Library copies of material which was handed out by the CCMA to those taking part in the seminar.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to the answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *664*, he will indicate the individuals or organisations represented by Grant Thornton Management Consultants at the meeting held on 2 October 1987, and whether Grant Thornton Management Consultants were paid any moneys from public funds in respect of their services.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Grant Thornton did not represent any individuals or organisations at the meeting on 2 October 1987. They received no fee for their attendance.

"Inside Intelligence"

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the cost hitherto of Her Majesty's Government's proceedings in the Scottish courts in relation to Anthony Cavendish and his memoirs, "Inside Intelligence."

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The cost of the proceedings will only be known once accounts have been lodged with and taxed by the auditor of court.

Scottish Special Housing Association (Loan)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the reply on 22 February to the hon. Member for East Kilbride, if he will give the loss sustained by the Scottish Special Housing Association on the 183-day loan for £16 million advanced on 30 June 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Special Housing Association incurred interest charges of £742,000 on the short-term loan of £16 million advanced from the National Loans Fund on 30 June 1987. Since these charges were incurred without adequate provision in the association's estimates, the association's financial regulations require that they should be shown as a financial loss.

Employment Practices

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what conditions relating to employment practices are applied to firms substantially dependent on assistance from public funds.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* All companies are bound by employment law. No particular conditions relating to employment practices are applied to firms in receipt of assistance from public funds for which my Department is responsible.

D and A Allan (Clydebank)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much public money, in terms of grants, freedom from rates or other tax relief, rent reductions and other support, has been given to the firm of D and A Allan in Clydebank's business park since it was established.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The firm of David Allan and Co. Ltd. is located in the Clydebank business park within the Clydebank enterprise zone. No rates will therefore be payable by the company during the life of the zone. I understand that no direct assistance has been provided by the Scottish Development Agency, such as rental concessions or loans, offers of financial assistance have however been made by the Clydebank Enterprise Fund Ltd. (a body that is partly funded by the SDA) but details are confidential. Details of individual grant payment by my Department are also generally a matter of commercial confidentiality although cumulative payments of regional development grant to individual firms in excess of £25,000 in any single quarter are published regularly in *British Business*.

SDA (Contracts)

Mr. McTaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the contracts, with the subject of the assignment, awarded to management consultants or accounting firms by the Scottish Development Agency, with the name of the consultant concerned.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 29 January 1988]*: The amounts spent by the Scottish Development Agency on consultants' fees are given in the table. A detailed breakdown comprising the subject of the assignment and the names of the consultants cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate expense and breaching commercial confidentiality.

	£
1981-82	3,115,748
1982-83	4,265,553
1983-84	5,086,337
1984-85	4,953,324
1985-86	8,568,179
1986-87	6,851,863
[1]1987-88	5,538,812

[1] To 31 December.

The figures, which exclude fees associated with capital contracts, include fees on research and development, advisory services, appraisal and administration (for example, tax and accountancy advice, pension and legal consultancies).

Nurses

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide data showing the average level of nurses' pay in Scotland; and if he will also express this as a percentage of the national average income.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 15 February 1988]*: I regret that information on average annual earnings of nurses in Scotland is not collected centrally. Examples of rates of pay for nursing staff in direct patient care areas at the current level payable from 1 April 1987 are shown in the table.

Grade	*Minimum of basic pay scale £ per annum*	*Maximum of basic pay scale £ per annum*
Student Nurse	4,540	5,170
Nursing Auxiliary	4,565	5,855
Enrolled Nurse	6,250	7,750
Staff Nurse	7,300	8,600
Sister II	9,000	12,000
Senior Nurse 7	10,850	13,550

In addition, nurses receive payment for working unsocial hours and overtime. There are also allowances for staff employed in certain geriatric and psychiatric units.

The average gross weekly earnings of adults in full-time non-manual employment in April 1987 was £217·40. This figure includes overtime and other supplements to basic pay, and is not directly comparable to the salaries quoted above. For a typical married man earning the average gross salary quoted above, the 2 per cent. decrease in the standard rate of income tax introduced in the 1987 Budget led to an increase of £2·89 per week in take-home pay. For a typical single person the increase was £3·42 per week.

EMPLOYMENT

Departmental Staff

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the responsibilities of each of the deputy secretaries in his Department and the number and ranks of staff reporting to each.

Mr. Cope: There are two deputy secretaries in the Department of Employment. One has four secretaries (grade 3) and one assistant secretary (grade 5) reporting to him with responsibilities for:

- Employment policy including employment and training legislation, new initiatives and measures to assist the long-term unemployed—51 staff.
- Oversight of the employment service and its regional and local office organisation with some 41,000 staff.
- Training policy, including adult training and education, youth training, careers service inspectorate and youth employment policy—(and liaison with the Manpower Services Commission)—83 staff.
- European Community business relating to employment —32 staff.
- Press and information matters—53 staff.

The other has five under secretaries (grade 3) and one grade 4 reporting to him with responsibilities for:

- Overseas affairs, covering international employment matters, the labour attache service and the work permit scheme—137 staff.
- Health and safety policy, including legislation (and liaison with the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive)—nine staff.
- Economic and social advice and research on employment matters, including employment market research—54 staff.
- Industrial relations policy and legislation, including disputes, pay issues, wages councils, Wages Inspectorate, employment protection, redundancy and equal opportunities—(429 staff); and oversight of the Employment Appeal Tribunal (26 staff); the Central Office of Industrial Tribunals (362 staff); and liaison with the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service.
- The Department's interest in small firms and tourism, including the loan guarantee and enterprise allowance schemes and oversight of regional small firms advisory centres—238 staff.
- Employment statistics, including unemployment and vacancy series, index of retail prices, family expenditure and labour force surveys and the census of employment —263 staff.

Two directors at under secretary (grade 3) level also report direct to the permanent secretary covering:

- Finance and resource management, including all financial services and audit—676 staff.
- Personnel and management services, including computer services, procurement and office support services such as typing, messengerial and library services—1,131 staff.

Training Schemes

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many filled places there were for each region, including Greater London, at the end of October 1987, November 1987, December 1987 and January 1988 on *(a)* the community programme, *(b)* the enterprise allowance scheme, *(c)* YTS, *(d)* the young workers scheme, *(e)* the job release scheme, *(f)* the job share scheme, *(g)* the new job training scheme and *(h)* the job start allowance.

Mr. Cope: The information by MSC region is as follows:

	October 1987	November 1987	December 1987	January 1988
(a) Community Programme[1]				
South East	10,497	10,178	10,161	10,175
London	14,541	13,987	13,906	13,846
South West	14,592	14,579	14,539	14,331
West Midlands	26,011	25,896	25,785	25,660
East Midlands and Eastern	17,235	16,921	16,881	16,860
Yorks and Humberside	25,430	25,161	25,345	25,530
North West	36,138	36,346	36,117	36,063
Northern	28,410	28,224	28,171	28,061
Wales	20,047	19,613	19,570	19,454
Scotland	30,687	30,443	30,146	30,209
(b) Enterprise allowance scheme				
South East	12,176	12,173	12,231	12,084
London	10,123	10,103	10,017	10,004
South West	10,334	10,194	10,085	10,013
West Midlands	9,617	9,403	9,498	9,455
East Midlands and Eastern	10,245	10,145	10,216	10,135
Yorks and Humberside	9,299	9,158	9,200	9,160
North West	14,946	14,748	14,715	14,540
Northern	5,133	5,121	5,174	5,121
Wales	5,958	6,595	5,944	5,886
Scotland	9,193	8,443	8,924	8,833
(c) YTS				
South East	46,411	45,972	45,348	[2]45,313
London	22,345	22,214	21,856	22,007
South West	33,717	33,478	33,106	33,141
West Midlands	51,944	51,364	50,660	50,643
East Midlands and Eastern	51,021	50,489	49,758	49,792
Yorks and Humberside	47,089	46,921	46,366	46,561
North West	65,282	65,315	64,581	64,665
Northern	30,508	30,525	30,264	30,219
Wales	24,378	24,513	24,251	24,530
Scotland	43,569	43,588	42,573	46,179
(d) The new workers scheme[3]				
South East	962	899	835	783
London	258	242	224	209
South West	1,354	1,315	1,247	1,221
West Midlands	2,765	2,735	2,578	2,548
East Midlands and Eastern	1,715	1,692	1,566	1,557
Yorks and Humberside	2,224	2,254	2,160	2,178
North West	4,234	4,619	4,363	4,326
Northern	1,850	1,845	1,815	1,848
Wales	1,849	1,925	1,915	1,930
Scotland	2,127	2,074	1,972	2,072
(e) The Job Release Scheme[4]				
South East	2,311	2,228	2,144	2,123
London	1,051	1,029	999	980
South West	1,765	1,735	1,709	1,705
West Midlands	2,122	2,071	2,052	2,037
East Midlands and Eastern	3,179	3,095	3,043	3,073
Yorks and Humberside	3,168	3,094	3,074	3,152
North West	3,396	3,306	3,250	2,306
Northern	890	861	841	829
Wales	739	718	703	712
Scotland	1,531	1,501	1,485	1,488
(f) Jobshare[5]				
South East	30	31	22	23
London	6	5	5	5
South West	19	20	25	27
West Midlands	48	52	44	41
East Midlands and Eastern	82	85	85	84
Yorks and Humberside	175	179	181	190
North West	310	314	314	321
Northern	48	54	55	57
Wales	66	79	80	85
Scotland	45	42	40	38
(g) New job training scheme				
South East	*	2,459	2,426	2,643
London	*	2,841	2,907	2,688
South West	*	1,979	1,933	2,056
West Midlands	*	3,130	2,921	3,025

	October 1987	November 1987	December 1987	January 1988
East Midlands and Eastern	[6]	2,645	1,729	2,728
Yorks and Humberside	[6]	3,297	3,808	4,038
North West	[6]	3,231	3,257	3,414
Northern	[6]	1,761	1,747	1,946
Wales	[6]	1,298	1,223	1,239
Scotland	[6]	2,472	2,407	2,472
(h) The jobstart allowance				
London and South East[7]	312	259	219	186
South West	210	172	153	138
West Midlands	631	537	476	429
East Midlands and Eastern	475	448	370	339
Yorks and Humberside	546	496	447	407
North West	1,041	965	850	770
Northern	378	337	284	255
Wales	373	331	286	257
Scotland	500	461	418	381

Notes:
[1] Excluding charities.
[2] Figures are as recorded by MSC at the end of January 1988 and are subject to revision.
[3] The new workers scheme replaced the young workers scheme in April 1986. Figures are for employees being supported at specified time.
[4] Figures are for employees being supported at specified time.
[5] Includes job splitting scheme. Figures are for employees being supported at specified time.
[6] Regional figures for October 1987 are not available.
[7] Separate figures for Greater London are not available.

Labour Statistics

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give, from the 1987 "Labour Force Survey" by region including Greater London, and by sex, the number of people not counted as unemployed by the definition using broad International Labour Organisation guidelines, on the grounds that they had not looked for a job in the four weeks prior to interview, but who had stated that they would like a job if one was available, and *(a)* were available to start work within two weeks or *(b)* were not available to start work within two weeks.

Mr. Lee: Preliminary results from the 1987 "Labour Force Survey" are as shown in the following table:

Persons not in employment and not unemployed on ILO-OECD definition, who had not looked for work in four weeks prior to interview[1] but would like a job, by availability to start work
Spring 1987. Thousands

	Available to start within two weeks		Not available to start within two weeks[2]	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Great Britain	379	799	284	512
Northern	28	55	20	35
Yorkshire and Humberside	41	86	28	53
East Midlands	26	60	18	42
East Anglia	[3]	24	[3]	14
South East	100	209	73	152
of which Greater London	49	90	32	66
South West	23	62	18	29
West Midlands	43	87	30	50
North West	55	101	42	73
Wales	24	39	23	29
Scotland	30	75	26	38

[1] Includes those who did not state whether they had looked for work.
[2] Includes those who did not state whether they were available to start work.
[3] Sample size too small for a reliable estimate.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give, from the 1987 "Labour Force Survey", the number of people who had looked for a job in the four-week reference period and were available to start work within two weeks, for each region and Greater London, broken down by sex and claimant status.

Mr. Lee: The available information is given in the following table. A reliable analysis of the regional figures by claimant status is not available.

People looking for a job in the four-week reference period[1] who were available to start work within two weeks
Great Britain, Spring 1987
(Preliminary results)

Thousands

	Men	Women	Total
Claiming benefits	1,506	495	2,001
Not claiming	215	668	883
Total, Great Britain	1,722	1,163	2,884
Of which:			
South East	393	282	675
(including Greater London)	(203)	(115)	(318)
East Anglia	44	41	85
South West	100	92	193
West Midlands	209	119	328
East Midlands	117	87	203
Yorkshire and Humberside	172	105	277
North West	236	163	398
North	127	72	199
Wales	101	64	165
Scotland	223	139	362

Note: The figures from the "Labour Force Survey" are subject to sampling errors. In some cases figures may appear not to add because of rounding.
[1] Including some wanting to start a new job already obtained, as in the ILO/OECD measure of unemployment.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the constituencies in which current unemployment is at over 15 per cent.

Mr. Lee: The information requested is not available. Unemployment rates are not calculated for areas smaller than travel-to-work areas.

YTS

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give an estimate of the number of 16 and 17-year-olds seeking a place on YTS in Scotland, England and Wales in 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Cope: The estimated numbers of YTS entrants are as follows:

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Scotland	38,600	36,500	36,000
England	321,100	303,500	299,300
Wales	24,300	23,000	22,700

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give an estimate of the number of places available on YTS for Scotland, England and Wales in 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Cope: The estimated numbers of YTS places in 1988-89 are as follows:

	Number
Scotland	65,000
England	450,000
Wales	30,000

Estimates for later years are not yet available.

Mr. A. Archer (Member's Correspondence)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth dated 3 December 1987 concerning the case of Mr. A. Archer, which was referred by his Department to the Department of Health and Social Security on 11 January and referred back to his Department on 16 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the considerable delay in responding to his letter of 3 December 1987. Inquiries are being made to establish the facts relating to the case in question and I hope to be able to reply in the very near future.

Tourism

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the amount of money in per head of population spent on tourism promotion in each of the English regions, by region, and for Scotland and Wales *(a)* on promotion abroad and *(b)* on promotion within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lee: I regret that figures for the English regions are not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The figures show per capital expenditure (in the current financial year) by the national tourist boards on all activities in Britain and that by the British Tourist Authority, which has overall responsibility for the overseas promotion of tourism to the whole of Britain. The only national tourist board empowered to promote overseas is the Scottish board.

Per Capital Expenditure (£)

Body	*Abroad*	*In Britain*
BTA	0·64	—
ETB	—	0·60
STB	0·17	1·97
WTB	—	3·97

Wages

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employers have been prosecuted in the last 12 months for breach of wages council obligations; and what was the overall number of work places in which infringements were discovered.

Mr. Nicholls: In the 12 months ending 31 January 1988 the Wages Inspectorate prosecuted nine employers for offences under wages council legislation.

Statistics on infringements are compiled by reference to the numbers of each type found. In 1987, 4,443 establishments were found to be underpaying one or more workers, 1,249 establishments had inadequate wage records, 6,743 had inadequate records of time worked and 6,275 were not displaying a current wages council notice. These figures are not mutually exclusive. The overall number of establishments found to be infringing the legislation could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Maternity Pay Fund

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans the Government have for the maternity pay fund.

Mr. Nicholls: The Social Security Act 1986 provided for the introduction of statutory maternity pay from 6 April 1987 and for the assets and liabilities of the maternity pay fund to be transferred to the national insurance fund not later than 5 April 1988.

The transfer took place on 31 January 1988, on which date the maternity pay fund ceased to exist. A statement of account showing the state of maternity pay fund at the date of transfer will be published in due course.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Incontinence

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give his current best estimate of the number of incontinence sufferers in the United Kingdom; if he will give an estimate of the distribution in incontinence by age and sex; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: An epidemiological survey conducted by the Medical Research Council's epidemiology and medical care unit between 1976 and 1986 covering a sample of the general population in England and Wales showed rates of prevalence of urinary incontinence per thousand population as follows:

Aged	*Number*
Males	
5-14	69
15-64	16

Aged	Number
Over 65	69
Females	
5-14	51
15-64	85
Over 65	116

As faecal incontinence is less common, it is not possible to give precise prevalence figures.

Cleveland Social Services Department

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy to carry out an investigation into the running of Cleveland county council's social services department, when the Butler Sloss tribunal reports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I do not think it would be right for me to pre-empt the outcome and recommendations of Lord Justice Butler Sloss' inquiry report.

Medical Laboratory Scientific Officers

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many medical laboratory scientific officers are currently employed in the National Health Service; what is the maximum number employable in each grade; how many vacancies exist in each grade; how many have left the profession in each of the last two years; and what were their grades upon departure.

Mr. Newton: At 30 September 1986, the latest date for which data are available to this level of detail, there were 14,624 (whole-time equivalent) medical laboratory scientific officers (including unqualified grades) in post in the National Health Service in England.

Information on the maximum number employable, vacancies, leavers and their grades upon departure is not held centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to contact the chairmen of individual regional health authorities for this information.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of medical laboratory scientific officers working in the public health laboratory service hold qualifications at degree level or above.

Mr. Newton: This information is not routinely collated and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Retirement Age

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce a system of equal retirement age of 65 years for women and men, with flexible pension arrangements for those who wish to retire earlier; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We are considering what options for change in pension age might be appropriate. As well as equal treatment between men and women and the possibility of greater choice for individuals, our consideration of this subject has to take account of the social and economic impact of any change and of the long-term financial implications for individuals, employers and the state.

Foreign Students

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services in what circumstances foreign students in Britain, supported by grants from their own Governments, are entitled to full supplementary benefit; how many students are currently claiming; and what has been the cost to the public funds in each of the last three years.

Mr. Scott: Most foreign students are not entitled to supplementary benefit—except in emergencies—as they are admitted to the United Kingdom on the basis that they will be self-supporting and will not have recourse to public funds. However, students from other EC member states (and certain other European countries) can qualify for supplementary benefit on the same basis as British students; that is normally in the summer vacation only, and provided they are available for temporary work. The number of such students receiving benefit is not known but is thought to be minimal.

Community Care

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what part he intends the voluntary sector to play in the provision of community care for both mentally handicapped and elderly people; and how much money has been allocated to them for this purpose.

Mr. Newton: Voluntary organisations have an important role to play both in the direct provision of services and in the contribution they make to developing policies and planning future services. We shall continue to encourage and support them and to promote their partnership with the statutory sector. In 1986-87, DHSS financial support to the voluntary sector through the S64 general scheme of grants and a number of special initiatives exceeded £35 million. A substantial proportion of this money has been used to develop innovative projects which have extended the range of services to elderly and mentally handicapped people in the community as well as meeting the administrative costs of national voluntary organisations concerned with the interests of these groups.

War Widows

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he intends to review the pensions of elderly war widows with a view to increasing the benefit to bring it into line with that for more recently widowed spouses of service men, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Under the war pensions scheme administered by the Department the standard rate of war widows pensions is the same regardless of when the service man died. Differences in widows' pensions paid under the armed forces pensions scheme are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

NHS (Spending)

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of gross national product the Government now spend on the National Health Service, and what are the latest comparable figures for other EEC Governments.

Mr. Newton: The share of health expenditure in total national spending is conventionally calculated in relation to gross domestic product: that is the market value of all goods and services produced by United Kingdom residents.

In 1986, the latest year for which information is available for the United Kingdom, public expenditure on health was 5·3 per cent. of GDP.

The following table shows public expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP in EEC countries in 1985, the latest year for which internationally comparable data are available.

Public expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP, 1985

	Per cent.
Belgium	5·5
Denmark	5·2
France	6·7
Germany	6·4
Greece	4·1
Ireland	6·9
Italy	5·4
Netherlands	6·5
Portugal	4·1
Spain	4·3
United Kingdom	5·2

Note: Luxembourg is excluded from the table because of reported inconsistencies in the national health accounts.
Source: OECD.

Nurses

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether nurses employed within the National Health Service who transfer between hospitals or between health districts at their own request revert to the bottom of the relevant pay scale and lose any incremental points gained by years of qualified service.

Mr. Newton: A nurse who transfers to a post of equivalent grade within the NHS enters the salary scale for the new post at her existing salary.

Dr. Raj Kumar

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will reconsider the case of Dr. Raj Kumar and his claim under the National Health Service (Superannuation) (War Service Etc.) Regulations 1977; and if he will consider future amendment of these regulations.

Mrs. Currie: Dr. Kumar's claim to reckon his war service in the National Health Service superannuation scheme has been most carefully considered but cannot be met. The National Health Service (Superannuation) (War Service Etc.) Regulations 1977 require that entry to National Health Service employment, following war service, must have been on or before 30 June 1950. Dr. Kumar did not enter such employment until 17 September 1976 and so does not satisfy this requirement. There is no discretion under the war service regulations to vary the basic entry requirements. These have been applied consistently not only to the NHS superannuation scheme but to all other public service schemes.

The Government do not intend to amend these regulations.

Clinics (Brent)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services which clinics in the Brent area health authority have been closed during the period 1979 to 1987; and which clinics are currently threatened with closure.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that this information is not held centrally. As responsibility for local health services rests with district health authorities, the hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Brent health authority.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations have been received concerning the proposed closure of Perrin road clinic, College road clinic, One Tree Hill clinic and Monks park clinic in the Brent health authority area.

Mrs. Currie: Two representations have been received centrally. The provision of services locally is a matter for Brent health authority, and the hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the authority for further information.

Nottingham Family Practitioner Committee

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps his Department will take to ensure that Nottingham family practitioner committee, as agent for his Department's stationery for doctors *(a)* retain adequate stocks of A5 envelopes for women No. FP6B, *(b)* begin to stock A4 stationery and *(c)* assist those doctors wishing to convert from A5 to A4 stationery.

Mr. Newton: I know of no problem with regard to stocks of FP6B envelopes. The necessary A4 stationery is available for those who require it either direct from Her Majesty's Stationery Office or from stocks held by the family practitioner committee; the method of supply is for local arrangement. We do not regard it as a matter of priority to allocate funds to assist the change from A5 to A4 stationery for medical record purposes.

Brent Health Authority

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the level of annual revenue allocated to Brent health authority from 1979 to the current dates.

Mrs. Currie: The allocation of resources to district health authorities is a matter for regional health authorities. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the North West Thames regional health authority for information about the annual revenue allocated to Brent health authority.

Rent Thresholds

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the rent threshold figures giving the maximum housing benefit subsidy for each local authority area from April.

Mr. Portillo: The table gives the threshold figure set for each rent registration area (county or London borough) for 1988-89. Each authority's threshold is the same as that of the registration area in which it is located.

Authority	*Rent Threshold 1988-89 £ per week*
Barking	56·58
Barnet	77·32
Bexley	57·32
Brent	62·43

Authority	Rent Threshold 1988-89 £ per week
Bromley	71·67
City	85·97
Camden	88·09
Croydon	74·41
Ealing	70·55
Enfield	60·69
Greenwich	55·13
Hackney	59·55
Hammersmith	61·85
Haringey	63·91
Harrow	66·02
Havering	63·53
Hillingdon	66·71
Hounslow	69·75
Islington	64·15
Kensington and Chelsea	76·31
Kingston	71·15
Lambeth	62·89
Lewisham	54·41
Merton	72·77
Newham	54·88
Redbridge	55·54
Richmond	74·83
Southwark	56·41
Sutton	68·96
Tower Hamlets	58·83
Waltham Forest	48·73
Wandsworth	69·64
Westminster	114·89
Merseyside	41·96
Cheshire	45·80
Greater Manchester	50·30
Lancashire	60·48
West Midlands	39·05
Hereford and Worcester	46·45
Shropshire	44·65
Staffordshire	39·19
Warwickshire	38·76
Tyne and Wear	39·27
Cleveland	41·71
Cumbria	31·00
Durham	38·89
Northumberland	43·50
Humberside	34·89
North Yorkshire	43·55
South Yorkshire	36·84
West Yorkshire	38·93
Derbyshire	38·42
Leicestershire	39·19
Lincolnshire	41·53
Northamptonshire	43·69
Nottinghamshire	40·98
Essex	47·30
Norfolk	47·38
Suffolk	44·65
Bedfordshire	43·00
Berkshire	50·83
Buckinghamshire	48·51
Cambridgeshire	47·33
Hertfordshire	42·88
Oxfordshire	54·48
East Sussex	53·27
Kent	54·63
Surrey	52·34
West Sussex	50·98
Dorset	45·32
Hampshire	47·68
Isle of Wight	43·22
Avon	52·34
Gloucestershire	49·15
Somerset	45·42
Wiltshire	49·69
Cornwall	51·95
Devon	51·53
Clwyd	40·70
Dyfed	44·00
Gwent	39·61
Gwynedd	35·24
Mid-Glamorgan	41·63
Powys	38·54
South Glamorgan	48·31
West Glamorgan	39·32
Borders Region	72·00
Central	72·99
Dumfries and Galloway	60·94
Fife	61·72
Grampian	63·50
Highland	54·50
Lothian	62·08
Strathclyde	55·03
Tayside	64·88
Islands	37·06

Heating Allowances

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what applications for extra heating allowances can be made by tenants of local authority property where the local authority installs new heating systems, which cause tenants to pay more in energy costs than before the new system was installed;

(2) what single adjustment payments are available to those in receipt of benefit to help meet the cost of new heating systems installed in properties by local councils.

Mr. Portillo: No additional weekly help is available towards the running costs of a new heating system. The supplementary benefit scale rates are intended to cover all normal day-to-day expenses, including heating.

Where people have not put aside sufficient money for fuel costs because of unfamiliarity with a new heating system, single payments are available for half of the running costs incurred during the first six months of using that system.

Benefit Offices (Staff Safety)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many regions of his Department have requested the fitting of reinforced glass screens in interview rooms in local offices because of concern for the safety of staff following benefit regulation changes in April; if he will list the total offices of his Department where such screens are to be fitted; and what is the total cost of additional security at these offices.

Mr. Portillo: No region has made such a request. However, because of the anticipated increase in private interviews from April, additional interview rooms are being provided in local offices where needed. Some of these rooms will have protective screens.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he is taking to protect local office staff from attacks by the public following the benefit changes in April.

Mr. Portillo: There are existing arrangements in local offices to protect staff from attacks by the public. The Department sees no need to supplement these provisions following the benefit changes in April.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the number of 16 and 17-year-olds claiming supplementary benefit in January, June and October of each year from 1979 to 1987 inclusive and for Scotland, England and Wales.

Mr. Scott: Information relating to the number of 16 and 17-year-olds claiming supplementary benefit in the months quoted is not collected, but the number of 16 and 17-year-olds in receipt of supplementary benefit on a particular day in each year indicated is as follows:

Year	*England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Great Britain*
1979	59,000	12,000	7,000	79,000
1980	112,000	18,000	10,000	140,000
1981	134,000	22,000	11,000	166,000
1982	148,000	22,000	13,000	183,000
1983	139,000	25,000	11,000	175,000
1984	148,000	25,000	11,000	184,000
1986	126,000	32,000	10,000	168,000
1987	not yet available			

Source: Sample statistical inquiry conducted in November/December each year other than 1986 when it was conducted in February. No inquiry took place in 1985.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give an estimate of the number of 16 and 17-year-olds in Scotland, England and Wales who will lose their general entitlement to supplementary benefit as a result of the new social security provision for the years 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Scott: I regret that information on which to base estimates of the numbers who will lose general entitlement to income support is not available since a number of groups of 16 and 17-year-olds will retain their entitlement through being in one of the categories to be exempt from the general provision. In addition, it is not known how many will continue in higher education or who will go straight from school into a job. However, an estimated 70,000 unemployed summer school leavers will be affected in September 1988. Of those, some 95 per cent. will lose entitlement to income support in their own right.

Patients (Compulsory Domiciliary Medication)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what considerations he or the Mental Health Act commissions are giving to statutory powers for compulsory domiciliary medications of patients not in institutions; if he is aware of any evidence of such need; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Compulsory treatment in the community is the subject of discussions that have been taking place within such organisations as the Mental Health Act Commission, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and MIND. At present no firm proposals have been put forward to the Department. No changes would be considered without a full consultation with all those concerned with mental health.

North Yorkshire Family Practitioner Committee

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultations were carried out before making further appointments to the North Yorkshire family practitioner committee.

Mrs. Currie: All appointments of lay members to family practitioner committees are made by Ministers after consultation with the chairman.

Blood Transfusion Service

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on changes in the charges levied on private hospitals for blood ordered from the blood transfusion service.

Mrs. Currie: Guidance to health authorities on the handling charges for blood and its derivatives supplied to non-NHS hospitals is given in a "health notice" which is revised annually. This revision ensures that the handling charges continue to reflect the costs incurred.

Handling charges to be levied from 1 April 1988 until 1 April 1989 will be published in a "health notice" currently in course of preparation.

Drug Manufacturers

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what arrangements exist to enable manufacturers to make representations against unfavourable recommendations of the advisory committee on National Health Service drugs and the advisory committee on borderline substances.

Mr. Newton: From today the committees will advise manufacturers in writing of proposed unfavourable recommendations they intend to make to Health Ministers. Manufacturers will be given 30 days from the date of the letter of the committee concerned (or longer at the discretion of the committee) in which to make written representations against the proposed recommendations. Requests for an oral hearing will be granted by the committees if they consider that a case is of such a nature that their advice cannot properly be formulated without one. Manufacturers will have the right to be represented at any oral hearings that may be arranged. The Committees will take full account of any representations received in formulating their recommendations to Ministers.

Borderline Substances

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the terms of reference of the advisory committee on borderline substances; and what are the criteria used to decide whether a borderline substance should be placed on the list of products excluded from prescription under the National Health Service.

Mr. Newton: The terms of reference of the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances (ACBS) are:

"To keep under review the principles for determining whether preparations should properly be regarded as drugs, foods, toilet preparations, or disinfectants and to give advice on the classification of particular preparations in these categories submitted to the Committee."

In making decisions about borderline substances the Secretary of State is advised by the ACBS. This committee provides him with expert independent medical advice on the classification of so-called borderline substances and whether they should not be prescribed by general medical practitioners at NHS expense or should be prescribed for patients with specified medical conditions.

The committee considers all relevant information provided by the manufacturer of the substance concerned;

and the sole criterion used by the committee in reaching an opinion that a particular borderline substance should not be prescribed is that it has no therapeutic use in the treatment of disease.

The Secretary of State, in deciding whether a borderline substance should be placed on schedule 3A to the NHS (General Medical and Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1974 and so not be prescribable by general practitioners at NHS expense, takes the committee's advice into account and uses the same criterion. Scotland and Northern Ireland have corresponding arrangements.

NHS Income-generating Unit

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to establish a National Health Service income-generating unit within his Department; how many staff, and at what grades, will be employed; what the cost will be; against what guidelines it will operate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 19 January 1988]:* I am today announcing the establishment of an income generation unit within the Department. The unit will be headed by Mr. Ron Kerr, district general manager of North Hertfordshire health authority on secondment to the Department. The unit will form part of the NHS Management Board's financial management directorate and will advise the board, and through it Ministers, on issues relating to income generation. Its responsibilities will include helping authorities to develop and implement income generation schemes; identifying and promoting opportunities for income generation; disseminating best practice to health authorities; and monitoring the success of the income generation initiative. We expect that, in addition to Mr. Kerr and his secretary, the unit will consist of four staff, of whom at least one will be a health authority officer on secondment.

Social Security Reform

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of those currently receiving supplementary benefit who will receive transitional additions from April when income support is introduced; and if he will provide these figures by amount of addition in bands of £1, and by claimant category, for each local office of his Department in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Knowsley South (Mr. Hughes) *Official Report*, 29 January, column *411*, if he will break down the number of claimants who will receive a transitional addition *(a)* by category of claimant and *(b)* by benefit office.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 17 February 1988]:* Information on numbers of claimants receiving a transitional addition for each local office is not available. For Great Britain, the information requested is in the table.

Claimants currently receiving supplementary benefit who will receive a transitional addition from April 1988 by amount of addition and claimants category (thousands)

Amount of addition	*80+*	*60-79*	*Sick/disabled*	*Lone parents*	*couples and children*	*Others*	*Total*
No addition	190	660	190	400	470	970	2,870
<£1	120	120	10	90	10	110	470
£1-2	30	100	10	50	10	60	260
£2-3	20	120	*	10	10	90	260
£3-4	10	50	*	10	*	30	110
£4-5	10	30	*	10	*	40	80
£5-10	*	40	*	10	*	150	210
£10+	*	*	*	*	*	30	40
Total receiving addition	200	450	30	190	30	520	1,420
Total with and without addition	390	1,120	220	580	510	1,480	4,300

Notes:
(i) * denotes a figure of less than 5,000.
(ii) Figures may not add owing to rounding.
(iii) These estimates are based on data from the February 1986 Annual Statistical Enquiry.

Income Support

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate how many recipients of supplementary benefit will fail to qualify for income support as a result of the changed definition of full-time work from 30 hours to 24 hours; and if he will indicate how many of these claimants are single parents.

Mr. Scott: *[holding answer 19 February 1988]:* It is estimated that some 15,000 claimants will fail to qualify for income support as a consequence of the reduction in the number of hours they may work and remain entitled to benefit. Fewer than 5,000 of these will be single parents. Those single parents and couples with children affected by this change may be entitled to family credit, and all claimants may be entitled to housing benefit and remission of health charges on the grounds of low income.

Social Security Tribunals

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when his Department's office at Yeoman street, Leicester, will supply the regional chairman of social security appeals tribunals in Nottingham its statement of case relating to the appeal against refusal of supplementary benefit by a constituent of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton, departmental reference number 103/22797, whose name and address has been given to his private office; and when the appeal will be dealt with.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The constituent to whom my hon. Friend refers lodged an appeal on 23 December 1987. The adjudication officer has forwarded his submission of the facts of the case to the social security appeals tribunal in Nottingham. The case has been listed for hearing on 8 April 1988.

Funeral Costs

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what discussions he is having with appropriate organisations on promoting simple and inexpensive insurance schemes to cover funeral costs; and if he will make publicity material available about such schemes.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* There are no discussions in progress with any organisations about the promotion of private insurance to cover funeral expenses. There are no plans for the Department to publicise such schemes.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he is taking to encourage people taking out simple and inexpensive insurance to cover the cost of their own funeral and to plan for their own funeral arrangements; what consultation is taking place with the insurance industry to devise suitable insurance schemes; and if he will make arrangements for premiums to such schemes, either in lump sum or regular payments, to be claimed from his Department.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* We are aware that many people wish to take out private insurance to cover the cost of their own funeral, but there has been no consultation with the insurance industry to devise such insurance schemes. We believe that public funds should primarily be used to help those on low incomes who are faced with funeral expenses which they cannot afford to pay. Such provision is currently made from the social fund to those in receipt of certain income-related qualifying benefits.

AIDS and Drug Misuse

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the report of the Advisory Council on Drug Misuse on AIDS and drug misuse before he responds publicly to the report's recommendations.

Mr. Moore *[holding answer 28 January 1988]:* I have recently received the first report on AIDS and drug misuse by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. I am grateful to the council for completing this stage of its work so quickly, and we are giving the report urgent consideration. Meanwhile, I have set in hand arrangements for publishing the report, which I expect to be available in a few weeks.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Sherry

Mr. Whitney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) why excise duty regulations permit British sherry producers to pay lower duty in relation to alcoholic strength than is charged on sherry; and whether he will make a statement on this distinction;

(2) why competing sherries are taxed under different regimes.

Mr. Lilley: Excise duties on wines and made wines are charged by reference to alcoholic strengths at the time of duty payment. The same rates apply to United Kingdom production as to imports. British sherry producers can achieve a lower duty burden by blending their products after payment of duty.

Engine-Testing Fuels

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking the exemption from excise duty of fuels used in bona fide engine testing.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on this matter.

Dollar Value

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the statement on the meeting of the European Council, *Official Report*, 15 February, columns 705-17, whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the value of the dollar agreed as the basis for deciding what constitutes exceptional circumstances; and what call would be made on the contingency reserve if the nominal rate of the dollar fell so as to reduce the real rate, in terms of relative export prices for manufacturers, to the average for 1978-80.

Mr. Brooke: I have nothing to add to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in response to the question by the hon. Member on 22 February 1988 at column *15*.

Money Supply

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the expansion of the money supply, using each of the main monetary indicators, for each quarter since May 1979, as a percentage of the figure one year previously.

Mr. Lilley: Quarterly figures for M0, the main narrow measure of the money supply, were published in the 1988 edition of *Economic Trends Annual Supplement* for the period 1982 Q3 to 1987 Q3. Earlier quarterly figures have not been published. Figures for M0 in 1987 Q4 can be derived as the average of the monthly figures in table 11.4 of *Financial Statistics*, February 1988.

Quarterly figures for broad money back to 1979 were made available by the Bank of England in June 1987. Subsequent figures for broad money are shown in tables 11.2 and 11.3 of *Financial Statistics*, February 1988.

Funeral Charges (VAT)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the effect on the present level of funeral charges of introduction of zero-rate value added tax on funeral charges.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* This information is not available.

THE ARTS

Arts Marketing

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Minister of the Arts what plans he has to continue encouraging arts marketing in the financial year 1988-89.

Mr. Luce: I recognise the need for professionalism in marketing the arts. I welcome the creation of the Arts Council's marketing department, which has embarked on a wide programme of developments in this field. After extensive consultations, I have decided to provide additional resources for new marketing initiatives, with which I shall be particularly associated, to supplement and complement the work already in hand. These will replace the 1987-88 experimental arts marketing scheme.

The Arts Council in co-operation with other bodies, including the Museums and Galleries Commission, will take the lead on two new measures: the development of a distance learning package and a programme of training courses for top management. The distance learning package is intended to make good practice on arts marketing widely available through an instructional video and supporting literature. The marketing courses are aimed at increasing the awareness of the value of marketing among those concerned with the management of arts bodies.

TRANSPORT

Air Safety (Alcohol and Drug Abuse)

Mr. Charles Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are being taken by the Civil Aviation Authority to determine whether alcohol or other drugs are being abused by those responsible for air safety; whether any screening tests for drug abuse have been conducted by the Civil Aviation Authority; and what is his policy on screening for alcohol abuse and other substance abuse by air traffic controllers and airline pilots.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Civil Aviation Authority is wholly responsible for aviation safety regulation. I will ask the chairman of the authority to write to my hon. Friend.

A1 (Improvements)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects work to be completed on improvements to the A1 between Berwick-upon-Tweed and the Scottish border.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Two schemes are programmed for improvements to the A1 north of Berwick-upon-Tweed. One involves a small scheme modification to the roundabout at the northern end of the Berwick-upon-Tweed bypass, and should be completed in 1988-89. The other will provide a dual carriageway from Marshall meadows to the Scottish border or beyond. This is a larger scheme and the most effective solution may require consultation with the Scottish Development Department. Work should be completed in the early 1990s.

Manchester International Airport

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement, further to the reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, from the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, on 11 January, *Official Report*, column *144*, on the prospects for increased United States carrier access to Manchester international airport; and what steps he is taking to keep the airport's board in touch with development.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The United States Government have just responded to the proposals that we tabled early in January. The United States proposals are being studied with interest and urgency.

It is too early to give precise indications of future prospects for increased access by United States carriers to Manchester. The Government are pleased that the United States Government appear to wish to negotiate on this matter.

We seek to ensure that Manchester International Airport Authority is continually kept in touch with developments.

Cycling

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of steps his Department is taking and has taken to make cycling safer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Pedal cyclists are one of the vulnerable road user groups. Progress on cycling safety can be made in steps.

Some 90 per cent. of cycle casualties are on local authority roads. They have the responsibility to provide cycle facilities. The Department provides technical advice and guidance to local authorities on the design and construction of cycle facilities based on research and application studies conducted by the traffic advisory unit and the TRRL. Current work includes 24 innovatory schemes, funded by the Department, and five large-scale urban cycle route projects.

The new "Highway Code" includes advice to cyclists on safer riding techniques and to motorists on the need to be aware of cyclists. As part of our current road safety publicity programme we are distributing relevant material to local authority road safety officers.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the number of people who travel by bicycle and the distances of journeys made by bicycle.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: About 3½ million people in Great Britain use a pedal cycle in an average week. The average length of a bicycle journey is about 1¾ miles. Cycling accounts for about 2¾ billion miles a year on Great Britain's public roads.

London Underground

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what support the Government are giving to efforts to fight crime on the London Underground.

Mr. Channon: Following my Department's report, "Crime on the Underground", we have made available £15 million to London Underground Ltd. over three years to implement a range of measures to improve the security of passengers on the Underground. These measures, which

will be implemented progressively, include equipping 42 deep-level stations with facilities to provide reliable underground radio communications; pilot schemes at a number of stations involving staffed focal points; safe waiting areas; and passenger alarms with talk-back facilities. If successful, these measures will be extended to other parts of the network. The British Transport police are considering ways of extending the application of new policing methods which brought a reduction of more than 25 per cent. in robberies last year at the southern end of the Northern and Victoria lines.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what types of radio equipment are currently available for British Transport police officers engaged on duties within the London Underground system.

Mr. David Mitchell: The British Transport police use standard police personal radios in the VHF band. Following a recommendation in my Department's report, "Crime on the London Underground," London Underground Ltd. is at present installing leaky feeder cables at 42 key deep level stations which will enable the BTP to have instant radio contact underground with their control centre.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many police officers have been deployed on regular duties on the London Underground in each of the past five years; and what is the number currently in service.

Mr. David Mitchell: The average number of British Transport police officers deployed on regular duties on the London Underground in each of the last five years is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1983	278
1984	262
1985	269
1986	304
1987	319

The complement of the Underground division of the British Transport police has been increased to 350 officers; the number so far in post is 314.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many arrests have taken place on the London Underground system on each of the past five years.

Mr. David Mitchell: The British Transport police do not record the number of arrests on the London Underground. The number of of prosecutions for offences on the Underground in each of the last five years is as follows:

Year	*Indictable*	*Non-indictable*
1983	1,417	8,969
1984	1,113	6,441
1985	1,207	6,162
1986	1,397	4,651
1987	1,365	2,687

The decrease in prosecutions for non-indictable offences reflects a reduction in the problem of ticket fraud with the introduction of travelcards and changes in London Underground's ticketing and inspection procedures.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fatalities arising from people falling under trains have occurred on the London Underground system in each of the past five years.

Mr. David Mitchell: The table shows the fatalities on all lines of London Underground Ltd. during the last four years resulting from persons falling under trains. Figures for 1983 are not readily available.

	1984	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Trespassers	19	19	15	20
Suicides	22	24	33	27
Others:				
Falling off platforms	1	4	3	1
Attempting to board as train departed	—	1	—	—
Totals	42	48	51	48

Note: In all cases listed as falling off platforms drugs, drink or illness was a main factor.

Bus Services (London)

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the deregulation of bus services in Greater London.

Mr. David Mitchell: In recent months we have received 10 representations from hon. Members, a submission from the London Regional Passengers' Committee and a small number of letters from members of the public about the future deregulation of bus services in London.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has concerning the adequacy of staffing levels on bus services in Greater London.

Mr. David Mitchell: It is for the management of LRT and the bus operator concerned to determine what staffing levels are adequate to run bus services efficiently and safely.

London Regional Transport

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, when he next meets the chairman of London Regional Transport, he will raise with him the standard of service provided by London Regional Transport subsidiaries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: We expect to discuss a range of issues when we next meet the chairman of London Regional Transport, including quality of service.

A6 Disley Bypass

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if pursuant to the answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *750*, he will list the local councils and public bodies he consulted, with the advice received in each case, in relation to the route of the A6 Disley bypass.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In accordance with usual practice, when preparing for the current public consultation we invited views, on a strictly in-confidence and non-committing basis, from the councils and public bodies listed as follows. Each now has the opportunity to submit formal views.

Cheshire County Council
Derbyshire County Council
High Peak Borough Council
Macclesfield Borough Council
Stockport Borough Council
Peak Park Planning Board
Chinley, Buxworth and Brownside Parish Council
Disley Parish Council
Lyme Handley Parish Council
New Mills Parish Council
Poynton with Worth Parish Council
Countryside Commission
Nature Conservancy Council
National Trust
Chester Regional Health Authority
Derbyshire Regional Health Authority
North West Regional Health Authority
British Gas
British Geological Survey
British Pipeline Agency Ltd.
British Railways London Midland Region
British Telecom
British Waterways Board
CEGB
Whaley Bridge Parish Council
Cheshire Constabulary
Derbyshire Constabulary
Greater Manchester Constabulary
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Civil Aviation Authority
North Western Electricity Board
North West Water Authority

Buses (Testing)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in how many cases of which he is aware bus or coach operators have submitted more than one vehicle for test using the same set of tyres on the different vehicles so submitted.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Such records are not available

Spot checks at operators' premises and of vehicles in use are normally carried out when operators are suspected of using vehicles in an unroadworthy condition.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he proposes to take as a result of Ladyline Coaches of Cheshire recently submitting nine vehicles for test with the same set of tyres.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are not proposing to take further action as a result of these allegations.

Ladyline Coaches operates a fleet of eight buses varying in size from minibuses to large coaches. No more than four vehicles could have interchangeable tyres. The Department has no evidence to support the allegations regarding the use of the same tyres on more than one vehicle. In any case the practice is not illegal.

The Department's vehicle examiners inspected six of the operator's vehicles in January 1988. All were found to be in a satisfactory condition.

North Wales Coast Railway Line

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will discuss with the chairman of British Rail the decision not to proceed with work to upgrade the track of the main north Wales coast line across Ynys Môn during the next financial year.

Mr. David Mitchell: No. Detailed decisions of this sort are a management matter for BR.

A1/A1(M) (Durham)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, by accident type and class of vehicle, the numbers of accidents on that part of the A1/A1(M) road which falls within the county of Durham, in the last year for which figures were available.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information is as follows:

Accidents on the A1 in Durham: 1986

	Fatal	*Serious*	*Slight*	*Total*
Total accidents	3	17	22	42
Of which:[1]				
involving Pedal cycles	—	—	—	—
Motorcycles	—	1	—	1
Cars	2	14	15	31
Buses and coaches	—	—	—	—
Light goods vehicles	1	3	2	6
Heavy goods vehicles	2	2	10	14

[1] Some accidents involve two or more vehicles and will therefore be counted more than once.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Surplus Commodities

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the statement on the meeting of the European Council, *Official Report*, 15 February, column 711, whether he will explain why it would be bad for the countryside if United Kingdom farmers were no longer allowed to export some of their surplus production of cereals and dairy products at the expense of the United States and other food-exporting countries; and if he will include in the *Official Report* an estimate of the effect on United Kingdom exports of manufacturers of the growth of this trade.

Mr. MacGregor: The United Kingdom has a successful export trade in agricultural products. If access to export opportunities were denied to our farmers, other countries would take our place on world markets. This would have the effect of reducing substantially the amount of land devoted to cereals production, to the detriment of the rural economy.

Greek Bananas

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements were made at the European Economic Community summit for putting a ceiling on the output of bananas from Greece and for reviewing the Greek restrictions on imports of bananas from other European Economic Community countries.

Mr. Donald Thompson: There is no common regime for bananas. The Commission is responsible for administering the free circulation provisions of the treaty of Rome.

Agricultural Policy

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will meet representatives of the Church of England to discuss implications for the standard of living of rural people of Her Majesty's Government's agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: No such meeting has been requested.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from clergymen in rural areas about the effects of Her Majesty's Government's agricultural policy on the rural areas.

Mr. Gummer: I receive representations from a wide range of organisations, on the impact of agricultural policy on the rural areas. On 17 February, for example, I had a useful meeting with a delegation from Rural Voice led by its chairman, Rev. Jeremy Martineau.

Intervention Stocks

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total value of cereal, beef and cheese held in intervention stocks in the United Kingdom as of the latest available date, in June 1979 and in June 1983.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The total book value of cereals, beef and cheese held in intervention stores in the United Kingdom on those dates were (£ million):

	Number
December 1987	308
June 1983	108
June 1979	50

Alternative Land Use

Ms. Quin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next intends meeting representatives of the National Farmers Union to discuss the potential for farm woodlands.

Mr. Gummer: We are in regular contact with the National Farmers Union about the development of farm woodlands. I discussed our revised proposals for the farm woodland scheme with the NFU and other interested organisations on 16 December.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with farming organisations concerning the relationship between farming and forestry, following his proposals for alternative land use.

Mr. Gummer: I met representatives of various farming organisations recently to discuss this subject and the proposed farm woodland scheme in particular.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the set-aside proposal agreed in Brussels preclude the possibility of a lowland farmer receiving payment for set-aside and using the grazing fallow to diversify or expand his sheep flock; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The terms of the recent agreement by the European Council enable member states to permit grazing of set-aside land under conditions be laid down. The details have still to be discussed in the Council, and decisions on the precise shape of the scheme in the United Kingdom will follow after that.

Grain Production

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the EEC output of grain in each of the past 10 years; by how much production will have to rise above the 160 million tonne threshold to increase the burden on the EEC budget; what is the Government's forecast of *(a)* production and *(b)* production costs in each of the next five years when the price reduction has been triggered if rising yields per hectare are maintained; and what contribution the new arrangements are forecast to make to reducing agricultural surpluses.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 18 February 1988]:* Total production of cereals in the previous 10 years in the countries which now make up the European Community was as follows:

	Million tonnes
1978-79	137·0
1979-80	132·7
1980-81	144·2
1981-82	134·3
1982-83	145·2
1983-84	138·2
1984-85	173·2
1985-86	160·5
1986-87	154·3
[1]1987-88	153·1

[1] Provisional.

The effect of increased levels of production on the EC budget would depend on a wide range of factors, including prices of cereals on world markets and the ECU-US dollar exchange rate.

The Government do not make forecasts of production or production costs on the basis requested by the hon. Member; I would, however, refer him to the reply I gave him on 22 February, at column *49*.

The introduction of stabilisers for cereals will reduce the level of producers returns and so the incentive to produce cereals.

Cereals

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list, for each member state of the European Community, the yield of cereals in the harvest year 1986-87, the tonnage liable to co-responsibility levy and the proportion of levy paid to date.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* The most recent figures available for production and the tonnage on which co-responsibility levy has been collected for the 1986-87 Community harvest are as follows. Information is not available on the tonnage liable to the co-responsibility levy.

Member state[1]	*Production million tonnes*	*Tonnage on which levy collected by 31 July 1987 for transactions to 30 June 1987*
Belgium	2·3	3·2
Denmark	8·0	1·7
West Germany	25·6	11·5
Greece	5·2	0·9
Spain	16·0	4·5
France	50·1	14·8
Ireland	1·8	0·9
Italy	17·8	6·3

Member state[1]	*Production million tonnes*	*Tonnage on which levy collected by 31 July 1987 for transactions to 30 June 1987*
Luxembourg	0·1	0·1
Netherlands	1·3	2·7
United Kingdom	24·5	[2]11·7

[1] Portugal does not yet implement the EC cereals regime.
[2] Up to 31 December 1987 levy had been collected on 13·4 million tonnes in respect of the 1986-87 harvest.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Crumlin Road Prison

1. **Mr. McCusker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will pay an official visit to Her Majesty's prison, Crumlin road, Belfast, to discuss prison conditions.

Mr. Stanley: I had the pleasure of paying an official visit to Her Majesty's prison, Crumlin road, on 25 November.

Security

3. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation.

29. **Mr. Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

30. **Mr. Maginnis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

41. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in the Province.

44. **Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the present security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Tom King: Since I last answered questions in the House on 28 January, three members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and one civilian have died. The threat remains high, but the courageous and determined efforts of the security forces are continuing to yield results. In particular, they have recovered a number of significant caches of arms and ammunition thought to have belonged to both Loyalist and Republican terrorist organisations.

So far this year 34 people have been charged with serious offences and 222 weapons, 63,616 rounds of ammunition and 392 lb of explosives have been recovered in Northern Ireland. In addition, already this year the Garda Siochana has made a number of very significant finds of arms and ammunition. These include some 125 weapons, approximately 80,000 rounds of ammunition and almost 600 lb of commercial explosives.

Public Order (Prison Sentences)

7. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prosecutions have taken place under the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987; how many right hon. and hon. Members from Northern Ireland constituencies have served prison sentences as a result; and how many local councillors have served prison sentences.

Mr. Stanley: On the latest available figures 2,108 people had been prosecuted under the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987; five hon. Members had chosen to be imprisoned rather than to be fined for offences under the order. Similar information in respect of local councillors is not readily available.

40. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many right hon. and hon. Members representing constituencies in Northern Ireland are presently in prison in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Stanley: Four.

Single Payments

13. **Mr. Snape:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount of single payments paid by the Department of Health and Social Security in 1987-88; and what plans he has to protect the living standards of claimants under the new social fund arrangements.

Mr. Needham: Single payments in the 52 weeks ended 12 January 1988 amounted to nearly £24·3 million.

From April 1988, people will generally be expected to manage on their weekly income. However, under the social fund there will continue to be non-repayable grants to help people maintain themselves in the community. Loans will also be available to help with budgeting and there will be limits to the size of weekly repayments. These will be set in proportion to the applicant's benefit level and his continuing commitments, the aim being to ensure that the level of recovery is not unreasonable.

United States Investment

15. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has about the effect of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland's decision not to prosecute certain Royal Ulster Constabulary officers on the stated investment intentions of United States industrialists in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: There is no sign of any such effect, nor do I expect any.

22. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the level of United States investment in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: There are currently 24 United States companies in Northern Ireland employing 10,171 people.

Employment (Equal Opportunities)

18. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards anti-discrimination practices in employment.

Mr. Viggers: The Government are firmly committed to ensuring full equality of opportunity in employment for all Northern Ireland. Proposals for strengthening the law relating to discrimination on religious or political grounds are now being finalised. The consultation period on a proposal for a draft Sex Discrimination (Amendment) Order has just been completed, and that measure, which brings the position in Northern Ireland into line with that in Great Britain, should become law by the summer. Provision to prevent discrimination against disabled persons in employment continues to be made on the same basis in Northern Ireland as in the rest of the United Kingdom.

34. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to publish his White Paper on equal opportunity.

37. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will now announce the date for the publication of his White Paper on Equal Opportunity.

Mr. Viggers: My right hon. Friend will be making an announcement on the Government's policy proposals in the near future.

Capital Grant Scheme

20. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what will be the effect of the abolition of the standard capital grant scheme on the amount of money available for industrial development in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: There will be no diminution in the priority given to measures which will further strengthen the Northern Ireland economy. Resources will continue to be made available as necessary for the Industrial Development Board and the local enterprise development unit to deal with any soundly based project that could not proceed without Government support.

Stalker/Sampson Report

21. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will reconsider his decision not to publish the Stalker/Sampson report; and if he will make a statement.

28. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will now reconsider his decision not to publish the Stalker/Sampson report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: No.

Unemployment

10. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received from the Northern Ireland trade union movement about unemployment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: In December 1987 I received a copy of the document "Making the Economy Work — An Alternative Development Strategy," published by the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union. Otherwise I have not received any representations from the trade unions on general economic issues since November 1986, although I am always ready to do so.

ACE Schemes

23. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to expand the use of ACE schemes for community care initiatives; and if he will make a statement on proposed new ACE schemes in this field.

Mr. Viggers: On 13 December last I announced that an additional £10 million was being allocated to the ACE programme in 1988-89 and approximately 30 per cent. of this increase would be available to ACE sponsors who promote community health and social care projects. Consideration is currently being given to a number of proposals for the establishment of new ACE projects as well as the expansion of existing schemes in the community care field.

RUC (Catholic Recruits)

24. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what projections he has made of levels of recruitment of Catholics to the Royal Ulster Constabulary over the next five years.

Mr. Stanley: I understand that no such projections have been made; nor could they be made meaningfully, being dependent on the quality and background of all future applicants. The RUC will, however, continue its long-standing efforts to recruit Roman Catholics to the RUC and the RUC Reserve.

Police Authority

25. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met the Northern Ireland Police Authority; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend and I frequently meet and correspond with the chairman of the Northern Ireland Police Authority and other members of the authority, as necessary, on matters within the authority's statutory remit. The specific matters concerned are confidential.

Electricity Generation

26. **Mr. Sean Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has yet reached a conclusion on the provision of new electricity generating capacity in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the likely start date for Kilroot phase II.

27. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the provision of new electricity generating capacity in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Carrick Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) earlier today.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

31. **Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he is satisfied with the workings of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. Tom King: I believe the agreement and the conference established by it provide the best means of co-operation with the Government of the Irish Republic, in the interests of both countries.

Labour Statistics

32. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish details of present unemployment levels in Northern Ireland; and if he will take steps to ensure that unemployment totals for Northern Ireland are in future published at the same time as unemployment rates by constituency in Great Britain.

Mr. Viggers: At 14 January 1988, the latest date for which unemployment figures are available, there were 121,778 unemployed claimants in Northern Ireland, representing 17·9 per cent. of the working population. Compared with the same month last year, that is a decrease in unemployment of 9,427.

Unemployment figures for Northern Ireland are published by press release on the same dates as those for the rest of the United Kingdom, public holidays permitting.

Wages Act 1986

33. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to extend the Wages Act 1986 to Northern Ireland; what is his estimate of the effect on employment levels of young people that the removal of wages council protection would have; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: The Draft Wages (Northern Ireland) Order 1988, which was laid on 10 December 1987, will introduce reforms similar to those already in place in Great Britain under the Wages Act 1986. I am not aware of any studies which quantify the number of jobs which will arise from the specific reforms which are proposed and attempts to estimate the effect on employment levels of the removal of young persons from the scope of wages councils are not likely to be productive. However, the removal of statutory minima which prevent employers offering jobs at rates which young people would accept will be conducive to their increased employment.

Dogs

17. **Mr. Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will review the operation of the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: No. The Department of Agriculture has monitored the operation of the order since it came into force; it has been well received and there are no plans to carry out a review.

Police Discipline

35. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next proposes to meet the Northern Ireland Police Authority to discuss police discipline.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend has no present plans to do so.

RUC (Reorganisation)

36. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the reorganisation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

39. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the reorganisation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend did so on 17 February.

38. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Royal Ulster Constabulary officers, and of what rank, are to be subject to internal disciplinary proceedings following events reported in the Stalker/Sampson report, for obstructing the officers of the Stalker/Sampson team in carrying out their inquiries.

Mr. Tom King: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay).

Kincora Boys Home

19. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many civil servants working in his Department were interviewed in connection with investigations into the Kincora Boys Home.

Mr. Tom King: This is a matter for the RUC. It is, however, not police practice to reveal details about persons interviewed during the course of their investigations.

Job Creation (Foreign Investment)

42. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many jobs have been created in the last five years as a result of foreign firms setting up in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: A total of 6,472 new jobs have been promoted in the period 1 April 1982 to 31 March 1987 as a result of new foreign investment and expansions of existing foreign-owned companies.

RUC-Garda (Meetings)

43. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary last met his counterpart in the Garda of the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Stanley: On 16 January.

Education Reform

45. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the consultation paper on education reform is to be published.

Dr. Mawhinney: In the next few weeks.

Terrorism

46. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he remains satisfied with progress in the fight against terrorism in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: I shall not be satisfied until the evil of terrorism is eradicated. I believe that no level of terrorism can ever be justified. We will continue to give every support to the security forces in their efforts to defeat the men of violence and to press for the closest possible co-operation between the RUC and the Garda Siochana.

Travelling People

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what monitoring takes place to determine atmospheric lead levels at legal and other sites occupied by travelling people; and, where such monitoring has occurred, what levels have been recorded.

Mr. Needham: Monitoring of atmospheric lead levels, other than emissions from the scheduled processes under the Alkali and Works Regulation Act 1906, is the responsibility of the district councils in Northern Ireland. No monitoring of lead levels has been carried out on sites occupied by travelling people in the Province. I shall be arranging for a circular to be issued to the councils drawing attention to the possible need to initiate monitoring on such sites.

Rubbish Dump, Magheramorne

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what compensation will be offered to Magheramorne owner-occupiers, the sale of whose property is blighted by the proposal to develop the largest rubbish dump in Northern Ireland at Magheramorne.

Mr. Needham: There is no provision in the planning legislation for the payment of compensation to third parties as a result of planning decisions. In any event a decision has not yet been reached on the proposal.

Training Centres

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of training centres in Northern Ireland, their courses and their attendances in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Viggers: The available information for the two years ended 31 March 1987 is lengthy and in tabular form. I have sent a copy to the hon. Member and arranged for copies to be placed in the Library.

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the next meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference is to be held.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the next meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference is to be held.

Mr. Tom King: We had a meeting yesterday and I hope to meet Irish Ministers again shortly.

European Heritage Funding

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the list of projects approved during the past three years for European Heritage funding; and if he will make a statement on the procedure for submitting applications for European Heritage funding.

Mr. Needham: No projects for European Heritage funding have been approved in Northern Ireland.

The procedure for submitting applications is usually contained in a spring issue of the official journal of the European Communities in each year. Applications have to be submitted by the owner of the property or his agent. The journal gives details of the regional or national organisation responsible for selecting projects and a closing date. The organisation establishes the eligibility of the project after which the Commission, on expert advice, makes a decision on whether or not to provide financial support.

The conservation service of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland carries out this function for the Commission in Northern Ireland. It is advised by the Historic Buildings Council for Northern Ireland.

Homelessness

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has of the current cost of facilities for the homeless in Northern Ireland and what has been the cost in each of the last five years.

Mr. Needham: There are three statutory hostels for the homeless, which are run by the Eastern health and social services. Expenditure on them in each of the last five years was as follows:

	£
1982-83	305,190
1983-84	273,543
1984-85	246,067
1985-86	309,516
1986-87	239,131

A comparable figure for 1987-88 is not yet available.

Expenditure by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive on its homeless advice unit since it was established in November 1985 is as follows:

	£
1985-86	38,972
1986-87	62,239
1987-88	[1]57,638

[1] estimate to 31 January 1988

Detailed information on the cost of general facilities for the homeless provided by the Housing Executive and registered housing associations through the housing programme is not readily available.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current funding for voluntary organisations dealing with homelessness in Northern Ireland; and what are the criteria to qualify for such funding.

Mr. Needham: In 1986-87, the Department of Health and Social Services and the four health and social services boards paid grants totalling £299,154 to voluntary organisations dealing with homelessness.

Such grants are payable on a discretionary basis to voluntary organisations providing services similar or related to any of the health or personal social services under article 71 of the Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1972.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the implications of the recent cuts in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive budget in the light of the transfer of responsibility for homeless people from the Department of Health and Social Security to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and what additional funding he proposes to provide for this new function.

Mr. Needham: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's budget is determined each year as part of the public expenditure survey. The transfer of responsibility for the temporary accommodation needs of homeless people to the executive will be accompanied initially by a transfer of resources from the health and social services boards. Subsequent bids by the executive for additional funding to be directed towards meeting the needs of the homeless will be assessed in future public expenditure surveys.

Teacher Training Places

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many teacher training places in Northern Ireland have been taken up by students from the

Irish Republic during the past year as a result of European Community regulations; and what he estimates the demand to be for that source for the next two years.

Dr. Mawhinney: Ten such students took up training in 1987-88. No significant change is expected over the next two years.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what manpower modelling processes have been set up within the equal opportunities unit of the Department of Finance and Personnel (NI); and if he will make a statement on their operation.

Mr. Stanley: The equal opportunities unit has concentrated to date on establishing a sound data base and analysing the resultant material in terms of age profile, promotion rates, wastage and so on. This enables trends to be identified leading to measurement and evaluation of the variables which are influencing those trends. The results have been fully reported in the unit's first two reports. When the analytical work is completed, the unit will be considering whether there exists a sound foundation for manpower modelling which avoids the dangers of projections based on uncertain trends and simplified assumptions.

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland why the equal opportunities unit of the Department of Finance and Personnel (NI) has only produced one report of its investigations in four years.

Mr. Stanley: Following the instituting of comprehensive monitoring arrangements, the unit has produced two reports—the first on 22 July 1986 and the second on 17 December 1987. Copies of both reports are in the Library.

Community Services Grant Aid

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list by district council area, the community services grant aid given to district councils during 1986-87 and 1987-88;

(2) if he will list by district council area, the community services grant aid to be given to district councils during 1988-89 and the date on which district councils were given this information.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information for 1986-87 and 1987-88 is shown in the table. I am planning to make an announcement in March in respect of 1988-89.

Council	*1986-87* £	*1987-88* £
Antrim	51,750	52,950
Ards	37,500	38,550
Armagh	18,750	19,200
Ballymena	60,000	61,350
Ballymoney	7,500	7,650
Banbridge	17,625	18,000
Belfast	660,000	675,225
Carrickfergus	42,000	43,350
Castlereagh	93,750	94,950
Coleraine	33,750	34,500
Cookstown	6,750	6,900
Craigavon	192,750	197,175
Derry	124,500	128,625
Down	33,750	35,475
Dungannon	8,625	8,850
Fermanagh	40,500	41,625
Larne	21,750	22,275
Limavady	17,250	17,625
Lisburn	69,000	70,950
Magherafelt	5,250	5,400
Moyle	15,750	16,125
Newry/Mourne	95,250	98,400
Newtonabbey	57,750	59,100
North Down	50,250	50,925
Omagh	62,250	64,350
Strabane	73,500	75,975

Capital Schemes

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list by district council area, the recreational or community capital schemes which were approved or implemented during 1986-87 and 1987-88;

(2) if he will list by district council area, the recreation or community capital schemes which are to be approved or implemented during 1988-89.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information for 1986-87 and 1987-88 is shown in the table. I hope shortly to release details in respect of 1988-89.

1986-87—Council and Project

Ards
Greyabbey Village Hall—Upgrading
Surfacing of Tennis Courts, Bowling Green and Car Park
Floodlighting at Enler Park

Ballymena
Pavilion at Clough Playing Fields
Golf Driving Range, Ballymena Showgrounds
Sand slitting at Cargan Playing Fields
Pavilion at Cargan Playing Fields

Ballymoney
Play Area at Rockend, Corkey

Castlereagh
Extension to Braniel Community Centre
Equipment for Cragleith Playing Fields

Carrickfergus
Extended Lobby at Leisure Centre

Coleraine
Lodge Road Athletics Track—Equipment
Resurfacing of Anderson Park Tennis Courts

Derry
Resurfacing of Tennis Courts at St. Columb's Park
Floodlightin of all weather pitch at Brooke Park
Floodlighting of all weather pitch at St. Columb's Park
Bowling Pavilion at Brooke Park
Pavilion at Prehen Playing Fields

Down
Crossgar Playing Fields

1987-88—Council and Project

Antrim
Golf Control Building at Allen Park
Greystone Community Centre

Ards
Health and Safety works at Comber Leisure Centre
Health and Safety works at Kiltonga Squash Centre
Health and Safety work at Queen's Hall
Floodlighting at the Common, Donaghadee

Armagh
Markethill Bowling Pavilion

Ballymena
Kells/Connor Playing Field Development

Sand slitting at Cargan Playing Fields
Floodlighting at Showgrounds
Portable Changing Unit at Clough Playing Fields

Ballymoney
Health and Safety works at Riada

Belfast
Playground equipment at various sites
Upgrading of Woodvale Community Centre
Conversion of old sauna at Grove Swimming Pool (Weights Room)

Castlereagh
Cregagh Community Centre extension

Coleraine
Playing Field at Kilrea
Equipment at Lodge Road Playing Fields

Derry
Purchase of rescue boat for Prehen Boathouse.
Floodlighting of Templemore pitches.

Down
Erection of temporary changing pavilion at Annsborough.
Erection of temporary changing pavilion at Rossconnor Arts Centre, Downpatrick.

Dungannon
Access road at Dungannon Park.
Moy Community Centre.
Refurbishment of pitches at Dungannon Park.

Fermanagh
Purchase of Ederney Town Hall and conversion to Community Centre.

Larne
Replacement heating system at Lynn Community Centre.
Tower Pool weight training room.
Purchase of land at Glenarm.

Limavady
Health and Safety works at Roe Valley Recreation Centre.
Resurfacing tennis courts at Roemill.

Lisburn
Car parking at Lisburn Leisure Centre.

Magherafelt
Floodlighting of tennis courts at Queen Elizabeth II Park.
Temporary pavilion at Tobermore Playing Fields.
Health and Safety works at Greenvale Leisure Centre.

Dungannon
Land Purchase at Dungannon Farm Park

Fermanagh
Purchase of Newtownbutler Town Hall and conversion to Community Centre

Larne
Seacourt Community Centre
Gymnasium Equipment for Tower Pool Complex
Extension to Bowling Pavilion at Curran Park

Limavady
Additional seating at Limavady Town Hall
Stage lighting at Limavady Town Hall
Conversion of Highlands Primary School to Community Centre

Newry and Mourne
Meigh Playing Fields
Bowling green at Clonallon Park, Warrenpoint

Omagh
Snooker extension at Omagh Leisure Centre
Play area at Fairview Gardens, Dromore

Newry and Mourne
Pavilion and Annalong Bowling Green
Multi purpose area at Hilltown
Purchase of former library premises, Margaret Square

Newtownabbey
Changing pavilion at 3 Mile Water Playing Fields

North Down
Extension to Breezemount Community Centre
Floodlighting hockey pitches at Ward Park

Omagh
Health and Safety works at Eskra Community Centre

Strabane
Health and Safety works at Riversdale Leisure Centre

NI 2000

Sir John Biggs-Davison: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of the NI 2000 programme for cleaning up the environment in the Province.

Mr. Viggers: The NI 2000 board was appointed on 20 January 1988. Since then two meetings have been held to plan operational strategies for the promotion of environmental improvement projects. Already proposals for projects have been received from both the public and private sectors and I look forward to receiving progress reports from the chairman of NI 2000.

Car Parks

Sir John Biggs-Davison: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many car parks are run by the Department of the Environment (NI); how many are free and in how many charges are levied; and how many have been privatised since his answer on this matter to the hon. Member for Epping Forest on 3 April 1987.

Mr. Needham: The Department of the Environment (NI) controls 334 car parks of which 91 are charged and 243 are free. A total of 31 charged car parks are managed by the private sector. No car parks have been privatised since 3 April 1987.

Nursery Education

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration he has given to the introduction of an under-fives initiative in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The implementation of this objective is being carried forward in the detailed operational plans drawn up annually by the health and social services boards in the light of local needs, priorities and available resources. I have no plans to introduce a special initiative for the under-fives in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available to indicate the number of mother and toddler groups in Northern Ireland and the assistance or concessions offered to them by area boards, councils, the Housing Executive and other bodies.

Mr. Needham: The extent to which health and social services boards provide financial or other support to such groups is not readily known, but some units of management do offer modest grant-aid (usually in the

form of launching grants) to groups operating in their districts. Both the Department of Education and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive may assist groups by the provision of spare capacity in schools and the letting of dwellings or the leasing of land at nominal rent to permit such groups to carry out their activities.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate nursery education provision in each board area.

Dr. Mawhinney: The numbers of available places in 1987-88 are as follows:

Board Area	*In nursery schools*	*In nursery classes in primary schools*	*Totals*
Belfast	1,250	850	2,100
Western	500	225	725
North-Eastern	825	300	1,125
South-Eastern	750	100	850
Southern	625	725	1,350

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide details of the financial or other assistance given to pre-school playgroups by *(a)* each health and social services board and *(b)* each education and library board.

Mr. Needham: In addition to contacts with pre-school playgroups in connection with registration procedures required under the Children and Young Persons Act (NI) 1968, the health and social services boards provided financial assistance as follows in the year ended 31 March 1987:

	£
Northern Board	75,054
Southern Board	31,361
Eastern Board	823,948
Western Board	142,837
Northern Ireland total	1,073,200

Education and library boards provide no assistance to pre-school playgroups.

Privatisation

Sir John Biggs-Davison: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made by Northern Ireland departments and statutory boards with the privatisation of services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland is planning to privatise the artificial insemination service at 1 October 1988 and the pig carcase classification service by 1 January 1989. A number of other possibilities in the Northern Ireland public sector are also under consideration.

Tertiary Education

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what EEC legislation and court rulings were taken into account when deciding the terms and conditions governing eligibility of European Economic Community students for places and grants for tertiary education in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: These terms and conditions were not determined separately from those in the rest of the United Kingdom. The Government took mainly into account a judgment of the European Court of Justice in February 1985 in a case referred to it by a Belgian court (Gravier *v* City of Liege).

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the cost of funding tertiary education in Northern Ireland, for students from European Economic Community member states *(a)* in total and *(b)* for each member state;

(2) how many students from the United Kingdom, eligible to receive tertiary education in Northern Ireland, have been unable to gain places during 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88;

(3) what is the total number of students in Northern Ireland who have applied for entry to tertiary education in 1988, listed by education establishments.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is not available.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures the Government intend to implement to curb the use by students from European Economic Community member states of Northern Ireland's tertiary education system to the detriment of students from the United Kingdom who are unable to obtain places there.

Dr. Mawhinney: No measures are proposed. There is no evidence that EC students are displacing United Kingdom students from places in tertiary education in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the total number of students who commenced tertiary education in Northern Ireland in 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88, listed by educational establishments;

(2) what was the total number of students involved in tertiary education in Northern Ireland in 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88, listed by educational establishments.

Dr. Mawhinney: Available information is as follows:

	1985-86		*1986-87*		*1987-88*[3,4]	
	New[1] *Entrant*	*Total*[2] *Enrolment*	*New*[1] *Entrant*	*Total*[2] *Enrolment*	*New*[1] *Entrant*	*Total*[2]
Universities						
Queen's University	1,845	7,164	1,886	7,360	1,936	7,552
University of Ulster	2,665	7,458	2,766	7,613	2,992	7,994
Colleges of Education						
Stranmillis	168	563	166	594	173	632
St. Mary's	166	567	171	595	177	635
Institutions of Further Education						

	1985-86		1986-87		1987-88[3,4]	
	New[1] Entrant	Total[2] Enrolment	New[1] Entrant	Total[2] Enrolment	New[1] Entrant	Total[2]
Belfast College of Technology	981	1,196	737	965	—	—
North West College of Technology	687	1,003	773	1,083	—	—
Antrim Technical	206	254	197	245	—	—
Ballymena Technical	655	883	665	893	—	—
Newtownabbey Technical	351	427	382	507	—	—
Lisburn College of Further Education	396	487	429	558	—	—
North Antrim College of Further Education	91	117	183	201	—	—
Lurgan College of Further Education	414	556	378	559	—	—
Portadown College of Further Education	953	1,178	718	971	—	—
Armagh College of Further Education	562	720	568	789	—	—
Banbridge College of Further Education	225	272	186	245	—	—
Down Technology Area	395	471	395	469	—	—
Newcastle College of Further Education	160	180	228	263	—	—
Fermanagh College of Further Education	413	539	401	526	—	—
Coleraine Technical	392	499	329	434	—	—
Limavady Technical	303	357	292	378	—	—
Magherafelt College of Further Education	231	264	278	338	—	—
East Tyrone Technology Area	560	675	624	767	—	—
Omagh Technical	473	553	480	548	—	—
Larne College of Further Education	243	267	247	289	—	—
Newry and Kilkeel Further Education Area	624	786	567	715	—	—
Belfast College of Business Studies	892	923	798	965	—	—
Castlereagh College of Further Education	324	387	405	480	—	—
Rupert Stanley College of Further Education	827	1,030	1,182	1,489	—	—
North Down Technology Area	718	882	642	812	—	—
Northern Ireland Hotel and Catering College	212	233	192	210	—	—

[1] Excludes students entering postgraduate study as they commenced tertiary education in a previous year.
[2] Includes all full-time students.
[3] Figures for 1987-88 are provisional.
[4] Figures for Institutions of Further Education are not yet available.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many students in tertiary education in Northern Ireland in 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88, and how many of those applying for entry in 1988, are from other European Economic Community member states, listed *(a)* as a percentage of the total, *(b)* by educational establishments and *(c)* by country of origin.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is as follows:

	1985-86				1986-87				1987-88			
	ROI		Other EC[3]		ROI		Other EC[3]		ROI		Other EC[3]	
	Number	Per cent.[2]	Number	Per cent.[2]	Number	Per cent.[2]	Number	Per cent.[2]	Number	Per cent.[2]	Number	Per cent.
Universities												
Queen's University	95	1·3	14	0·2	121	1·6	10	0·1	179	2·4	7	0·1
University of Ulster	224	3·0	29	0·4	337	4·4	64	0·8	609	7·7	60	0·8
Colleges of Education												
Stranmillis	7	1·2	—	—	6	1·0	—	—	7	1·1	—	—
St. Mary's	8	1·4	—	—	10	1·7	—	—	8	1·3	—	—
Institute of Further Education												
Belfast College of Technology	2	0·2	—	—	5	0·5	—	—	—	—	—	—
North West College of Technology	55	5·5	—	—	78	07·2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Antrim Technology	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ballymena Technology	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newtownabbey Technology	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lisburn College of Further Education	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Antrim College of Further Education	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

	1985-86				1986-87				1987-88			
	ROI		Other EC[5]		ROI		Other EC[5]		ROI		Other EC[5]	
	Number	Per cent.[2]	Number	Per cent.[2]	Number	Per cent.[2]	Number	Per cent.[2]	Number	Per cent.[2]	Number	Per cent.
Lurgan College of Further Education	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Portadown College of Further Education	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Armagh College of Futher Education	2	0·3	—	—	1	0·4	—	—	—	—	—	—
Banbridge College of Further Education	—	—	—	—	1	0·1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Down Technical Area	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newcastle College of Futher Education	—	—	—	—	1	0·4	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fermanagh College of Further Education	16	3·0	—	—	18	3·4	—	—	—	—	—	—
Coleraine Technical	—	—	—	—	2	0·5	—	—	—	—	—	—
Limavady Technical	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Magherafelt College of Further Education	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Tyrone Technical Area	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Omagh Technical	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Larne College of Further Education	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newry and Kilkeel Further Education Area	5	0·6	—	—	4	0·6	—	—	—	—	—	—
Belfast College of Business Studies	1	0·1	—	—	—	—	1	0·1[6]	—	—	—	—
Castlereagh College of Further Edudation	—	—	—	—	2	0·4	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rupert Stanley College of Further Education	3	0·3	—	—	8	0·5	1	0·1[6]	—	—	—	—
North Down Technical Area	4	0·5	—	—	3	0·4	—	—	—	—	—	—
Northern Ireland Hotel and Catering College	1	0·4	—	—	2	1·0	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Includes students from European Community member states other than the United Kindom or the Republic of Ireland. Information on EC students at universities is not readily available by individual member states, apart from ROI.
[2] As percentage of all full-time students.
[3] Figures for 1987-88 are provisional.
[4] Figures for Institutions of Further Education are not yet available. Figures for 1988 are not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.
[5] Germany.
[6] France.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what terms and conditions are applicable in Northern Ireland to students from European Economic Community member states, regarding eligibility for *(a)* Department of Education grants and *(b)* education and library board grants to pursue tertiary education;

(2) what terms and conditions are applicable in Northern Ireland to students from European Community member states, regarding fee-paying places in tertiary education.

Dr. Mawhinney: EC students who gain places in Northern Ireland institutions of tertiary education and who satisfy certain criteria of eligibility in respect of residence, type of course and previous study have their tuition fees paid.

Fees-only awards are made by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland and the education and library boards, respectively, to EC students who, in competition with Northern Ireland students, obtain postgraduate bursaries or studentships or discretionary awards in respect of other courses of tertiary education.

RUC (Chief Constable)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received concerning the position of the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Mr. Tom King: The first part of my statement on 17 February dealt with the aspect of possible disciplinary proceedings as a result of the investigations carried out by Mr. Stalker and Mr. Sampson. I have undertaken to inform the House of further developments.

As I also told the House on 17 February, I have discussed certain aspects of the Stalker-Sampson inquiry report with the Chief Constable. In particular he has accepted in principle all the recommendations made by Mr. McLachlan.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend and I meet the Chief Constable of the RUC regularly. Our meetings are confidential and it would not be right to disclose their content.

Children

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the proportion of four-year-olds in Northern Ireland *(a)* in single parent families, *(b)* whose parents are unemployed and *(c)* whose parents receive family income supplement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 24 February 1988]:* The information is not available. However the proportion of four-year-olds in families receiving one parent benefit is approximately one in 17·5 of all four-year-olds in families receiving child benefit.

Fair Employment Agency

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the yearly number of employees of the Fair Employment Agency for each year since its inception, indicating their grade and classification and brief job description.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 24 February 1988]:* The information required is detailed in the table. In addition the agency are currently engaged in the recruitment of 11 additional staff: One assistant director (employer liaison) (deputy principal); four employer liaison officers, two conciliation officers, one education officer, and one research assistant (all at staff officer level) and two clerical staff.

Fair Employment Agency

Staff and Grade[1]	*1976-77*	*1977-78*	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Co-ordinating Director (PO)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Deputy Co-ordinating Director (DP)	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Assistant Director (Complaints) (DP)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	1
Assistant Director (Investigations) (DP)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Assistant Director (DP) (Solicitor/Secretary)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	1
Assistant Director (DP) (Education/Publicity)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Conciliation Officers (SO)	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	3	2
Research Officer (SO)	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Investigation Officers (SO)	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	1	1	3
Assistant Conciliation Officers (EOI)	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	1	1	1
Employer Liaison Assistant (EOI)	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Assistant Investigation Officers (EOI)	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	1
Trainee Conciliation Officers (EOI)	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—
Administrative Officers (EOI)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Personal Secretary	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Administrative Assistant (EOII)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—
Education Assistant (EOII)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Clerical Staff	3	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Total	8	11	13	13	13	12	13	15	15	15	20

Equivalent Grades in Northern Ireland Civil Service.
PO—Principal Officer.
DP—Deputy Principal.
SO—Staff Officer.
EOI—Executive Officer (Grade 1).
EOII—Executive Officer (Grade 2).

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list in the *Official Report* the amount of money spent by the Fair Employment Agency each year since its inception in constant prices.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 24 February 1988]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Period	*FEA Expenditure at 1987 Prices* £
1976-77[1]	104,426
1977-78	186,064
1978-79	237,559
1979-80	277,162
1980-81	288,086
1981-82	290,339
1982-83	284,148
1983-84	274,171
1984-85	294,522
1985-86	309,916
1986-87	398,582

[1] September 1976 to March 1977.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 26 February 1988

EMPLOYMENT

Quarrying

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment why no prosecutions were undertaken in the period covered by the Miner and Quarries Inspectorate's report for the period ended March 1986 in the light of the number of accidents therein reported.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive's inspectors make use of a range of enforcement techniques from advice and persuasion, through the issues of enforcement notices to prosecution. Prosecution is regarded as the last resort and was not judged to be appropriate in any case during this period.

Unemployment Benefit

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed benefit claimants there were in each parliamentary constituency at January; and how many of them were *(a)* aged under 25 years, *(b)* aged under 25 years, and unemployed for 12 months or more, *(c)* aged under 25 years, and unemployed for six months or more or *(d)* of any age and unemployed for 12 months or more.

Mr. Lee: I am sending the hon. Member a table showing the number of unemployed claimants in each parliamentary constituency in Great Britain, for each of the age and duration categories requested, on 14 January 1988, which is also available in the Library.

Construction Industry (Accidents)

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what form figures for the accident rate on building sites are collected.

Mr. Nicholls: Accident rates are calculated nationally for the construction industry by dividing the total number of relevant accidents to employees reported to the Health and Safety Executive by the estimated total number of employees in the construction industry.

Tourism

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has as to how many local authorities *(a)* have a designated tourism office, *(b)* have a department or sub-department of tourism, or *(c)* have a tourism officer employed within an economic development unit.

Mr. Lee: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, I welcome the fact that a large and increasing number of local authorities have staff with specific responsibilities for developing tourism within their areas.

TRANSPORT

Cabotage

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next expects the European Transport Ministers to discuss the question of cabotage rights for European shipping within the European Economic Community.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend intends to raise the question of shipping cabotage at the Transport Council of Ministers next month with a view to a more substantive discussion at a subsequent Council under the current German presidency.

Air Misses

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the official definition of a risk-bearing air miss; (2) what is the official definition of a reported air miss.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In the Civil Aviation Authority's published air miss statistics, air misses are categorised as A, B, or C depending upon whether there was a definite risk, a possible risk, or no risk of collision. Risk-bearing air misses are those in categories A and B.

In the same context a reported air miss means an air miss reported by any civil or military pilot in United Kindom air space. Reports are filed when a pilot considers that his aircraft may have been endangered by the proximity of another aircraft to the extent that a risk of actual collision existed.

ENVIRONMENT

Inner-city Partnership Programme

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the value of the inner-city partnership programme for Lambeth for 1988-89 in real terms as a percentage of the allocation for 1986-87/88.

Mr. Chope: The 1988-89 allocation is 82 per cent. of the 1986-87 allocation and 88 per cent. of the 1987-88 allocation, at 1988-89 prices. But in 1986-87 Lambeth underspent its allocation by over 13 per cent. and estimates for 1987-88 indicate an underspend of a similar proportion. The allocation for 1988-89 is a slight increase on the estimated 1987-88 outturn at 1988-89 prices.

Vacant Land (Tower Hamlets)

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the London Residuary Body will transfer the open space on the junction of Bruce road and Powis road, E3, to the London borough of Tower Hamlets with a view to incorporating it into Bromley recreation ground and enabling plans for an under-fives playground to proceed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The future of this site is currently under discussion by the LRB and the council of the London borough of Tower Hamlets. It is open to the London residuary body to make a proposal to the Secretary of State for the transfer of this property to the council under section 67 of the Local Government Act 1985.

Homeless Persons

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 1 February to the

hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) *Official Report*, columns 429-30, what are the criteria used to determine the allocation of money for housing projects for the homeless to the local authorities listed.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on 20 January at cols. *749-52*.

Rugby Matches (Crowd Control)

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the presidents of the home country Rugby football unions concerning crowd control before, during and immediately after major rugby matches.

Mr. Moynihan: I last met the president of the Rugby Football Union on 16 December 1987 and I had brief discussions with the presidents of the Welsh and Scottish Rugby Unions on 20 February 1988. The question of crowd control was not discussed at either meeting.

Northamptonshire County Council

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total number of full-time equivalent employees of the Northamptonshire county council as at the end of December 1979, December 1983, December 1984, December 1985, December 1986 and December 1987.

Mr. Chope: The results of the joint manpower watch December 1987 survey are not expected until towards the end of March 1988. The numbers of staff employed by Northamptonshire county council, at September for each year, are as follows:

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total Staff (FT + PT)*
1979	[1]	[1]	[1]
1980	9,775	8,532	18,307
1981	9,471	8,321	17,792
1982	10,327	8,527	18,764
1983	10,264	8,330	18,594
1984	10,331	8,480	18,811
1985	10,347	8,837	19,184
1986	10,163	9,362	19,525
1987	10,123	9,656	19,779

[1] Data not available.

Source: Joint Manpower Watch for England.

Full-time equivalent figures are not available for individual authorities.

Derelict Land Survey

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the latest derelict land survey.

Mr. Chope: The returns for the next derelict land survey are due in by the beginning of October. Information will then be analysed, and we expect to be in a position to publish the results of the survey in the summer of 1989.

Member's Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 1 February regarding a representation to meet his officials over the Wimpey no-fines properties in Blallenall, Walsall.

Mrs. Roe: I replied to the hon. Member on 24 February.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if the Property Services Agency is using external accountancy practices to check consultants' fees; how many instances of discrepancies have been discovered; and if he will list, by directorate and region, the amounts received from refunds or by a subsequent reduction of fees;

(2) pursuant to the answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, columns *531-32*, if he will describe the nature and scope of his Department's inquiries into the case of procedural irregularity involving the consultant Maurice Baguley in relation to the overseeing of maintenance contracts at the Property Services Agency's works offices at Westminster and Teddington.

Mr. Chope: There were no cases of irregularity arising from the employment of Maurice Baguley and Partners, on the maintenance management contract at the PSA district works office at Westminster, which was successfully completed in June 1987. No inquiries have therefore been instituted. The case to which I referred in my answer to a previous question, columns *531-32*, related to an employee of the consultants T. Dunwoody and Partners who are employed at Teddington district works office on a similar contract.

The procedural irregularity was uncovered during one of the routine management checks carried out at all district works offices which were instituted as part of the agency's drive to maintain efficiency and probity in its operations. Subsequent inquiries included interviews with the consultancy partners and the consultants' employee involved and also checks on all other contracts handled by that employee. It was following his interview that the employee handed in his resignation. There was no evidence whatsoever that any other employee of the consultants' firm was involved or had acted irregularly.

Lambeth Bridge House

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who are the landlords and freeholders of Lambeth bridge house, Great Westminster house and Horseferry house; and whether the owners have recently expressed any concern about the state of repair of these buildings.

Mr. Chope: The landlords and freeholders of Lambeth bridge house, Great Westminster house and Horseferry house are, respectively, Adamant Investment Corporation Ltd., Legal and General Assurance Society Ltd. and Pearl Assurance Ltd.

I can confirm that discussions have been held between PSA and the landlords of Lambeth bridge house and Horseferry house on the extent of necessary repairs and maintenance. Work on both buildings will commence in the next financial year. Repairs to Great Westminster house are the responsibility of the landlord. I am advised that the landlord does not propose to effect any repairs and intends instead to demolish and redevelop the

building. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food staff are due to leave the building by September this year, on lease expiry.

Urban Programme

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the projects funded in each of the London boroughs through the urban programme announced on 9 February.

Mr. Chope: The allocations announced on 9 February were provisional, and do not relate to an approved list of projects. They are subject to approval of the inner area programmes submitted by each authority.

Water

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether domestic rateable values will continue to be used for water charging purposes once they are abolished for local authority purposes.

Mr. Moynihan: It is clearly not in the interests of consumers that the water industry should continue to use rateable values for water charging purposes indefinitely, once domestic rates are abolished for local authority purposes from 1990. The Government therefore intend to amend the Local Government Finance Bill to prohibit the use of all rateable values, both domestic and non-domestic, for water charging purposes from 1 April 2000. This will give each water undertaker a period of 10 years after domestic rates are abolished in which to choose and introduce alternative means of charging.

Consultants

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the number of occasions where consultants employed by the Property Services Agency have been discovered by it to have overcharged for consultancy services; and if he will also identify in relation to each occasion the amount of money subsequently repaid, or the amount of subsequent fee reduction.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* As part of the agency's established procedures, PSA staff check all fee accounts submitted by consultants. Any inaccuracies or overcharging are dealt with immediately, normally by making the necessary adjustments to the consultants fee account before payment. Most adjustments are of a routine nature and bearing in mind that thousands of consultants' accounts are submitted on a monthly basis, no central record is kept of such adjustments.

On some very large projects a firm of chartered accountants is being employed by PSA to conduct an independent audit on certain aspects of the consultants' bills. To date bills from nine major consultants have been audited by the firm and savings of over £1 million representing some 2·5 per cent. of consultant fees have been made in the fees claimed. The commissions concerned were let by two directorates, the Directorate of Defence Services 1 and the Directorate of Civil Accommodation.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of all spending over budget in the last financial year by each department of the London Docklands Development Corporation.

Mr. Chope: Provision was made for LDDC's expected expenditure by votehead, as recorded in table 1 of class X, vote 3, of the main Supply Estimates (HC 227—IX, X: March 1987). A further £2,163 was transferred from the Merseyside development corporation when it became clear that MDC would not require its full allocation. Of this transfer, £1,163,000 was allocated to votehead (F) and £1,000,000 to votehead (G). Virements between other voteheads were either within the LDDC's delegation limits, or were approved by the Department. Outturn compared with final provision, as amended, in 1986-87 was therefore as follows:

£ thousands

	Final Provision	*Outturn*
A. Running costs	9,500	10,624
B. Estate management; maintenance, rates, security	3,900	3,301
C. Environment improvement works	6,200	7,100
D. Land purchase	15,000	12,800
E. Land reclamation and site preparation	8,118	8,364
F. Provision and renewal of gas, water, etc main services	[1]3,600	5,363
G. Roads and transport	[2]6,500	8,701
H. Support for industry — grants and loans under the Inner Urban Areas Act 1978	700	483
I. Support for voluntary organisations and social facilities	3,900	4,114
J. Docklands Light Railway	6,000	5,554
K. Housing	200	—
Gross Total	65,781	66,404
Deduct: (Y) receipts used to offset items A and B	900	1,523
Net Total	64,881	64,881

[1] Plus 1,163 transfer.
[2] Plus 1,000 transfer.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Acrylic Yarn Imports

Sir Marcus Fox: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether the concerns of the United Kingdom acrylic yarn spinners about imports from Turkey have been raised with the European Economic Community in Brussels recently; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs informed the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on 22 February of the industry's serious concern about these imports. I have previously indicated to my hon. Friend that there was an overriding need to agree textile restraint arrangements with Turkey. Nevertheless, I have ensured that our growing concern at the import levels for acrylic yarn is made clear to our Community partners and the Commission. They have been told of the mounting evidence of damage from Turkish imports to United Kingdom acrylic yarn producers who have been forced to introduce extensive short-time working. I shall continue to monitor the domestic situation closely. If sufficient justification for seeking action from the Commission emerges, I shall act accordingly.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Pension Funds

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans for the conversion of the pension funds of academic and technical officers in former British dependencies into pay-as-you-go schemes.

Mr. Chris Patten: Four Indian family pension funds were converted into "pay-as-you-go" schemes in 1985. Nine colonial widows' and orphans' pension funds — Botswana, Ghana, Lesotho, Malaysia (Sabah), Malaysia (Sarawak), Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Swaziland and Zambia — were converted in 1986. Three others — Guyana, Kenya (European Officers) and Kenya (Asian Officers)—will be converted once the apportionment of assets to be vested under the British Government's control has been agreed with overseas Governments concerned. The overseas superannuation scheme and the overseas service pensions scheme and fund are also scheduled for conversion in due course. None of these funds and schemes are exclusively confined to academic and technical officers.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the last audit was done on the pension funds of academic and technical officers in former British dependencies; and when the next one will take place.

Mr. Chris Patten: Funds under the control of the Overseas Development Administration are audited annually. We do not have comprehensive information on funds administered by other Governments.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken to ensure that all those entitled to benefit from the pension funds of academic and technical officers in former British dependencies are in receipt of those entitlements.

Mr. Chris Patten: The primary responsibility for ensuring that any entitlements are put into payment rests with the beneficiary concerned. However, the Overseas Development Administration is also attempting to establish the present whereabouts of several thousand former contributors and contingent beneficiaries, the great majority of whom served on short-term contracts in the former British dependencies and who, for one reason or another, have lost contact with the schemes. In addition, upon receipt of notification of the death of an officer, the ODA checks whether any widow's or dependants entitlement exists under the funds and schemes under its control.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the pension funds for British academic and technical officers in former overseas dependencies run by the Overseas Development Administration are indexed; how this has been applied; and from what date the indexation began.

Mr. Chris Patten: The pension funds and schemes administered by the Overseas Development Administration are not themselves index-linked, but all expatriate officers' individual pensions awarded under those schemes are elegible for an index-linked pension supplement under United Kingdom pension increase legislation. The date from which pensioners have the benefit of indexation varies with their individual circumstances.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many pension funds for British academic and technical officers in former overseas dependencies are run by the Overseas Development Administration; and if he will list them.

Mr. Chris Patten: Forty-eight widows' and orphans' pension schemes and funds are administered by the Overseas Development Administration. Details are as follows:

Colonial and other Widows' and Orphans' Pension Schemes Administered by the Overseas Development Administration

Aden Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1967.
Barbados Public Officers' Widows' and Childrens' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1985
Barbados Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1985.
Belize Public Officers' Widows' and Childrens' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1982.
Belize Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1982
[14] Joint (Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland) Public Officers' Widows and Orphans' Pensions (Defunded) (UK) Scheme 1986.
Cyprus Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1979.
East African Community (East African Scheme) Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1979.
East African Community (Railways and Harbours Corporation) Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1979.
Fiji Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1975.
The Gambia Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1974.
[1] Ghana Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (Defunded) (UK) Scheme 1986.
[2] Guyana Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions Fund (UK) Scheme 1978.
Jamaica Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1976.
[13][4] India Family Pensions (Transferred) (UK) Scheme 1985.
[2] Kenya Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1977.
[2] Kenya Asian Public Officers' Family Pension Fund (UK) Scheme 1977.
Kenya Asiatic Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pension Fund (UK) Scheme 1977.
Malawi Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1975.
Malaysia (Peninsular Malaysia) Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1979.
[1] Malaysia (Sabah) Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (Defunded) (UK) Scheme 1986.
[1] Malaysia (Sarawak) Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (Defunded) (UK) Scheme 1986.
Malta Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1976.
Mauritius Public Officers' Widows' and Childrens' Pension (UK) Scheme 1975.
Mauritius Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1985.
Nigeria Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1979.
Seychelles Public Officers' Widows' and Childrens' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1976.
[1] Seychelles Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (Defunded) (UK) Scheme 1986.
[1] Sierra Leone Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (Defunded) (UK) Scheme 1986.
Singapore Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1977.
Sri Lanka Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1979.
Sudan Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1973.

Tanzania (Tanganyika) Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1976.
Tanzania (Zanzibar) Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1976.
Tanzania (Zanzibar Asiatic Officers) Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1976.
Trinidad and Tobago Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1986.
Uganda (European Officers) Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1985.
Uganda (Asian Officers) Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1985.
Zambia Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (UK) Scheme 1985.
[1] Zambia Public Officers' Widows' and Orphans' Pensions (Defunded) (UK) Scheme 1986.
Zambia Transferred Federal Officers' (Dependents) Pensions (UK) Scheme 1985.
[2] Overseas Superannuation Scheme.
[2] Overseas Service Pension Scheme.

[1] Formerly funded schemes converted to "pay-as-you-go" schemes.
[2] Funds scheduled for conversion.
[3] The Indian family pensions scheme comprises the following defunded schemes:
Indian Civil Service Family Pension Fund (Transferred)
Indian Military Service Family Pension Fund (Transferred)
Indian Military Widows' and Orphans' Fund (Transferred)
Superior Services (India) Family Pension Fund (Transferred)
[4] The total of 48 includes the Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland schemes and the Indian family pension funds counted separately.

Public Officers

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the criteria used by his Department for assessing whether or not those working in former British dependencies prior to independence were public officers.

Mr. Chris Patten: The term "public officer" does not identify a single group of officers who worked in the former British dependencies. In broad terms, it covers those who worked in a territory's central Government service. But each country's law and administrative procedures have their own variations and exceptions: an assessment of whether an individual was a public officer for any particular purpose can only be made in context.

Non-administrative Officers (Compensation)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many non-administrative officers in former British dependencies received lump sum compensation on independence; and what criteria were used in assessing who received such compensation.

Mr. Chris Patten: No central record exists of the occupational status of the tens of thousands of overseas officers whose pensions are the responsibility of the British Government, or of whether they received compensation for loss of career. The information could be compiled only at disproportionate cost. The criteria for determining eligibility for compensation, which varied from territory to territory, were set out in each country's schemes.

Cyprus

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 9 February, *Official Report*, column *125*, why it is not possible except at disproportionate cost to state *(a)* how much money given by Her Majesty's Government was applied for training and scholarships for (i) Greek Cypriots and (ii) Turkish Cypriots in the last three financial years and *(b)* how many (i) Greek Cypriots and (ii) Turkish Cypriots received training or scholarships funded wholly or partly by Her Majesty's Government in the last three financial years.

Mr. Chris Patten: Within the technical assistance training programme expenditure on training and scholarships for the period in question is not recorded separately in terms of whether the recipients are from the Greek or Turkish parts of the island. The costs are attributed to the country as a whole as expenditure is incurred. To determine the sums expended by community would require examination of all the files of those who received awards in the three years concerned.

Following my earlier reply, arrangements are being made to ensure that in future both numbers of recipients and sums expended from aid funds on each community are recorded.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Nursery Education

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many three and four-year-old children in each local education authority area in England are in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time nursery education in private nursery schools; and what percentage of the estimated three and four-year-old population in each local education authority area this represents for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dunn: This information is not collected centrally.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many three and four-year-old children in each local education authority in England are in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time nursery education, in nursery schools and nursery classes of primary schools, excluding any children in reception classes in primary schools and any children in private schools; what percentage of the estimated three and four-year-old population in each local education authority area this represents; and what is the average hourly attendance, per week, of these children in (i) full-time and (ii) part-time nursery education, for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dunn: The information requested on the numbers and percentages of children in maintained nursery education in January 1987 is given in the table. Information on the average hourly attendance of these pupils is not collected centrally.

Full-time and part-time pupils aged three and four in nursery schools and classes—January 1987

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Percentage*[2]
Barking	95	861	24·5
Barnet	148	1,706	24·7

	Full-time	Part-time	Percentage[2]
Bexley	24	578	11·6
Brent	355	1,781	30·1
Bromley	0	122	1·9
Croydon	90	507	7·0
Ealing	19	2,310	28·4
Enfield	0	1,383	21·0
Haringey	419	1,427	32·4
Harrow	0	789	16·1
Havering	1	225	4·4
Hillingdon	3	2,592	43·3
Hounslow	1,317	2,294	64·5
Kingston upon Thames	71	777	27·4
Merton	48	1,321	32·6
Newham	136	3,404	51·3
Redbridge	21	426	8·4
Richmond upon Thames	13	503	14·3
Sutton	0	665	15·8
Waltham Forest	148	2,050	36·6
Inner London	8,070	11,833	33·7
Birmingham	2,722	5,114	27·2
Coventry	190	1,449	19·7
Dudley	151	1,989	28·9
Sandwell	363	2,595	37·0
Solihull	0	1,330	30·2
Walsall	161	3,026	48·3
Wolverhampton	0	3,432	52·0
Knowsley	17	1,551	30·2
Liverpool	1,011	3,892	40·2
St. Helens	6	1,184	25·3
Sefton	63	1,537	23·2
Wirral	32	1,435	17·1
Bolton	531	1,701	30·2
Bury	203	510	15·8
Manchester	3,906	2,269	50·2
Oldham	703	1,226	30·6
Rochdale	182	1,500	27·6
Salford	1,920	724	44·1
Stockport	229	670	12·5
Tameside	97	1,706	32·2
Trafford	8	593	11·3
Wigan	25	1,828	22·6
Barnsley	41	2,499	44·6
Doncaster	62	3,004	39·3
Rotherham	380	2,241	38·5
Sheffield	585	3,739	37·6
Bradford	461	3,933	30·3
Calderdale	493	798	25·8
Kirklees	10	3,627	35·0
Leeds	420	4,709	29·5
Wakefield	118	3,300	42·2
Gateshead	48	1,354	28·6
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1,191	1,259	36·6
North Tyneside	111	1,937	45·5
South Tyneside	77	1,477	43·2
Sunderland	145	2,677	33·2
Avon	1,502	1,399	13·0
Bedfordshire	683	3,619	28·3
Berkshire	261	4,438	23·9
Buckinghamshire	0	2,095	12·8
Cambridgeshire	202	1,684	11·5
Cheshire	114	3,741	16·3
Cleveland	13	7,200	45·4
Cornwall[3]	41	1,246	13·4
Cumbria	154	1,784	16·8
Derbyshire	856	4,610	24·3
Devon	245	1,700	9·0
Dorset	0	739	6·0
Durham	324	4,674	33·3
East Sussex	7	940	6·9
Essex	193	1,864	5·5
Gloucestershire[1]	0	0	0·0
Hampshire	16	1,706	4·5
Hereford and Worcester	150	753	5·6
Hertfordshire	178	7,213	30·0
Humberside	1,015	5,351	29·9
Isle of Wight	15	88	4·3
Kent	5	1,792	4·9
Lancashire	174	4,638	13·4
Leicestershire	1,493	3,483	21·4
Lincolnshire	151	768	6·9
Norfolk	5	825	5·2
North Yorkshire	275	2,171	15·9
Northamptonshire	380	1,943	15·9
Northumberland	133	1,373	20·1
Nottinghamshire	370	9,942	42·4
Oxfordshire	164	1,568	12·4
Shropshire	2	1,095	11·3
Somerset	47	25	0·7
Staffordshire	2,430	3,177	21·3
Suffolk	16	1,999	13·4
Surrey	83	2,437	11·3
Warwickshire	28	1,689	14·8
West Sussex	25	478	3·4
Wiltshire	2	201	1·4
ENGLAND	39,392	211,737	21·3

[1] This authority has no nursery schools or classes.
[2] Total number of three and four year old children in nursery schools and classes as a percentage of the estimated three and four year old population.
[3] Includes Isles of Scilly.

Education Reform

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out, in respect of each inner London borough council *(a)* the actual number of staff transferring to it on 1 April 1986 as a result of the abolition of the Greater London council and *(b)* his estimate of the number of staff to be transferred to it at 1 April 1990 as a result of the abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn *[holding answer 18 February 1988]:* Some 100,000 staff were transferred from the Greater London council to successor authorities by the main statutory order. Of these, the majority transferred to the joint authorities and the Inner London education authority, and separate figures by boroughs are not available. My right hon. Friend has said that we expect block transfer arrangements to cover well over 80 per cent. of ILEA staff, that is over 56,000 full-time equivalent staff.

WALES

Prescription Charges

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of National Health Service prescriptions issued per year in Wales in respect of single-course treatments for which more than one prescription charge was levied; and what are the revenues accruing.

Mr. Grist: This information is not available.

It is not possible to identify from information given on prescription forms whether the items being prescribed are for a single course of treatment or otherwise.

Felinheli (Port Dinorwic) Bypass

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he now anticipates building of the Felinheli (Port Dinorwic) bypass in Gwynedd will begin; and when he proposes to go out to tender with regard to this scheme.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Felinheli (Port Dinorwic) bypass is programmed to start in the period January 1988-December 1990, as set out in "Roads in Wales 1985". Invitation of tenders will depend on the satisfactory completion of statutory procedures and the availability of financial resources.

Eye Test and Dental Examinations

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* eye tests and *(b)* dental examinations took place in Wales in each of the years 1980 to 1986 by area health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist *[pursuant to his reply, 30 November 1987, c. 405-8]:* I regret that the last line of the table—namely, that part which related to dental examinations by the general dental service—contained errors. The following table provides the amended information:

Eye tests by hospital opticians[1]

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Clwyd	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Dyfed	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Pembrokeshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gwent	—	—	—	—	—	—	119
Gwynedd	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	215	86	77	152	41	90	51
Powys	28	64	49	36	27	36	39
South Glamorgan	12	36	44	27	50	32	46
West Glamorgan	118	22	200	620	331	517	518
Wales	373	208	370	835	449	675	773

[1] First attendance as an out-patient.

Dental inspections by the community dental service[1]

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	[2]*1986-87*
Clwyd	47,687	59,584	64,030	54,259	48,045	44,667	43,357
East Dyfed	54,967	54,959	33,601	34,839	32,901	31,915	38,494
Pembrokeshire			16,091	15,508	17,406	19,861	17,269
Gwent	68,063	66,385	60,562	77,991	60,344	65,431	56,609
Gwynedd	16,941	11,349	12,082	12,426	20,266	21,799	19,125
Mid Glamorgan	90,742	99,859	92,070	84,760	86,396	77,365	72,369
Powys	17,987	22,071	16,708	20,275	18,423	19,200	22,109
South Glamorgan	44,056	44,694	45,205	45,128	41,555	43,383	41,768
West Glamorgan	42,303	42,276	43,036	40,971	45,486	49,366	53,157
Wales	382,746	401,177	383,385	386,157	370,822	372,987	364,157

[1] Includes first and subsequent inspections.
[2] Financial year 1986-87.

Hospital Out-patients (dental)[1]

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Clwyd	2,987	3,027	2,941	2,897	2,635	3,180	3,573
East Dyfed	996	937	1,036	1,642	1,461	1,715	1,933
Pembrokeshire	356	908	687	670	641	725	768
Gwent	2,072	2,258	2,717	3,210	3,103	3,237	3,154
Gwynedd	1,506	1,452	1,455	1,451	1,567	1,812	1,364
Mid Glamorgan	1,357	1,506	1,686	2,573	2,878	2,845	2,303
Powys	—	—	—	129	191	178	227
South Glamorgan	22,451	21,906	18,413	18,383	19,878	21,980	20,927
West Glamorgan	4,352	3,884	4,317	4,848	5,033	4,887	4,114
Wales	36,077	35,878	33,252	35,803	37,387	40,559	38,363

[1] First visit as an out-patient (dental surgery and orthodontics).

(thousands)

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Eye tests by the General Ophthalmic Service in Wales	576	489	499	519	561	597	623
Dental examinations by the General Dental Service in Wales	1,458	1,467	1,542	1,580	1,637	1,665	[1]1,751

[1] Financial year 1986-87

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Attorney-General whether the review of the Government's legal service will examine and make recommendations on all aspects of the management of legal staff of the Crown prosecution service and the office of the procurator fiscal.

The Attorney-General: The terms of reference of this review are to consider:

1. what legal services are needed by the Government;
2. how those services can most effectively and economically be provided and organised, taking account of the Government's policies of privatisation and of contracting out;
3. what changes are needed in the management of legal staff in Government service, including their recruitment, retention, training, deployment and remuneration, so as to make best use of them;

and to make recommendations.

The review will therefore cover the work of the Crown prosecution service and , I understand, the office of the Procurator Fiscal. However, it is unlikely to look in detail at the structure and organisation of the Crown prosecution service because the department is so new.

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Attorney-General whether he is satisfied with the workings of the Crown prosecution service; and whether he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Crown prosecution service has now been in existence for almost 18 months throughout England and Wales, and slightly longer in the old Metropolitan local authority areas. It has had a difficult time, principally because it has not yet been able to recruit all the lawyers needed, and this has placed great strains on its staff, who have had to work long and hard to cope with these shortages. I am more than satisfied with their work.

There has also been a considerable amount of criticism of the service's work. Some of it has been well founded; more of it has not, deriving from shortcomings for which the service itself was not responsible. Despite its problems the Crown prosecution service is fulfilling the tasks set for it; there is now a prosecution service in every area of the country, national policies on prosecutions have been developed and implemented, and there is increasing evidence of an improvment in the quality of cases coming before the courts. The Director of Public Prosecutions has decide on a management strategy for the future of the service which will build on these achievements.

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Attorney-General what changes have taken place in the remuneration of the staff of the Crown prosecution service since their salaries were debated in the House on 11 December 1985, *Official Report* columns 1009-24.

The Attorney-General: In addition to the 1986 and 1987 Civil Service pay awards the following changes have been made to the pay of staff employed within the Crown prosecution service:

1. An allowance payable to Crown prosecutors and senior Crown prosecutors working within the London, Surrey, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Essex, Kent and Thames Valley areas of the Crown prosecution service. This allowance is also payable to grade 6 lawyers working within the London, Surrey, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire areas.

2. An additional allowance is payable to Crown prosecutors and senior Crown prosecutors who cover some weekend or bank holiday court sittings.

3. Following the transfer of staff from local authorities to the Civil Service a number of pay anomalies were identified. The great majority of these have been resolved and this has involved the payment of additional salary to some 500 staff.

4. An additional increment has been added to the salary scale maxima of those staff at grades 4 to 7. This increment will be awarded to those officers whose performance meets the criteria for payment of a performance point.

The following table indicates the salary scale minima and maxima of staff employed in the grades shown within the service, as they were at April 1985 and as they are now.

Salary scales
Minimum and maximum

Grade	*As at April 1986*	*As at January 1988*
5 Chief Crown Prosecutor (Mainly)	20,964–25,533	[1]24,765–29,465
6 Branch Crown Prosecutor (Mainly)	17,000–22,926	[1]18,786–26,335
7 Equivalent to Senior Crown Prosecutor	13,508–18,363	[1]15,030–21,092
Crown Prosecutor	10,500–15,000	11,603–16,576
Senior Executive Officer	10,980–13,801	12,225–15,779
Higher Executive Officer	8,896–11,265	9,985–12,878
Executive Officer	4,953–8,917	5,870–10,292
Clerical Officer	3,149–6,293	3,664–7,247
Clerical Assistant	2,898–5,054	3,314–5,799
Senior Personal Secretary	6,088–7,797	8,400–10,150
Personal Secretary	5,322–6,607	6,607–7,846
Typing Manager	7,600–8,800	8,400–10,100
Typist	4,400–5,720	4,964–6,363

[1] Includes additional increment payable under the performance pay scheme.

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Attorney-General how many officers have been seconded from outside London to London in each quarter since the Crown prosecution service was set up; what was the extra cost of such secondments, and what is the present shortfall of staff *(a)* generally and *(b)* in the London area.

The Attorney-General: The number of officers seconded from outside London to the three London areas since the Crown prosecution service became fully operational on 1 October 1986 was as follows:

126 in the quarter ended 31 December 1986;
160 in the quarter ended 31 March 1987;
132 in the quarter ended 30 June 1987;
33 in the quarter ended 30 September 1987;
26 in the quarter ended 31 December 1987.

The extra cost of such secondments was approximately £630,000.

As at 30 January 1988 the Crown prosecution service had vacancies for 718·5 staff. Of these 253 were within the London area.

Commonhold

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Attorney-General what is his response to the recommendations of the working group of the Law Commission on commonhold (Cm. 179); and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The working group report Cm. 179, to which my hon. Friend refers, was published in July

last. It makes far-reaching recommendations. A decision on implementation will be taken when these have been fully considered.

CIVIL SERVICE

Government Offices (Smoking)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will give details of arrangements for designated non-smoking areas in Government buildings.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 25 February 1988]:* This information is not held centrally. It is for each Government Department to determine arrangements for non-smoking areas in its buildings taking account of local circumstances.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make it his policy to ban smoking in all Government offices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 25 February 1988]:* It is for individual Government Departments to decide what measures to take to restrict smoking in their offices. I encourage Departments to take whatever steps are practicable to achieve this and have asked Departments to give every encouragement to local managers to conduct surveys of the attitudes of their staff with a view to extending non-smoking areas in offices.

In my own Department, management, staff and trade unions are co-operating in a trial ban on smoking at the workplace. I will pass on the lessons from this exercise to other Government Departments.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Out-patient Waiting Times

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to publish details of out-patient waiting times on a district by district basis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Information on out-patients waiting times is not at present collected centrally.

Cervical Cancer

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average waiting time nationally for the results of cervical cancer smear tests; and what is the average waiting time for women in north Staffordshire.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that this information is not held centrally in the form requested. According to Health Circular HC(88)1, published on 12 January, the target for laboratories is that they should aim to send the result of a cervical smear to the doctor who submitted it within a maximum of one month of receiving it. Health authorities in England reported that in December laboratories serving 56 out of 191 districts were not achieving this target. The average processing time for these 56 districts was seven weeks. Where backlogs do exist they are being tackled mainly by the recruitment and training of more staff, by the use of other laboratories and by overtime working.

The average processing time in North Staffordshire districrt health authority in the same period was eight weeks.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing the waiting list figures by specialty in the Leicestershire health authority as at 31 March for each year from 1981 to 1987.

Mr. Newton: The requested information is given in the table.

Number of patients on in-patient waiting list at 31 March, 1981 to 1987, for Leicestershire District Authority.

Specialty	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
General medicine	10	4	3	3	15	3	6
Neurology	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
Cardiology	165	250	298	230	172	225	183
Rheumatology	0	0	0	6	15	0	4
Geriatrics	87	67	51	70	65	61	10
Units for younger disabled	6	11	15	12	11	16	0
General surgery	1,232	894	983	668	912	1,172	928
Ear, nose and throat	759	870	852	887	1,208	1,371	1,553
Traumatic and orthopaedic	2,113	2,112	1,969	1,596	1,391	1,226	1,340
Ophthalmology	621	442	465	492	515	573	727
Radiotherapy	34	59	47	71	82	106	14
Urology	147	113	377	358	331	396	452
Plastic surgery	602	500	555	436	553	818	1,091
Thoracic surgery	154	173	246	282	358	307	446
Oral surgery	127	225	374	373	557	482	260
Gynaecology	815	836	603	655	1,040	1,124	1,151
Mental handicap	49	42	37	37	33	0	0
Mental illness	17	0	4	2	0	7	15
G.P. other	3	3	1	1	4	4	9
Psychogeriatric	41	70	86	59	57	61	68
Forensic Psychiatry	0	0	0	0	11	10	10
Total	6,982	6,671	6,966	6,238	7,330	7,962	8,278

Specialty	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
of which percentage waiting over a year	25·6	25·1	21·2	19·6	14·8	14·2	[1]13·6

[1] Value imputed as numbers waiting over a year not available for Trent region.

Cancer Screening

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cervical cancer screening laboratories there are in Great Britain; what is the ratio of adult women to laboratories; what are the levels of staffing per laboratory; and how much funding each laboratory receives.

Mrs. Currie: In 1986 in England there were 196 NHS laboratories. The number of women aged 20 to 64 (the eligible age group for routine screening within the computerised call and recall system) was 13·69 million, a ratio of 69,871 women to each laboratory. If they were all screened every five years, this would generate an average of 13,974 smears a year for each laboratory. On average in 1986 the number of cervical smears screened per laboratory was 18,923 and the average number of staff was 4·4*. Information on funding is not available centrally.

* *Source:* DHSS form SBH 140.

NHS (Management)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce an integrated National Health Service management system based on the United States of America model of Provider Review Organisations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: As my hon. Friend will be aware, the Government are undertaking a wide-ranging, internal review of the National Health Service. At this stage we are not ruling out any proposals for reform.

Crewe District Health Authority

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will tabulate by specialty the number of cases dealt with by the Crewe district health authority for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad) on 17 December 1987 at column *715*.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will tabulate by specialty the waiting list figures in the Crewe health authority as at 31 March in each year since 1981.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is given in the table.

The number of patient on the in-patients waiting list in Crewe District Health Authority by specialty as at 31 March 1981-87

Specialty	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
General medicine	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Dermatology	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Geriatrics	3	3	0	1	7	0	0
General surgery	2,186	2,366	2,499	2,169	2,343	1,681	915
Ear, nose and throat	521	702	747	675	736	654	195
Traumatic and orthopaedic	160	222	290	198	361	330	335
Ophthalmology	140	182	151	161	153	202	219
Urology	308	325	505	471	689	682	665
Oral surgery	183	219	297	353	405	362	356
Gynaecology	592	653	698	644	754	766	824
Mental handicap	16	15	15	15	15	15	0
Psychogeriatric	0	0	0	4	4	0	0
Total	4,109	4,687	5,202	4,691	5,467	4,695	3,512
of which percentage waiting over a year	37·5	43·4	42·6	42·6	44·2	44·7	37·6

Single Payments

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services for how long supplementary benefit single payments were made in the United Kingdom; what was the cost thereof for 1983-84, 1984-85, 1985-86 and 1986-87; and what are the latest figures for 1987-88.

Mr. Portillo: Regulated single payments have been made since November 1980. The information requested on expenditure is given below:

	£ million
1983-84	183
1984-85	266
1985-86	368
1986-87	365
1987-88[1]	166

[1] 8 April 1987 to 12 Janary 1988.

Note: Information for 1986-87 and 1987-88 is provisional.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each local office in Great Britain the single payment expenditure for the 32 weeks ended on 7 April 1987 and for the corresponding period in 1985-86 and 1984-85, and the supplementary benefit case load for each in the same period.

Mr. Portillo: The single payment expenditure by each of the Department's local offices in Great Britain for the 32 weeks ended on 7 April 1987 is available in the table "Supplementary Benefit Single Payment Expenditure, 27 August 1986 to 7 April 1987".

The number of people receiving supplementary benefit, by local office, on 10 February 1987 is available in the table, "Analysis of Supplementary Benefit Claimants as at 10 February and 28 July 1987".

Copies of each of the tables are in the Library.

Similar information for the corresponding periods in 1984-85 and 1985-86 is not available in the form requested and would be disproportionately costly to obtain.

Church Hill House Hospital

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he is taking to transfer mentally handicapped patients from the Church Hill House hospital, Bracknell, to community care settings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: It is for the health authority and the local authority to co-operate to provide a comprehensive range of co-ordinated health and social services for mentally handicapped people and their families. The total number of residents at Church Hill House is expected to fall from 220 in April 1987 to 165 by April 1990. Community provision is expected to increase by 75 long-term beds and 29 short-term care beds. The East Berkshire health authority has also made significant progress in the provision of four community teams and a range of day care in co-operation with social services to ensure that people in the community are adequately supported. A decision about the remaining residents and the long-term future of the hospital will be taken in the light of the success in developing new services.

Health Centres

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy to encourage general practitioners to purchase health centres from health authorities.

Mr. Newton: We already provide financial incentives to general practitioners to purchase health centres offered for sale by health authorities.

Sickness and Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total number of people claiming sickness and invalidity benefit at the present time; and what was the number of people claiming sickness and invalidity benefit in February 1987.

Mr. Portillo: The total number of people claiming sickness and invalidity benefit as at 9 February 1988 was 1,298,000, and at 10 February 1987 was 1,297,000 (figures rounded to the nearest thousand).

Drugs (Costs)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy to encourage dispensing chemists to issue a receipt for each dispensed prescription showing the cost of the drugs dispensed.

Mr. Newton: We have no plans to do so.

South-East Thames Regional Health Authority

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the estimated population for each of the last 10 years for the South-East Thames regional health authority area and each of its constituent district health authority areas; and what estimates are available for the future.

Mrs. Currie: The latest available information is given in the table. Population projections based upon the mid 1985 estimates have been produced for each year up to 2010. The projected figures for a selection of years are given in the table.

Persons (thousands)

Health Authority	*Estimated Resident Population at Mid Year 1977*	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*
(a) Actual					
South East Thames RHA	3,601	3,585	3,580	3,587	3,589
Brighton DHA	302	300	299	298	298
Eastbourne DHA	205	208	210	212	213
Hastings DHA	151	151	152	153	154
South East Kent DHA	252	253	253	255	256
Canterbury and Thanet DHA	284	285	287	291	293
Dartford and Gravesham DHA	221	222	224	225	224
Maidstone DHA	185	186	187	189	190
Medway	315	316	318	320	322
Tunbridge Wells DHA	200	200	199	199	200
Bexley DHA	217	217	216	217	217
Greenwich DHA	214	213	214	216	216
Bromley DHA	299	299	298	298	299
West Lambeth DHA	184	176	170	166	163
Camberwell DHA	233	227	224	222	222
Lewisham and North Southwark DHA	339	333	329	326	323

Health Authority	*Estimated Resident Population at Mid Year 1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
South East Thames RHA	3,585	3,586	3,595	3,602	3,619
Brighton DHA	299	300	299	297	298
Eastbourne DHA	216	218	221	224	228
Hastings DHA	155	157	159	162	164
South East Kent DHA	257	257	260	262	264
Canterbury and Thanet DHA	295	294	296	300	301
Dartford and Gravesham DHA	224	223	223	221	221
Maidstone DHA	191	192	194	194	196
Medway	322	322	321	322	324
Tunbridge Wells DHA	199	198	198	196	196
Bexley DHA	218	218	218	219	220
Greenwich DHA	216	216	216	216	218
Bromley DHA	298	299	298	298	297
West Lambeth DHA	159	158	157	163	164
Camberwell DHA	216	214	216	212	212
Lewisham and North Southwark DHA	321	320	319	317	317

	1991	*1996*	*2001*
(b) Projected (1985-Based)			
South East Thames RHA	3,685	3,758	3,822
Brighton DHA	298	301	304
Eastbourne DHA	236	245	252

	1991	1996	2001
Hastings DHA	171	178	184
South East Kent DHA	273	283	292
Canterbury and Thanet DHA	312	320	327
Dartford and Gravesham DHA	221	222	222
Maidstone DHA	201	207	212
Medway	333	341	348
Tunbridge Wells DHA	194	194	194
Bexley DHA	218	220	222
Greenwich DHA	221	227	233
Bromley DHA	300	304	310
West Lambeth DHA	165	165	163
Camberwell	217	220	223
Lewisham and North Southwark DHA	326	331	335

Repetitive Strain Injury

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to ensure the compiling of statistics to indicate the scale of repetitive strain injury problems in Britain.

Mrs. Currie: I regret we cannot do so as such problems are mostly treated by general practitioners. The cost of compiling comprehensive statistics on the wide range of conditions treated by general practitioners would greatly exceed the benefits obtained from the information.

Free School Milk and Meals

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services which pupils will be entitled to free school milk and free school lunches following the social securiy changes which come into force in April.

Mr. Portillo: Pupils in families who receive income support will be entitled to free school meals on the same basis as those in families who currently receive supplementary benefit. Milk may be provided as part of the meal. In the new family credit scheme, the child credits include an extra £2.55 a week, in each week of the year, in place of free school meals. It is estimated that around 100,000 more school-age children will benefit under the family credit scheme compared to those who currently receive free school meals under the family income supplement and local authorities' discretionary schemes combined.

Mr. E. A. Kerrod

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services why the appeal against a reduction in the amount of his reduced earning allowance by Mr. E. A. Kerrod, of 49 New road, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, which was submitted to the clerk to the social security appeal tribunal in Cardiff on 26 October 1987, has still not been heard; how many other cases await decision by the tribunal; what is the average and longest period that an appeal is outstanding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I understand that Mr. Kerrod's appeal has been listed for hearing on 9 March 1988.

In Wales, for the quarter ending 6 June 1987, (the latest available figures) there were 10,767 appeals awaiting to be heard and the average length of time from lodgement to hearing was 18.4 weeks. Individual figures are not available for appeals taking more than 21 weeks to clear; 25 per cent. of all social security appeals fall into this category.

The subject of delays in the hearing of social security appeals is of great concern both to me and to His Honour Judge Byrt, who, as the president of Social Security and Medical Appeal Tribunals, has the responsibility for administering the social security appeal tribunals in Great Britain.

Judge Byrt has written a statement which sets out the practical difficulties presently facing his organisation and the steps which he is taking to overcome them. A copy of this statement of 4 February 1988 has been placed in the Library.

Supplementary Benefit

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people are in receipt of the long-term rate of supplementary benefit for the latest date and for equivalent dates in the previous five years.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is contained in table 34.40 of "Social Security Statistics 1987", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Tobacco

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will seek to ban the sale of tobacco products for oral use; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The Department has written today to a number of companies that manufacture tobacco products for oral use, their representative organisations and other interested parties to inform them that, pursuant to section 11(5) of the Consumer Protection Act, the Government propose to make safety regulations under section 11 of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 to prohibit persons from supplying or from offering to supply, agreeing to supply, exposing for supply or possessing for supply, certain oral tobacco products. The Government are concerned that the use of such products is causally associated with an increased risk of oral cancer. Bodies whose interests are affected are asked to make representations on the Government's proposals by 26 May 1988. The products we are considering are fine cut, ground or particulate tobacco products prepared, sold or advertised for oral use other than smoking or chewing. This does not include traditional solid chewing tobacco, loose tobacco for making up into cigarettes or snuff for nasal use. We are primarily concerned with products used in the mouth, often in a moist form held between the cheek and the gum, which can give rise to cancer of the mouth.

Thalidomide

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what representations he has received regarding a constituent of the hon. Member for Solihull, Miss Nancy Hood, of Beechwood Park road in Solihull, and her need for the drug thalidomide; and what steps he will take to ensure its availability to her;

(2) if he will make a statement regarding the sources of availability of the drug thalidomide as a treatment for certain skin ailments.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 21 January 1988]:* No product licences under the Medicines Act for thalidomide tablets are held in the United Kingdom. Two sources of the unlicensed medicine are available: the West German

orginators who impose supply requirements which are not possible to comply with and a Brazilian manufacturer whose product is of unknown quality and related safety. The Department is willing to conduct tests in which the Brazilian product is compared with that produced by the originator. If Miss Hood's doctor is satisfied with the results of these tests he would be able to obtain a sufficient supply to treat her on his own responsibility in accordance with the provisions of sections 9(1) and 13(1) of the Medicines Act 1968 and the Medicines (Exemption from Licences) (Importation) Order 1984.

Health Services (Demand)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the most recently available estimates of the percentage changes in demand on the hospital and community health services due to demographic change for each year from 1972-73 to 1995-96; and if he will put in the Library details of the methods used to arrive at the estimates.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 18 February 1988]:* The estimates of growth in demographic demand on the hospital and community health services for the years 1972-73 to 1995-96 are as follows:

Year	*Per cent.*
1972-73	0·0
1973-74	−0·1
1974-75	0·0
1975-76	0·1
1976-77	0·2
1977-78	0·3
1978-79	1·0
1979-80	1·3
1980-81	1·1
1981-82	0·4
1982-83	0·4
1983-84	0·5
1984-85	0·6
1985-86	1·3
1986-87	1·0
1987-88	1·0
1988-89	1·0
1989-90	1·0
1990-91	0·9
1991-92	0·7
1992-93	0·5
1993-94	0·3
1994-95	0·3
1995-96	0·9

Details of the method used to arrive at the estimates are given in answer to question 2 of the Social Services Select Committee Report, Session 1986-87, "Public expenditure on the social services 1987" (HC413).

Estimates of increased demand on services from demographic change are expressed in expenditure terms but this does not imply that increased spending is the only way in which increased demand can be met.

Pharmaceuticals (Adverse Reactions)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services on how many occasions his Department or the Committee on Safety of Medicines has investigated allegations that a pharmaceutical company failed to report adverse reactions to one of its products; on what date each inquiry commenced; in each case whether or not the allegation was found to be generally justified; and when the allegations were justified, what action was taken.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* The Department is currently investigating allegations that two pharmaceutical companies failed to report known serious adverse reactions to the Committee on Safety Medicines. The investigations which began respectively in November 1986 and November 1987 are continuing. Because information on suspected under-reporting is held on files relating to specific products and containing full licensing information, a count of earlier possible instances cannot be made without disproportionate cost.

Busparone

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received about the prescribing of the drug Busparone; what his response has been; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 24 February 1988]:* I have received no representations about prescribing Busparone. This is a licensed medicinal product and doctors are free to prescribe it if they think it clinically appropriate for their patients. In common with all such products, Busparone will be subject to the special reporting arrangements of the Committee on Safety of Medicines in respect of suspected adverse drug reactions.

Health Authority Statistics

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list by London health authority the total available patient beds for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 2 February 1988]:* The available information is given in the table.

Number of available beds in each London District Health Authority for the years 1979 to 1986.

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
District Health Authority								
Barnet	2,840·7	2,799·6	2,771·3	2,748·1	2,670·4	2,550·9	2,444·8	2,324·0
Harrow	908·1	901·6	914·0	938·4	934·8	877·9	904·5	886·3
Hillingdon	1,627·5	1,479·6	1,528·4	1,525·7	1,498·9	1,405·9	1,378·2	1,329·1
Hounslow and Spelthorne[1]	..	..	..	1,548·1	1,497·3	1,446·9	1,381·7	1,356·3
Ealing	1,708·9	1,712·9	1,752·6	1,724·9	1,663·4	1,622·3	1,543·4	1,509·2
Brent	2,315·9	2,332·3	2,262·5	2,272·9	2,203·1	2,058·8	1,939·0	1,882·9
Paddington and North Kensington	1,364·7	1,275·8	1235·7	1,215·7	1,210·9	1,187·0	1,211·3	1,208·4
Riverside[2]							3,464·6	3,090·6

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	3,283·2	3,237·8	3,182·8	3,095·0	3,033·0	2,984·2	2,877·9	2,764·8
Hampstead[1]	..	..	..	1,963·4	1,918·5	1,893·7	1,874·6	1,818·3
Bloomsbury[1]	..	..	..	2,486·7	2,489·5	2,344·4	2,115·8	1,971·0
Islington[1]	..	..	..	1,176·9	1,104·8	1,018·4	916·6	865·8
City and Hackney[1]	..	..	..	1,887·2	1,883·9	1,852·8	1,754·2	1,685·8
Newham	940·6	923·5	936·4	886·5	845·4	877·2	879·8	876·1
Tower Hamlet[1]	..	..	..	1,433·2	1,396·4	1,363·3	1,354·7	1,289·6
Enfield	1,233·8	1,216·6	1,137·2	1,087·1	1,113·7	1,076·3	1,068·9	1,055·2
Haringey	1,235·8	1,122·3	1,142·6	1,156·6	1,108·8	1,027·9	986·4	1,071·9
Redbridge	1,654·8	1,655·0	1,650·4	1,632·6	1,644·3	1,630·2	1,616·9	1,552·8
Waltham Forest	3,310·7	3,317·9	3,244·8	3,050·5	2,841·9	2,667·4	2,508·0	2,406·6
Bexley	1,653·2	1,666·9	1,635·1	1,584·8	1,542·5	1,468·4	1,435·3	1,386·3
Greenwich	1,776·9	1,666·1	1,623·0	1,598·4	1,611·1	1,585·8	1,516·6	1,333·6
Bromley	2,590·8	2,490·6	2,466·4	2,376·6	2,295·6	2,116·2	1,988·9	1,887·0
West Lambeth[1]	..	..	..	2,100·2	2,119·4	2,065·8	1,992·8	1,887·1
Camberwell	1,432·3	1,366·4	1,332·3	1,289·3	1,279·1	1,232·4	1,263·7	1,231·7
Lewisham and North Southwark	2,335·5	2,257·1	2207·5	2,184·7	2,194·3	2,058·0	2,047·7	1,909·5
Croydon	3,191·8	3,089·0	3,006·0	2,928·9	2,860·4	2,728·2	2,637·3	2,396·5
Kingston and Esher[1]	..	..	..	1,563·7	1,517·0	1,456·9	1,416·2	1,377·6
Richmond, Twickenham and Rochampton[1]	..	..	..	978·5	970·0	916·1	867·7	859·5
Wandsworth	2,870·9	2,688·8	2,543·4	2,475·7	2,493·8	2,533·8	2,337·5	2,234·3
Merton and Sutton	2,687·1	2,609·6	2,509·7	2,495·4	2,477·0	2,389·8	2,332·4	2,235·0
The Hospitals for Sick Children	517·4	506·0	543·8	494·4	473·7	418·3	409·8	402·2
The National Hospitals for Nervous Diseases	356·5	355·4	344·6	355·7	350·8	341·1	348·7	337·9
Moorfields Eye Hospital	207·7	203·9	204·1	207·8	210·1	181·1	163·1	151·7
Bethlea Royal and Maudsley Hospitals	471·9	492·0	496·7	500·8	497·6	505·9	504·2	511·3
The National Heart and Chest Hospitals	602·9	570·3	577·4	555·6	552·4	540·1	448·6	423·2
The Royal Marsden Hospital	360·7	360·6	350·1	340·2	342·6	332·6	343·7	354·2
Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's[1]	..	..	..	891·4	899·7	916·6	868·1	844·6
The Eastman Dental Hospital	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Total - GLC	43,480·3	42,297·6	41,598·8	56·751·6	55,746·1	53,672·6	55,143·6	52,707·9

[1] Comparable figures not readily available because of NHS restructuring on 1 April 1982.
[2] Comparable figures not available prior to 1985.

SCOTLAND

Education Budgets

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent by each regional authority in Scotland on repairs and maintenance of schools, expressing this as a percentage of each region's education budget in each of the past five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information available is given in the following table which has been compiled from local authority financial returns and budget estimates.

Expenditure on repairs and maintenance expressed as a percentage of the education budget.

Region	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Borders	1·96	2·15	2·49	1·84	2·29
Central	3·36	3·32	3·96	3·83	3·93
Dumfries and Galloway	2·89	3·60	3·94	3·13	3·93
Fife	4·42	4·42	4·13	3·95	4·00
Grampian	4·38	3·95	5·21	3·35	4·01
Highland	3·05	3·58	5·62	3·05	3·88
Lothian	3·81	4·64	4·13	4·20	5·10
Strathclyde	4·56	5·06	5·05	4·97	4·51
Tayside	3·91	4·37	3·97	3·61	3·96
Orkney	1·97	3·16	2·57	3·73	3·32
Shetland	3·96	3·58	3·39	3·42	3·60
Western Isles	3·41	4·85	2·73	2·92	2·66

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the percentage of each region's education budget spent on *(a)* teaching staff and *(b)* non-teaching staff in each of the past five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is given in the following tables:

Region, Islands	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87
(a) Expenditure on teaching staff as a percentage of total education spending					
Borders	57·0	57·9	56·3	58·0	59·6
Central	57·7	57·3	57·1	56·7	59·1
Dumfries and Galloway	57·7	57·5	57·1	58·8	59·8
Fife	56·3	57·6	55·9	57·5	59·9
Grampian	58·0	57·7	57·0	58·8	59·6
Highland	56·6	56·1	56·1	57·6	59·4
Lothian	57·6	56·7	57·9	55·6	55·4
Strathclyde	50·5	50·3	49·9	51·1	52·9
Tayside	57·5	56·6	56·2	56·7	58·3
Orkney	52·4	51·2	46·9	48·0	48·3
Shetland	47·6	48·3	48·1	47·8	50·6
Western Isles	53·3	50·0	52·0	51·1	3·9
(b) Expenditure on non-teaching staff as a percentage of total education spending					
Borders	12·7	12·9	12·9	13·4	12·8
Central	14·9	15·1	15·2	15·8	15·7
Dumfries and Galloway	13·8	13·6	14·1	14·2	13·7
Fife	15·6	16·1	15·9	16·8	16·4
Grampian	15·8	16·4	16·0	17·0	16·5
Highland	13·6	13·7	13·5	13·4	12·9
Lothian	19·7	19·8	20·0	19·4	18·5
Strathclyde	19·4	19·4	19·3	19·8	19·1
Tayside	15·3	15·6	16·0	16·1	16·4
Orkney	16·0	15·5	16·4	18·2	17·5
Shetland	17·0	17·2	17·5	18·5	18·9
Western Isles	12·5	13·8	14·8	15·1	15·2

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the amount spent per pupil on books and relevant education material, adjusted for inflation by each regional authority in Scotland in 1978-79, 1982-83 and 1986-87.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information available is given in the following table which has been compiled from local authority financial returns. Expenditure on equipment was not separately identified in these returns until 1982-83.

Expenditure per pupil on text and library books and educational tools, equipment and materials

£s at 1986-87 prices

Region	1978-79[1]	1982-83	1986-87
Borders	7·16	11·76	14·48
Central	7·53	29·89	32·41
Dumfries and Galloway	11·02	27·91	46·97
Fife	9·32	24·63	38·13
Grampian	8·80	31·68	35·25
Highland	22·86	43·79	43·32
Lothian	10·07	30·12	30·54
Strathclyde	13·11	29·92	31·60
Tayside	5·83	35·81	40·51
Orkney	4·76	37·93	40·51
Shetland	12·04	18·18	57·43
Western Isles	4·33	67·87	24·98

[1] Figures for 1978-79 relate only to expenditure on text and library books.

Hospitals (Competitive Tendering)

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all individuals and organisations he has met since June 1987 in order to discuss competitive tendering in hospital services, together with the date of those meetings.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: On 13 August 1987 I met Mr. Murray and Mr. Howell of the British Hostels, Restaurants and Caterers Association and Mr. Hall, Mr. Bisley and Mrs. McVee of the Contract Cleaning and Maintenance Association. On 15 September 1987 I had discussions with Mr. Rawlings, Mr. Colling and Mr. Slark of the Association of British Laundry, Cleaning and Rental Services. I have also discussed competitive tendering with health board chairmen. As a result of these exchanges I asked the Scottish Home and Health Department to arrange the seminar on competitive tendering held on 2 October 1987.

Mentally Ill People

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was *(a)* the number of admissions to mental health hospitals, *(b)* this figure expressed as a rate for the health board catchment population and *(c)* the amount spent on community care projects for mentally ill people, for each health board and for each year from 1980 to 1987.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The requested information on admissions to mental illness and mental handicap hospitals is published annually in "Scottish Health Statistics", copies of which are available in the Library. The latest year for which information is available is 1985. Information on the costs of community care projects is not held centrally.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Spandau Prison

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to complete negotiations on the future of the site of Spandau prison, Berlin; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: In accordance with a prior agreement, the site is now under British control.

Malaysia

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met representatives of the Malaysian Government; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend met the Malaysian high commissioner on 17 January when they discussed a number of bilateral and regional matters.

Guatemala

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Guatemala.

Mr. Eggar: We have normal diplomatic relations with Guatemala, whose return to democracy in late 1985 we warmly welcomed.

Mr. Vassiliou

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has sent a message to Mr. Vassiliou on his election victory in Cyprus.

Mrs. Chalker: No. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister sent a message of congratulations to Mr. Vassiliou immediately after his election. The message was delivered to him on 23 February.

Mr. J. A. Smith

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received from the British high commissioner in Harare in the case of Mr. J. A. Smith of 195 New Cheveley road, Newmarket, on whose behalf the Zimbabwe social welfare pensions office convened a medical board on 9 November 1987.

Mrs. Chalker: The Zimbabwe social welfare pensions office has informed our high commission in Harare that "their convening a medical board on 9 November 1987" means that Mr. Smith's medical papers have been sent to the DHSS asking for a British medical board to be convened on its behalf. This board is asked to assess the degree of Mr. Smith's disability and to determine whether or not the disability is in a final and stationary condition. The papers reached the appropriate DHSS section on 24 February where the request is under urgent consideration. Meanwhile, since Mr. Smith has already provided a private medical report to the Zimbabwe authorities, the high commission in Harare has asked the Zimbabwe social welfare pensions office whether a medical board in the United Kingdom is still necessary. As I said in my letter of 16 February to my hon. Friend, I will let him know when we have clarified the position.

PRIME MINISTER

Value Added Tax

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to her answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, column *821*, if, in the light of the decision of the European Court of Justice on 23 February on the zero rating of spectacles and hearing aids, it remains the policy of Her Majesty's Government that it will insist on the United Kingdom's rights to determine zero rating.

The Prime Minister: This particular European Court decision concerns the interpretation of the exemption provision of the EC sixth directive on value added tax, which was agreed by all member states, including the United Kingdom, in 1977, and is consequently binding. The Commission proposals advanced by Lord Cockfield are proposals only, and cannot be adopted without the unanimous agreement of all member states. We shall continue to insist on our right to retain zero rating.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Cannon Row Buildings

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans exist to convert the former Cannon row police station into parliamentary offices; when those plans are now likely to be put into effect; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: The Services Committee recomended that the building should be refurbished for short-term occupation pending redevelopment under phase II of the Bridge street development scheme. The proposed occupants are listed in the Committee's Second Report 1986-87, paragraph 5 (HC 378).

The report quoted a mid-1988 completion date, but I understand from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) that completion should not now be expected before spring 1989.

Rail Warrants

Mr. Speed: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the current annual cost of administering the rail warrant scheme for right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr. Wakeham: The information requested for the current year could not be obtained in the time available and, given that, even then only at disproportionate cost.

Comparative figures, as at 11 November 1986, for 11 member states of the Council of Europe at appendix F (pages 93-99) of "Volume 2: Surveys and Studies of the Review Body on Top Salaries 24th Report: Review of Parliamentary Allowances, April 1987" (Cm. 131-II).

Parliaments (Travel Concessions)

Mr. Speed: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list, on the information available to him, the public travel concessions available to members of the domestic parliaments of member states of the Council of Europe.

Mr. Wakeham: The current annual cost of administering the rail warrant scheme is not identifiable. However,

the total charge to the Parliamentary and Privy Council : House of Commons Vote (Class 20 Vote 8) for the year 1986-87, in respect of rail travel by right hon. and hon. Members, their spouses, children and staff, amounted to £819,933·87.

Rooms and Facilities (Booking)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Lord President of the Council if rooms and facilities provided in the House can be booked for use other than in the name of an Officer or hon. Member of the House.

Mr. Wakeham: No.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Surplus Products

Mr. Pike: To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the cost of disposing of surplus agricultural products in the United Kingdom for the current year.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The cost of disposing of surplus commodities (beef, cereals, milk and milk products, olive oil, sugar and wine) in the United Kingdom in 1987-88 is estimated to be £603 million. This covers export refunds (net of MCAs), subsidies for internal disposals, losses on sale out of intervention, and depreciation of beef on entry to intervention.

Co-responsibility Levies

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries how the agreement of co-responsibility levies will affect British producers and producers in each other EEC country.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 25 February 1988]:* The agreement reached by the European Council on the cereals co-responsibility levy will reduce returns to all Community cereal producers by the equivalent of up to 3 per cent. of the intervention price for common wheat if the Community cereals harvest exceeds the production thresholds of 160 million tonnes.

The Council also agreed that the levy should be collected at the point of first sale and not as at present when the grain is processed, sold into intervention or exported from the Community. The detailed ruls for implementing this are under discussion, but the cost of he levy will continue to be borne by the producer. Small cereals producers will be relieved of the burden of both the basic and supplementary co-responsibility levy; again, the detailed rules on this provision are still under discussion.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he is taking to tackle promotion disparities favouring non-Catholics among educationally qualified entrants to the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Mr. Stanley: As indicated in the reports produced by the equal opportunities unit of the Department of Finance and Personnel, monitoring of the outcome of promotion procedures forms part of the comprehensive monitoring arrangements introduced in respect of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. If this monitoring should indicate that there are promotion disparities attributable to religious affiliation, appropriate remedial action will be instituted.

Housing Executive Tenants

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the rate of financial assistance given to new Housing Executive tenants who are in receipt of supplementary benefit.

Mr. Needham: Tenants on supplementary benefit would generally be entitled to housing benefit, the amount being related to their rent and rates. Like other claimants on supplementary benefit they would also have access to single payment provided that the prescribed conditions were satisfied.

Consultants

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of consultants by specialty in each health board in Northern Ireland in 1979, 1983 and 1987, showing in each case how many consultants were on full-time National Health Service contracts in these years.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is given in the following tables. It should be noted that (i) consultants whose sessions are split between different boards are shown under the board with which their major involvement lies; (ii) the vast majority of part-time consultants have a maximum part-time contract which is equivalent to 10 sessions per week commitment to the Health and Personal Social Services; for example, in 1987 there were only seven consultants with contracts less than the maximum part-time; (iii) joint appointments are those where consultants are appointed jointly by Queen's University, Belfast, and the Eastern health and social services board and time is divided between teaching medical students and clinical work.

Medical consultants by specialty in each Health and Social Services Board at 30 September 19

Specialty	Eastern Board				Northern Board			Southern Board			Western Board		
	[1]F T	[2]P T	[3]J A	Total	[1]F T	[2]P T	Total	[1]F T	[2]P T	Total	[1]F T	[2]P T	Total
Accident and Emergency	5	1	–	6	–			1		1			
Anaesthetics	36	8	3	47	7	3	10	10		10	7	1	8
Cardiology	10	2		12	1		1	1		1			
Chest Medicine	4	1	1	6									
Dermatology	2	2	1	5				2		2	1		1
ENT	4	5	–	9	2	1	3	1	2	3	1	3	4
General Medicine	19	4	8	31	8	3	11	4	2	6	8		8

Specialty	Eastern Board				Northern Board			Southern Board			Western Board		
	[1]F/T	[2]P/T	[3]J/A	Total	[1]F/T	[2]P/T	Total	[1]F/T	[2]P/T	Total	[1]F/T	[2]P/T	Total
General Surgery	10	14	4	28	8	5	13	4	4	8	6	2	8
Geriatrics	3	3	1	7	2	—	2	1	—	1	1	—	1
Nephrology	2	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Neurology	2	1	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Neuro-surgery	2	1	1	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	3	12	5	20	1	6	7	1	4	5	2	3	5
Ophthalmology	5	2	3	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	1	3
Orthopaedic Surgery	2	13	2	17	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	2
Paediatrics	6	1	6	13	—	—	—	2	—	2	2	—	2
Paediatric Surgery	3	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Pathology	18	1	12	31	2	—	2	3	1	4	2	—	2
Plastic Surgery	1	5	—	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Psychiatry	15	1	6	22	7	—	7	5	—	5	7	—	7
Radiology	16	1	1	18	3	—	3	2	—	2	4	—	4
Radio Therapy	3	—	1	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rheumatology and Rehabilitation	2	1	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Special Care	2	—	—	2	—	—	—	3	—	3	1	—	1
Thoracic and Cardiac Surgery	4	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Venereology	1	1	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	180	80	55	315	41	18	59	40	13	53	44	12	56

[1] F/T = Full Time
[2] P/T = Part Time
[3] J/A = Joint Appointments

Medical consultants by specialty in each Health and Social Services Board at 30 September 1983

Specialty	Eastern Board				Northern Board			Southern Board			Western Board		
	[1]F/T	[2]P/T	[3]J/A	Total	[1]F/T	[2]P/T	Total	[1]F/T	[2]P/T	Total	[1]F/T	[2]P/T	Total
Accident and Emergency	6	—	—	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Anaesthetics	45	6	3	54	10	1	11	10	—	10	8	1	9
Anatomy	—	2	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cardiology	9	2	—	11	1	—	1	1	—	1	—	—	—
Chemical Pathology	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Child Psychiatry	2	1	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Clinical Electrophysiology	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Clinical Neurological Physiology	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics	—	—	4	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dermatology	2	2	1	5	1	—	1	2	—	2	1	—	1
ENT	4	5	2	11	3	—	3	2	2	4	1	2	3
General Medicine	20	9	5	34	10	—	10	7	—	7	8	—	8
General Pathology	2	—	—	2	1	—	1	1	—	1	2	—	2
General Surgery	11	14	4	29	10	2	12	7	2	9	7	1	8
Geriatrics	5	1	3	9	3	—	3	1	—	1	2	—	2
Gynaecology and Obstetrics	7	9	6	22	4	2	6	4	3	7	4	2	6
Haematology/Blood Transfusion	4	—	2	6	1	—	1	1	—	1	—	—	—
Histology	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Histopathology/Neuropathology	4	—	6	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Immunopathology	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Infectious Diseases	2	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Medical Genetics	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Medical Microbiology	4	—	1	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mental Handicap	3	—	—	3	—	—	—	2	—	2	1	—	1
Nephrology	3	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Neurology	3	—	1	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Neuro-surgery	2	1	1	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ophthalmic Surgery	6	2	3	11	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	3
Orthopaedic Surgery	1	14	2	17	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	2
Other Departments	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Paediatric Surgery	3	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Paediatrics	6	1	6	13	2	—	2	1	—	1	4	—	4
Physiology	—	4	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plastic Surgery	—	5	—	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Psychiatry	12	—	4	16	8	—	8	10	—	10	7	—	7
Radiology	16	1	1	18	2	—	2	2	—	2	4	1	5
Radiotherapy and Medical Oncology	4	—	1	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rheumatology and Rehabilitation	2	1	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Thoracic and Cardiac Surgery	4	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Venereology	2	1	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	197	83	59	339	56	5	61	51	7	58	52	9	61

[1] F/T = Full Time
[2] P/T = Part Time
[3] J/A = Joint Appointments

Medical consultants by specialty in each Health and Social Services Board at 30 September 1987

Specialty	Eastern Board				Northern Board			Southern Board			Western Board		
	[1]F/T	[2]P/T	[3]J/A	Total	[1]F/T	[2]P/T	Total	[1]F/T	[2]P/T	Total	[1]F/T	[2]P/T	Total
Accident and emergency	6	—	—	6	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
Anaesthetics	42	13	3	58	10	1	11	11	—	11	8	1	9
Anatomy	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cardiology	11	2	—	13	1	—	1	1	—	1	—	—	—
Cardiothoracic surgery	4	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Chemical pathology	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Child and adolescent psychiatry	2	1	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Clinical genetics	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Clinical neuro-physiology	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Clinical pharmacology	—	—	4	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dermatology	3	2	1	6	2	—	2	2	—	2	2	—	2
ENT	4	5	2	11	3	—	3	3	1	4	2	2	4
General medicine	24	4	6	34	10	—	10	6	—	6	9	—	9
General medicine/special interest geriatrics	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	2	—	2	—	—	—
General pathology	2	—	—	2	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	—	1
General surgery	10	11	3	24	10	2	12	8	1	9	8	—	8
Genito-urinary medicine	2	1	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Geriatric medicine	6	1	3	10	3	—	3	1	—	1	2	—	2
Haematology	4	—	2	6	1	—	1	2	—	2	—	—	—
Histology	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Histopathology	7	—	7	14	2	—	2	—	—	—	1	—	1
Immuno-pathology	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Infectious diseases	2	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Medical microbiology	5	—	2	7	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Medical oncology	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mental handicap	4	—	—	4	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	—	1
Mental illness	17	1	6	24	8	—	8	5	—	5	9	—	9
Nephrology	4	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Neurology	3	—	1	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Neuro-surgery	2	1	1	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	7	9	4	20	5	2	7	4	4	8	3	3	6
Ophthalmology	7	1	3	11	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	3
Orthopaedics	2	14	2	18	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	3
Other departments	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Paediatric surgery	2	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Paediatrics	7	1	5	13	2	—	2	3	—	3	2	—	2
Physiology	—	4	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plastic surgery	—	5	—	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Radiology	20	4	—	24	5	—	5	4	—	4	4	—	4
Radiotherapy	5	—	—	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rheumatology and rehabilitation	3	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Urology	4	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	224	82	60	366	64	5	69	55	6	61	56	8	64

[1] F/T—Full time.
[2] P/T—Part time.
[3] J/A—Joint appointments.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table showing for each district of the Northern, Western and Southern health and social services boards, the number of people on waiting lists for each specialty for the last five years for which figures are available, giving a breakdown of the total waiting list by time spent on list.

Mr. Needham: I am sending to the hon. Gentleman and arranging for copies to be made available in the Library of tables showing, for each district unit of management of the Northern, Western and Southern health and social services boards, the number of in-patients on waiting lists at 31 December by specialty and by time spent on list for 1981, 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986. As a result of industrial action, information is not available for 1982.

Information on out-patient waiting lists could be extracted only at disproportionate cost.

Sheep Monitoring

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many scintillators were available to and used by his Department for the live monitoring of sheep in the restricted areas of Northern Ireland in each month from May 1986 to May 1987.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The use of scintillators for the live monitoring of sheep commenced with the use of one scintillator in June 1986. This number was increased by three in October 1986 and to five in February 1987.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when live monitoring of sheep on a general basis was introduced in the restricted areas of Northern Ireland following the Chernobyl accident.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* Live monitoring of sheep in Northern Ireland commenced in June 1986 across the Province including those areas which later became subject to restrictions.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when restrictions were first placed on the movement of sheep in Northern Ireland following the Chernobyl nuclear accident; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* 15 September 1987; until that date, using the United Kingdom action level of 1,000 bq/kg, monitoring since the Chernobyl accident showed no need to introduce restrictions.

Irish Citizens

Sir John Biggs-Davison: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Irish citizens are estimated to be resident in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Renton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) on 27 January 1988 at columns *255-6*.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Exchange Rate

Mr. Wells: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications of the rise in United States' domestic demand for prospects for the restoration of stability of the dollar exchange rate with the pound sterling.

Mr. Lilley: Exchange rate stability requires progress in eliminating excessive imbalances, in particular the United States budget and current account deficies as well as corresponding surpluses in Asia and Europe. Encouraging progress has been made, with legislation passed just before Christmas to reduce the United States budget deficit in 1988 and in 1989.

Customs

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what level of international collaboration has taken place to monitor the transition to the new system at customs posts throughout the European Economic Community.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The European Commission is responsible for monitoring the transition to the new system and is consulting member states. Early indications are that the changes have been introduced successfully throughout the Community.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what reduction is anticipated in the customs officers required by Her Majesty's Government at internal borders as a result of the reforms made by the single administrative document under the Customs '88 project.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The single administrative document is a measure for facilitating trade by rationalising official documentation. Once the new system has settled in, it should reduce both delays at Customs and the incidence of error, but the improvement is not quantifiable.

Road Transport (Small Businesses)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals exist for helping small road transport companies meet the additional costs of adapting existing computing systems to handle the new single administrative document under the Customs '88 project.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The introduction of the single administrative document has given firms the opportunity to simplify their procedures and review their arrangements for producing Customs declarations. There are no plans to meet any transitional costs incurred from public funds.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what special provisions have been made to help small businesses engaged in road transport since the adoption of the single administrative document under the Customs '88 project.

Mr. Lilley *[holding reply 22 February 1988]:* The launch of Customs '88 was preceded by a two-year publicity campaign which provided the information necessary for all businesses to prepare themselves. It has not been necessary to make special arrangements to help small businesses engaged in road transport.

DEFENCE

Weapons Systems

Mr Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *156*, to which particular weapons systems the Montebello requirement *(a)* applies and *(b)* does not apply.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The report considered at Montebello in 1983, when NATO Defence Ministers agreed both to a reduction in the Alliance's land-based nuclear stockpile in Europe and on the need for possible improvements to ensure the effectiveness, responsiveness and survivability of remaining forces, examined the question of the future size and composition of NATO's theatre nuclear stockpile as a whole.

NATO Meeting (Denmark)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is to be discussed at the NATO planning meeting at Kolding, Denmark, on 26 and 27 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) on 22 January at column *899*.

Ships (Lost Components)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answers of 15 February, *Official Report*, columns *448-50*, what screening is operated by contractors employed by his Department in relation to crew members on board ships transporting sensitive military components; what precautions his Department requires contractors to take; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The level of sensitivity of military components determines the extent of screening required

for crew members. The security aspects are defined in each contract and it is the contractor's responsibility to meet these. Particular items of structure lost in this incident were not of a highly sensitive nature.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answers of 15 February, *Official Report*, columns *448-50*, if he will give the dimensions, approximate weight and function of each of the Vanguard submarine sections lost on 5 and 6 February.

Mr. Sainsbury: The dimensions, approximate weight and function of the sections are as follows:

(a) 9m diameter × 2·4m × 57 tonnes—forward dome.
(b) 12m × 9m × 1·6m × 2·5 tonnes — deck/tank structure.
(c) 14m × 9m × 0·2m × 15 tonnes—deck structures.
(d) 14m × 8m × 0·2m × 12 tonnes—deck structures.
(e) 5m × 3m × 0·2m × 1 tonne—deck structures.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answers of 15 February, *Official Report*, columns *448-50*, when he expects the inquiries into the loss of Vanguard submarine sections to report; what resources are being directed to these inquiries; at what level his Department is represented; what interim measures have been taken, pending the outcome of the inquiries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: An investigation has been mounted by Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd under the terms of its contract. The committee of inquiry includes an officer from the staff of the principal naval overseer at VSEL. The VSEL report will be issued to MOD early March, and will be considered at high level within the Department. As an interim measure taken pending the outcome of the inquiry, VSEL has informed its sub-contractors that careful attention must be given to future transportation arrangements by sea.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, columns *448-50*, what were the weather conditions at the time of the loss of Vanguard class submarine sections on 5 and 6 February.

Mr. Sainsbury: The weather conditions generally prevailing in the Mallin and Irish sea areas for the periods in question were:

5 February
Surface wind from a south westerly direction force 6 to 7
Weather: Occasional showers
Visibility: Good
Sea: Moderate to rough

6 February
Surface wind west to north-west force 7 to gale force 8
Weather: Occasional showers
Visibility: Good
Sea: Moderate to rough

However conditions in these areas are known to be locally variable.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answers of 15 February, *Official Report*, columns *448-50*, if he will give further details of the numbers and types of picket boats exercising surveillance over the Vanguard submarine forward dome structure; whether any armed Royal Navy vessels are in the vicinity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The MOD initially requested that a picket boat be stationed in the vicinity of the position where the dome was reported to be lost. Subsequent search operations in the area to ascertain the exact location make this unnecessary. This arrangement will be reviewed if there is any time gap between the search and the salvage operations. No special deployment of Royal Naval vessels has been considered necessary as a result of this incident.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answers of 15 February, *Official Report*, columns *448-50*, what assessment he has made of the metallurgical suitability of the lost Vanguard submarine sections for further use; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: No assessment of the metallurgical suitability for further use of the submarine sections can be made until they have been recovered.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answers of 15 February, *Official Report*, columns *448-50*, when his Department first announced publicly that more Vanguard class submarine sections have been lost off Walney island on 6 February; if he will describe the nature of these sections; what precautions were taken following the loss of the forward dome structure on 5 February to avoid losses of further sections; why these precautions were not effective; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The secondary structure lost near Walney island was internal deck and tank units. The precise precautions taken following the loss of the forward dome structure and why these precautions were not effective has yet to be established and is a matter for the committee of inquiry.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answers of 15 February, *Official Report*, columns *448-50*, if he will now answer the question from the hon. Member for Linlithgow as to his assessment of the risk of the lost Vanguard class submarine forward dome structure falling into the hands of a foreign power; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The forward dome structure, which is not of a highly technical or sophisticated nature nor highly classified, is of such a size that it could only fall into the hands of a foreign power of an overt salvage operation were to be mounted. The risk of this in the close vicinity of the Scottish coastline and within United Kindom territorial waters is negligible.

Defence Research

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps in the Council of Ministers of the Western European Union to bring about a major effort to harmonise national operational requirements for military computer systems and initiate a joint European defence research programme between Western European Union member countries and other Western European countries wishing to take part; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: WEU Ministers are agreed that the appropriate forum for the pursuit of collaboration in defence equipment is the Independent European Programme Group, which comprises all the European members of NATO with the exception of Iceland. The IEPG has active programmes of work on increasing collaboration in defence research, including a number of computer-related programmes; and on the harmonisation

of operational requirements, where computers are considered in the context of the weapons systems employing them.

Smoke Hoods

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans for the equipping of military transport aircraft with passenger protection smoke hoods.

Mr. Sainsbury: We at present have no plans to fit smoke hoods to transport aircraft, although we are examining them and there is a continuing programme of flight safety improvements designed to maintain the excellent safety record of the RAF air transport fleet.

Anglo-American Defence Agreement

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff in his Department are currently deployed on the administration of the 1958 Anglo-American mutual defence agreement in the atomic control office.

Mr. Sainsbury: Currently two persons are employed on atomic control office business concerned with the administration of the 1958 United States/United Kingdom agreement for co-operation on the uses of atomic energy for mutual defence purposes.

Electroconvulsive Therapy

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *446*, how many soldiers have been treated with electroconvulsive therapy over the last two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not readily available and cannot be provided without disproportionate cost.

Service Men (Depression)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *446*, how many soldiers who applied to leave Her Majesty's forces during the last 12 months gave depression as the reason, or otherwise complained of that condition; and what treatment was given to the 13 service men diagnosed as suffering from depression.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested on the reasons given for applying to leave the services cannot be ascertained without disproportionate effort. It is not my Department's policy to discuss the medical treatment of individual cases, details of which are held in confidence.

MOD Houses

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Ministry of Defence houses there are in (i) Wales and (ii) Alyn and Deeside; how many such houses are currently empty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: As at the latest dates for which the information is available, the numbers of MOD houses and flats were:

	Married quarters[1]	*Civilian houses*[2]
(i) In Wales		
Total	2,577	132
Empty	379	59
(ii) In Alyn and Deeside		
Total	300	Nil
Empty	29	Nil

[1] As at 30 November 1987.
[2] As at 31 March 1987.

Many of the empty properties are either undergoing or awaiting works services, temporarily empty pending the arrival of new occupants or in process of disposal.

Sergeant Jarvie

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will pay compensation to Sergeant Jarvie of the King's Own Scottish Borderers following his reinstatement after his retrial for alleged misconduct; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I will write to the hon. Member.

Radar Stations

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date he expects the three weather radar stations in Scotland to become operational; and to what extent the stations will adequately cover all of Scotland, including the Shetland Islands.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* Discussions are proceeding between officials of the Scottish Office and the Ministry of Defence and, as indicated in my reply to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) on 8 December 1987, at column *153*, the Hebrides, the Highlands north-west of Aberdeen and the Edinburgh or Glasgow areas are likely to prove the most suitable sites. Data from stations placed in these areas, when taken with other information available to the Meteorological Office, are expected to lead to improved short-period weather forecasts and provide timely estimates of precipitation at the surface throughout Scotland. Radar coverage will not extend north of about 59 deg. north. However, alternative methods of measuring precipitation falling on the Shetland and Orkney islands are available. Present plans are that installation would take place in the early 1990s.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Visits)

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will instruct prison administrators to send out visiting orders to relatives of prisoners at least two weeks prior to any visit.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Establishments in England and Wales have been encouraged to issue visiting orders up to a fortnight before the 28-day period of validity begins, if this is administratively feasible and if they are aware that otherwise a planned assisted visit would have to be postponed.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will instruct prison administrators to

send copies of endorsed visiting orders to the new unit dealing with assisted prison visits to promote better co-ordination of services.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We intend to study this idea in the light of experience of the operation of the new unit.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will specify the meaning of the term "substantial period", in prison department forms F2022AS and F2022S, with respect to assisted prison visits.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand that it has been the normal practice of DHSS local offices, in administering the assisted prison visits scheme, to regard four months' cohabitation as a sufficiently substantial period to entitle an applicant to assistance, provided that the other conditions of the scheme are met. We see no reason to alter this guideline, which will continue to be applied flexibly.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the subsistence expenses and childminding costs of persons visiting prisoners referred to in paragraph 10 of form F2022AS, are discretionary where proof of claim is provided.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Yes. Payment of subsistence or childminding expenses may be withheld if the assisted prison visits unit is not satisfied that they were necessarily incurred in the course of visiting an inmate; or they may be met only in part if the amounts specified are excessive.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department will be assuming the responsibility for the statutory obligation previously discharged by the Department of Health and Social Security, of informing claimants about specific benefits consequent upon the establishing of the new unit dealing with assisted prison visits.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No such statutory obligation applies, or has ever applied, to the assisted prison visits scheme. None the less, we shall be considering the adequacy of present information about the Scheme.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances individual prison officers are asked to give an opinion as to whether or not an assisted visit expenses claim is justified; and if he will make it his policy to discontinue this practice.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Under present arrangements prison officers may be asked to confirm or clarify from their records details which are supplied by applicants for assisted visits. We have no plans to discontinue this practice.

Television Licences

Mr. McTaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been prosecuted in each of the last five years for non-payment of television licences; and what percentage of those were pensioners.

Mr. Renton: Figures are given in the table. These have been supplied by the national television licence records office, which instigates all prosecutions for television licence evasion.

No information is held by that office about the ages of those prosecuted. However, Home Office records show that in 1985 and 1986 fewer than 20 defendants proceeded against in England and Wales for offences under the Wireless Telegraphy Acts were of pensionable age.

Prosecutions for Television Licence Evasion in the United Kingdom

	1982-83	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
England and Wales	80,029	89,747	102,154	115,559	165,385
Scotland	5,063	7,058	7,542	7,121	9,004
Northern Ireland	341	575	645	782	838
United Kingdom	85,433	97,380	110,341	123,462	175,227

Irish Citizens

Sir John Biggs-Davison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many Irish citizens are estimated to be resident in England;

(2) how many Irish citizens are estimated to be resident in Wales;

(3) how many Irish citizens are estimated to be resident in Scotland.

Mr. Renton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) on 27 January 1988 at columns 255-56.

Prison Officers (Accommodation)

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list Her Majesty's prisons which provide living accommodation for prison officers, and their families; if he will identify the number of units at each such prison for the years 1985, 1986 and 1987; and if he has any plans to increase prison officer family accommodation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested is not readily available for 1985 and 1986 and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. For 1987, the information, as at 30 September, is as follows. There are no plans to increase prison officer family accommodation.

Her Majesty's Prison Service establishments which provide living accommodation for prison officers and their families (Number of units at 30 September 1987)

	Number
Acklington	104
Albany	120
Aldington	29
Ashford	172
Ashwell	22
Askham Grange	14
Aylesbury	85
Bedford	60

	Number
Birmingham	63
Blantyre House	22
Blundeston	46
Bristol	77
Brixton	366
Brockhill	35
Buckley Hall	16
Bullwood Hall	19
Camp Hill	59
Campsfield House	33
Canterbury	60
Cardiff	49
Channings Wood	37
Chelmsford	81
Coldingley	127
Cookham Wood	27
Dartmoor	85
Deerbolt	81
Dorchester	44
Dover	49
Drake Hall	36
Durham	99
East Sutton Park	13
Eastwood Park	23
Erlestoke House	36
Everthorpe	33
Exeter	73
Featherstone	54
Feltham	127
Ford	22
Foston Hall	13
Frankland	85
Gartree	118
Glen Parva	114
Gloucester	40
Grendon/Spring Hill	88
Gringley	10
Guys Marsh	32
Haslar	15
Hatfield	38
Haverigg	83
Hewell Grange	25
Highpoint	87
Hindley	46
Hollesley Bay	103
Holloway	181
Hull	72
Huntercombe Finnamore Wood Camp	87
Kingston (Portsmouth)	27
Kirkham	34
Kirklevington Grange	14
Lancaster	21
Latchmere House	59
Leeds	58
Leicester	58
Lewes	75
Leyhill	38
Lincoln	67
Lindholme	172
Liverpool	124
Long Lartin	130
Lowdham Grange	36
Low Newton	31
Maidstone	93
Manchester	119
Medomsley	9
Morton Hall	39
New Hall	26
Northallerton	18
Northeye	32
North Sea Camp	30
Norwich	74
Nottingham	31
Onley	61
Oxford	31
Parkhurst	170
Pentonville	214
Portland	97
Preston	36
Pucklechurch	42
Ranby	50
Reading	75
Risley	179
Rochester	55
Rudgate/Thorpe Arch	61
Send	34
Shepton Mallet	22
Shrewsbury	12
Stafford	56
Standford Hill	73
Stocken	46
Stoke Heath	20
Styal	37
Sudbury	15
Swansea	23
Swinfen Hall	51
Thorn [illegible]	19
Usk	37
The Verne	67
Wakefield	99
Wandsworth	257
Wayland	60
Wellingborough	40
Werrington	10
Wetherby	22
Whatton	46
Winchester	128
Wormwood Scrubs	375
Wymott	108

Remand Prisoners (Police Cells)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were held on remand on 22 February in police cells in the Metropolitan police area, the Greater Manchester police area, the Merseyside police area, Lancashire, the West Midlands, West Mercia, South Wales and Devon and Cornwall, respectively.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 22 February there were 360 remand prisoners in police cells in the Metropolitan police area, 42 in the Greater Manchester police area, 20 in the Merseyside police area, 27 in Lancashire, 73 in the West Midlands, 18 in the West Mercia, 22 in South Wales and 17 in Devon and Cornwall.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish an independent inquiry into the extent of the influence exerted by the Masonic order within the Metropolitan police; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are aware of the allegations which have been made about Masonic influence in the Metropolitan police, and the concern to which these have given rise. We are also aware of the need to respect the freedom of choice of the individual police officer where this does not affect his impartiality. My right hon. Friend will be discussing the matter with the Commissioner.

Miss Jurdotic Ladlina

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department's office in Croydon received a letter and passport which was sent by

registered post on 6 January by Miss Jurdotic Ladlina, a Yugoslav national, residing with Mr. and Mrs. Whiteley of 161 Church road, Southend-on-Sea; and if he will take steps to ensure that Miss Ladlina has her passport returned to her before her departure on 20 March.

Mr. Renton: Severe delays in dealing with correspondence in Lunar house have arisen because of the huge intake of correspondence and applications for citizenship which arrived in the last weeks of 1987. I recently announced the introduction of emergency measures to deal with the arrears of work on 16 February, at columns 862-63. It has not been possible to identify Miss Ladlina's letter from the information given, but the immigration and nationality department would normally expect to establish its receipt if full postal details, including the recorded delivery or registered postal packet number, the date of posting, and the purpose of the application can be provided. If the hon. Member will arrange for these details to be sent to me I will ensure that further inquiries are made and every effort made to return the passport as quickly as possible.

"Gun Sense is Good Sense"

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the initial print order for the publication "Gun Sense is Good Sense"; when it was first printed and subsequently reprinted; and when he now proposes to make further supplies available to the public.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Some 750,000 copies of the leaflet "Gun Sense is Good Sense" were printed as part of the campaign in 1983 against the misuse of air weapons. A further 50,000 copies were printed in both 1985 and 1986. A new leaflet to promote the safe use of air weapons was produced as part of the regional air weapon campaigns held at the end of 1986 in the West Midlands and Greater Manchester police force areas and we are evaluating what form future publicity material should take.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 29 February 1988

HOME DEPARTMENT

Firearms

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what powers police forces are refusing to renew firearms certificates for self-loading rifles.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A chief officer of police is empowered to refuse to grant or renew an application for a firearm certificate if the requirements set out in section 27 of the Firearms Act 1968 are not met. There is a right of appeal to the Crown court.

Brixton Prison

Mr. Stuart Holland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Vauxhall concerning overcrowding in F wing of Brixton prison.

Mr. Hurd: I wrote to the hon. Member on 26 February.

Television Licences (Handicapped Pensioners)

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider the introduction of a 5p television licence for those households where at least one member is a seriously handicapped pensioner.

Mr. Renton: There are no plans to do so.

Exceptional Leave Criteria

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* the criteria for granting exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Renton: The circumstances under which persons who do not qualify under the immigration rules have been allowed exceptionally to remain in the United Kingdom were set out in the Home Office evidence to the Home Affairs Sub-Committee on Race Relations and Immigration in 1984 — "Minutes of Evidence taken before the Home Affairs Sub-Committee on Race Relations and Immigration" HC72, Volume II, paragraph 44. If the hon. Member has a particular point in mind he may wish to write with more precise details.

Blorg and Contango

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to what progress the Metropolitan police fraud squad is making with its inquiries into the Liechtenstein subsidiaries of Lonrho plc, Blorg and Contango; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This is an operational matter which is the responsibility of the commissioner of police for the City of London. I understand from the commissioner that inquiries into these subsidiaries are continuing.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the light of the fact that no petitions for leave to appeal to the House of Lords have yet been lodged in the Birmingham pub bombings case, he will reconsider his answers to eight hon. Members' questions on the 18 February, *Official Report*, column *708*.

Mr. Hurd: No. My hon. Friend's replies to questions about this case on 18 February referred back to an earlier answer which dealt in substance with the issues that had been raised. I see no reason to reconsider that answer.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he uses in judging whether a case is sub judice for the purpose of answering parliamentary questions.

Mr. Hurd: It is not for Ministers to decide whether a case is sub judice in the strict sense which, under the rules of the House, precludes reference to it in a question. Our responsibility is for the answer to be given, and it is not our practice to comment on matters which are in a wider sense awaiting or under adjudication by a court.

Police Special Branches

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total number of police officers and civilians serving in, or responsible to, the special branches of police forces in England and Wales in each year from 1969 to the latest available date.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The readily available information is as follows:

Metropolitan Police	*Police officers*	*Civilians*
1968	366	44
1969	370	47
1970	382	54
1971	398	68
1972	400	77
1973	399	85
1974	393	105
1975	397	119
1976	405	120
1977	405	110
1978	395	98
1979	386	127
1980	400	115
1981	427	125
1982	396	115
1983	374	102
1984	380	115
1985	393	125
1986	405	137
1987	437	130

The available information about other police forces in England and Wales is given in the annual reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary.

Weapons (Amnesty)

Mr. Dixon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to ask the chief constable of the Northumbrian police to introduce an amnesty for holders of knives, guns and martial arts weapons, along the lines of that recently introduced by the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are discussing with the Association of Chief Police Officers how campaigns like that run by the Metropolitan police encouraging the disposal of knives and other weapons might be instituted more widely.

Prisoners (Temporary Release)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many serving adult prisoners in England and Wales were granted temporary release for attendance on a community-based employment or offence-related course during 1986 and 1987.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Records of the number of prisoners temporarily released under prison rule 6 are not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is planning any increase in the use of temporary release courses for adult prisoners in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Sentenced adult prisoners may be granted temporary release for educational purposes. We have no immediate plans to increase the use of temporary release in this area.

Settlers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what information he has as to how many people from the Republic of Ireland settled in England, Scotland and Wales in each year from 1982 to 1987 inclusive, for each of the age groups 16 to 18 years, 18 to 25 years and 25 years and over;

(2) what information he has as to how many people from Northern Ireland settled in England, Scotland and Wales in each year from 1982 to 1987 inclusive, for each of the age groups 16 to 18 years, 18 to 25 years and 25 years and over.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 18 February 1988]*: British citizens, and Irish citizens travelling within the common travel area, are not subject to immigration control and Irish citizens do not need to apply to settle in Great Britain. Based on information from the labour force surveys, it is estimated that the usually resident population of Great Britain in mid-1986 included some 30,000 persons who had been born in the Republic of Ireland and had entered Great Britain since 1980. A corresponding estimate for persons from Northern Ireland, and the other information requested, are not available.

PRIME MINISTER

State Security

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what steps she has taken to ensure that she is kept fully informed at all stages in future cases where an author or publisher approaches Her Majesty's Government through an intermediary to seek clearance for the publication of material about the security services; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Officials are aware of the appropriate steps to take in such cases.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if she has any plans to introduce legislation to legalise wrongdoing by members of the security and intelligence services when such actions are undertaken in the defence of the realm;

(2) if she has any plans to introduce legislation to legalise covert invasions of privacy by the security and intelligence services when such actions are undertaken in the defence of the realm; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 29 January, at column *397*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones).

"Spycatcher"

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Prime Minister if she has received correspondence from Lord Donaldson, Master of the Rolls, arising out of his "Spycatcher" judgment and correspondence between herself and the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: It is not my usual practice to give information on correspondence from third parties. As the hon. Gentleman knows, however, he wrote to me on 15 February and sent a copy to Lord Donaldson. Lord Donaldson subsequently sent me a copy of his reply to the hon. Gentleman.

Parliamentary Questions

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the criteria used by Government Departments in judging parliamentary questions to be answerable only at disproportionate cost; if there are any guidelines in force to override financial restrictions if it is in the national interest; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply of 11 February, at column *297*.

Any parliamentary question which is likely to involve disproportionate expenditure — currently £200 — is referred to the responsible Minister before significant resources are committed. This amount is currently under review. It is not a rigid limit; it is for the Minister concerned to decide in each case whether there are exceptional circumstances to justify answering a question which would cost more than £200.

Leak Inquiry Panels

Mr. Meale: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if she will list the names of members of all the Cabinet Office leak inquiries panels held since 1979;

(2) what the criteria are for appointing members of Cabinet Office leak inquiries panels;

(3) how many people are members of the Cabinet Office leak inquiries panel; how many inquiries have taken place during the last 11 months; and how many have taken place in each year since 1979;

(4) if she will list by name the current members of the Cabinet Office leak inquiries panel;

(5) who appoints members of the Cabinet Office leak inquiries panel;

(6) what was the cost of running the Cabinet Office leak inquiries panel during the present financial year and for each year since 1979;

(7) how many civil servants have been *(a)* disciplined and *(b)* dismissed as a result of the findings of inquiries set up by the Cabinet Office leak inquiries panel since 1979.

The Prime Minister: It is not the practice to comment on such matters.

30-Year Rule (Information)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make it her policy to review all statements made by Ministers in Her Majesty's Government since May 1979 in the light of information released under the 30-year rule to assess their accuracy regarding newly published information; and if she will seek to rectify any factual errors in statements or parliamentary answers made by Government Ministers since May 1979 which are identifiable from information made public at the Public Records Office on 1 January.

The Prime Minister: No. If the hon. Gentleman has a particular point in mind, I suggest he gets in touch with the appropriate Minister.

National Audit Office

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Prime Minister what restrictions, other than statutory, Her Majesty's Government put on access by the National Audit Office to Government papers.

The Prime Minister: The Government do not seek to deny access to papers which, in the terms of the National Audit Office Act 1983, the Comptroller and Auditor General reasonably requires for carrying out his examinations.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Anglo-Irish Conference

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will outline the specific requests recently made by the Irish Government at the Anglo-Irish Conference; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: Copies of the joint statements issued after the conference meetings on 2 and 16 February have been placed in the Library. These statements indicate the areas discussed at the meetings.

Homelessness

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what arrangements have been made for the transfer of responsibility for homeless people from the Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and if he will issue a report on the steps which have been taken.

(2) what new funding arrangements for voluntary organisations dealing with homelessness in Northern Ireland he proposes after new homelessness legislation is introduced; and what consultation there will be regarding those changes.

Mr. Needham: Arrangements for the transfer to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive of responsibility for the temporary accommodation needs of homeless people will be included in a proposal for a draft housing Order in Council which is to be published in March 1988.

Discussions on the practical issues arising from this proposed transfer are currently underway between the four health and social services boards and the Housing Executive.

It is also intended to include a provision on the proposed draft order which would deal with funding arrangements for voluntary organisations concerned with homelessness. The legislation will be subject to the normal consultation process.

Police Complaints

Mr. Gow: to ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland will come into being; and who are the members of the commission.

Mr. Tom King: I am glad to announce that the Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland comes into being today. The membership of the commission is as follows:

Chairman
Mr. James Grew

Deputy Chairman
Mrs. Romayne Carswell

Deputy Chairman
Mr. Brian Garrett

Members
Mr. James Gardner
Mrs. Denise Kennedy
Mr. Kevin Murnaghan
Mr. Brian Reid
Mrs. Brenda Shiel

The new commission which is being established under the Police (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 reforms the police complaints system in Northern Ireland. The commission will have extensive supervisory powers in relation to complaints against members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The commission will be required to supervise any case involving death or serious injury and will have the power to supervise the formal investigation of any other complaint against the Royal Ulster Constabulary if it so wishes.

An effective complaints system which has the confidence of the community can make a significant contribution towards strengthening the relationship between the public and the RUC. In this way the police will be better placed to combat terrorism and to maintain the rule of law.

I believe that the new commission will make a material contribution to strengthening good relations between the RUC and the whole community in Northern Ireland.

I should also like to express my appreciation of the very valuable work done by the outgoing Police Complaints Board.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the present cost of *(a)* the renewal of and *(b)* application for a firearms certificate in Northern Ireland; and what percentage of the total costs involved these fees cover.

Mr. Stanley *[holding answer 26 February 1988]:* The fee paid upon application for a firearms certificate is £33 and for the renewal of a firearms certificate £21. The fees are set at a level calculated to recover the full costs of operating the system of certification.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* shotguns, *(b)* ·22 rifles, *(c)* other rifles, *(d)* handguns and *(e)* other firearms are held on firearms certificates in Northern Ireland at the latest available date; and what were the numbers (i) five years and (ii) 10 years ago.

Mr. Stanley *[holding answer 26 February 1988]:* The information requested is as follows:

	31 December 1987	*31 December 1982*	*31 December 1977*
Shotguns	82,554	77,392	69,525
22 Rifles	12,219	12,410	12,491
Other rifles	1,195	1,281	1,423
Handguns	10,566	10,288	10,322
Other firearms	18,659	16,431	12,889

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the shotguns held on firearms certificates in Northern Ireland are semi-automatic.

Mr. Stanley *[holding answer 26 February 1988]:* The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Policy

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of Britain's bilateral and multilateral overseas aid is currently committed on condition that recipient nations adhere to International Monetary Fund adjustment programmes.

Mr. Chris Patten: The proportion of loans or credits in support of structural adjustment programmes provided by the international development institutions to which we contribute, such as the World Bank, is determined by the board of governors. Typically, the proportion is about 20 per cent.

Programme aid expenditure in the current financial year in support of adjustment programmes agreed with the International Monetary Fund/World Bank, as a proportion of bilateral country aid expenditure, is expected to be 20 per cent.

Ethiopia and Kampuchea

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will commit long-term development aid to Ethiopia and Kampuchea; and if it will be on a conditional basis.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) on 11 January at column 3; and to the answer I gave the hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) on 22 February at column 20.

Aid-trade Provision

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the companies which have benefited from the aid-trade provision in each of the last five years, stating the amounts received, the projects and the developing countries.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 7 July 1987 at columns *73-76*. Aid agreements signed with developing countries under the aid and trade provision in the current financial year to date are as follows:

April 1987 - February 1988

Country	*Project*	*Company*	*Export Value £ million*	*ATP Element £ million*
Belize	Leyland Trucks	British Leyland	0·463	0·117
Burma	Jute Carpet Mills	Mackies	0·040	0·040
Cameroon	NW Electrification Project	Balfour Beatty	5·428	1·362
Cameroon	Douala Port Telecoms	Placons Ltd	0·100	0·100
China	Shandong Paper Mill	Black Clawson International Ltd	1·667	0·502
China	Cosco Ships	British Shipbuilders	44·300	13·578
China	Liaodong Bay Oil Training	Global Engineering	1·000	0·080
China	Shanxi Mining College	HSDE	0·061	0·061
Cyprus	Southern Conveyor	SPP	3·467	0·870
Djibouti	Transhipment Study	Ocean Mackenzie	0·179	0·179
India	India UAE Submarine Cable	STC	24·450	6·140

Country	Project	Company	Export Value £ million	ATP Element £ million
India	HBJ Pipeline and Generators	Toyo UK	24·000	6·060
India	Geological Appraisal	Robertson Research International	0·305	0·305
Indonesia	Steel Bridging	Mabey and Johnson	10·702	6·846
Indonesia	Navigational Aids	Pharos Marine	9·906	7·007
Indonesia	Batam Island Power Study	Kennedy & Donkin	0·252	0·252
Indonesia	Coal Fired Power Station Training	BEI	0·800	0·800
Indonesia	Radio/TV Consultancy	BBC	0·250	0·250
Indonesia	Batam Island Airport	Technecon	0·013	0·013
Jordan	Walking Draglines	Ransome and Rapier	9·000	4·654
Kenya	Rural Telecommunications	Communication Supplies	20·625	7·300
Malawi	Power Transmission	Balfour HSPE Kennedy	8·080	2·590
Malawi	UX D5 Telecoms Study	GEC	0·300	0·300
Malawi	UX D5 Telecoms Stage I	GEC	5·580	1·734
Mozambique	Trucks	Leyland	2·496	0·661
Malaysia	Liwagu Hydroelectric Study	Watermeyer Ewbank	0·850	0·850
Malaysia	Rural Water Supervision	John Taylor	3·000	3·000
Panama	Gas Turbine Power Station	JBE	14·222	6·727
Peru	Water Test Units	Potopak	0·088	0·088
Seychelles	Mahe Water Consultancy	Sir A. Gibb	0·122	0·122
Tunisia	Polypropylene Plant Equipment	Extrusion Systems	0·188	0·047
Tunisia	Sakmo II	Froude Consine	1·933	0·584
Turkey	Circuit Breakers	GEC Switchgear	3·745	0·940
Zimbabwe	Harare Airport Master Plan	Sir A. Gibb	0·257	0·257

Pakistan

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the total cost of the Government's contribution to the population welfare plan of the Pakistan Government.

Mr. Chris Patten: Total commitments by the ODA to population programmes in Pakistan stand at nearly £8 million.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Maintenance Awards

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of total public recurrent expenditure on higher and further education has been attributable to student maintenance awards in each year from 1979.

Mr. Jackson: The following figures relate to expenditure on further and higher education within the DES programme. The total of maintenance expenditure on mandatory awards in England and Wales and discretionary awards in England is shown as a percentage of recurrent expenditure on universities (Great Britain), voluntary and direct grant colleges (England) and on maintained colleges of further and higher education (England).

Financial years	Percentage attributable to student maintenance awards
1979-80	15
1980-81	15
1981-82	15
1982-83	15
1983-84	15
1984-85	15
1985-86	14

Student Awards

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if a student seeking an award under the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1987 who can demonstrate that his circumstances per se comply with Regulation 3(1)(*b*) needs also to demonstrate that his circumstances comply with one of the categories in Regulation 3(2) in order to qualify.

Mr. Jackson: No.

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, in the interpretation of the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1987, the categories in Regulation 3(2) are to be regarded as extending or limiting the face value application of Regulation 3(1)(*b*).

Mr. Jackson: Regulation 3(2) extends the circumstances which enable a student to qualify as independent under regulation 3(1)(*b*).

National Leathersellers Centre

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what account he proposes to take in implementing his plans for the future funding of further education of the particular status of the national leathersellers centre at Nene college, Northampton with particular reference to the type of course provided and the type of students catered for; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what safeguards are proposed on future funding through the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council to ensure that courses offered by the leathersellers centre at Nene college can continue, even though not all of them are designated advanced.

Mr. Jackson: Assuming the Education Reform Bill becomes law during the current Session of Parliament, Nene college will, under the Bill's provisions, become a free-standing corporate body and transfer from local

authority control to the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council sector. The PCFC will be in funds to support all higher education courses at Nene college currently funded through the advanced further education pool. The Government have said that they will be open to local education authorities, as part of their continuing responsibility for non-advanced further education, to contract for the continued provision of FE courses at PCFC institutions. Authorities' continuing responsibility for such courses will be recognised in the assessment of grant-related expenditure for rate support grant purposes.

Education Reform

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements he has made for schools funded and run as joint shared facilities by district councils and county councils to opt out of the maintained sector.

Mr. Dunn: Under the provisions of the Education Reform Bill, any county or voluntary school, other than a primary school with fewer than 300 pupils, will be able to seek grant-maintained status. If the application is successful, property used or held by the former maintaining authority for the purposes of the school will transfer to the school. The Education Assets Board will be responsible for identifying and defining the property to be transferred and, by implication, the property which remains with the authority which previously owned it.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received seeking the addition to the Education Reform Bill of provisions to offer protection against possible abuse by any future Secretary of State of *(a)* the powers which the Bill grants to him over the content of the core curriculum, *(b)* the control which the Bill grants to him over the testing of children in schools and *(c)* the influence which the Bill grants to him on the dismissal of teachers.

Mrs. Rumbold: A number of organisations and individuals who wrote to us about our proposals for the national curriculum and assessment made points about the dangers of political control. We remain convinced that the safeguards built into the Education Reform Bill provide adequate protection against future abuse. The Bill does not grant my right hon. Friend influence over the dismissal of teachers, and my Department has not received representations on this matter.

Conductive Education

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment has been made of the number of children requiring conductive education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The information is not available centrally. It is the duty of individual local education authorities to identify children in their area with special educational needs and to ensure that appropriate educational provision is available for them.

"Your Choice for Life"

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total cost of production of the video "Your Choice for Life".

Mr. Dunn: The total production cost of the AIDS video for schools "Your Choice for Life" was £103,902.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many copies of the video "Your Choice for Life" have so far been distributed to *(a)* schools, *(b)* youth groups and *(c)* other centres.

Mr. Dunn: Copies of the package, which contains the video and the users' guide, were distributed initially as follows: *(a)* schools, 5,897 *(b)* the youth service, 168; and *(c)* other centres, 702. Copies for the youth service were sent to national organisations and to principal youth officers, not to individual clubs. The figures relate to copies distributed free of charge in England only; further copies of the package are available for purchase.

Departmental Videos

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure that any future video produced by his Department stresses that those who are celibate before marriage and faithful within it and who do not use drugs are a virtually no-risk group as far as AIDS infection is concerned;

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that any future video produced by his Department for use in schools does not promote the idea that practices other than normal heterosexual relations between husband and wife are acceptable.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has made it clear that schools have a responsibility to inform pupils of the facts about AIDS and to encourage them to behave responsibly and to avoid behaviour which may place them at risk. Under the Education (No. 2) Act 1986, it is the responsibility of governors of schools to decide whether and how sex education shall be given in their schools. Subject to that, pupils should understand how HIV infection may be passed on through sexual activity, both homosexual and heterosexual, and through the use of shared injecting equipment. They must also appreciate that the safest life style—and also the best—is to avoid casual or promiscuous sexual behaviour and to remain faithful to a single sexual partner, who is also faithful, and to avoid drug abuse.

Far from encouraging youngsters to experiment sexually, any responsible programme of teaching about AIDS should alert them to the dangers. In particular, there is no place in any school in any circumstances for teaching which advocates homosexual behaviour, which presents it as the "norm", or which encourages homosexual behaviour by pupils. These messages are written into the DES/Welsh Office video package for schools, "Your Choice for Life", and will form part of any other initiatives from my Department to promote and support the education service's response to AIDS.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to ensure that any future video produced by his Department for use in schools does not promote the idea that sexual activity by children under the age of 16 is acceptable.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has made clear on many occasions the need for schools to ensure that pupils appreciate the physical, emotional and moral risks of early sexual experimentation and of casual or promiscuous

sexual behaviour. The threat posed by AIDS lends added urgency and importance to these aims. It is also essential that pupils understand the law as it relates to heterosexual and homosexual activity, including the respective ages of consent. These points were emphasised in the Department's circular 11/87, "Sex Education at School", and further stressed in the users' guide which forms an integral part of the DES/Welsh Office AIDS video resource package for schools "Your Choice for Life".

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to ensure that any future video produced by his Department for use in schools does not promote the idea that drug taking by non-injective means is acceptable.

Mr. Dunn: The Department has a wide-ranging strategy to combat the drugs problem among young people: the aim is to prevent the misuse of drugs in any form. This is made clear in any materials produced.

Voluntary Aided Schools

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out in the *Official Report* a table giving details of each application for voluntary aided status received since 1979, with details of the religious denomination, if any, involved, the size and character of the school, whether boys, girls or mixed, and whether the application was approved or rejected.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Details of applications decided since January 1985 are as follows. Those for previous years could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Most applications have been made to establish new aided schools in place of voluntary schools which have been closed.

Proposls to establish voluntary aided schools

Local Education Authority	*Name of school*	*Denomination*	*Size*	*School type*	*Gender*	*Decision type*
Knowsley	New St. Dom/St. Columba's RC Comprehensive	RC	n/a	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Cleveland	New CE Aided Primary	C of E	n/a	Primary	Unknown	Approved
ILEA	New mixed Secondary	Non-denom	n/a	Secondary	Co-ed	Rejected
ILEA	New mixed Secondary	Non-denom	n/a	Secondary	Co-ed	Rejected
Gateshead	New St. Edmund Campion RC Comprehensive	RC	n/a	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Gateshead	New St. Thomas More RC Comprehensive	RC	n/a	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Surrey	New RC First and Middle	RC	n/a	Primary	Unknown	Approved
Leicestershire	New RC Primary	RC	n/a	Primary	Unknown	Approved
Derbyshire	New Secondary	Non-denom	n/a	Secondary	Unknown	Approved
Kent	New Primary	Non-denom	n/a	Primary	Unknown	Approved with modifications
Berkshire	New Ecumenical Middle	Other	n/a	Primary	Unknown	Approved
Staffordshire	New Primary	Non-denom	n/a	Primary	Unknown	Approved
Knowsley	New Voluntary Aided Comprehensive	Non-denom	n/a	Secondary	Unknown	Approved
Buckinghamshire	New RC Secondary	RC	n/a	Secondary	Unknown	Approved
Cheshire	New CE Primary	C of E	n/a	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Dorset	New CE Primary	C of E	n/a	Primary	Unknown	Approved
Enfield	Latymer All Saints Primary	C of E	n/a	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Bury	New Jewish Primary School	Jewish	240	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Manchester	New RC Primary	RC	n/a	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Bury	St. Monica's RC Secondary	RC	975	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Rochdale	New RC Secondary	RC	900	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Staffordshire	A New Primary School	Non-denom	210	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Coventry	Cardinal Wiseman RC Secondary	RC	1,500	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Oldham	New Mixed RC Secondary	RC	1,155	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Durham	Shildon St. John's CE Infant and Junior	C of E	370	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Cheshire	Winsford St. Joseph's RC Primary	RC	360	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Cambridgeshire	William Law C of E Primary, Wessington	C of E	420	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Berkshire	New Combined School	RC	420	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Berkshire	New Combined School	RC	270	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Enfield	New St. Ignatius RC Secondary	RC	n/a	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Dorset	Verwood CE Middle School	C of E	n/a	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
ILEA	Lubavitch House School	Jewish	n/a	Primary	Co-ed (segregated classes)	Rejected
St. Helens	New RC High School	RC	900	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
St. Helens	New RC High School	RC	900	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
St. Helens	New RC Sixth Form College	RC	375	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Sefton	New Primary School	C of E	350	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Bolton	New Mount St. Joseph/St. Augustine RC Secondary	RC	n/a	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved with modifications
Bolton	New Thornleigh/St. Cuthberts RC Secondary	RC	n/a	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved with modifications

Local Education Authority	Name of school	Denomination	Size	School type	Gender	Decision type
Hertfordshire	New Secondary School	RC	1,130	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Avon	All Saints CE Primary School	C of E	n/a	Primary	Co-ed	Rejected
Waltham Forest	St. George's RC Comprehensive	RC	1,000	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved with modifications
Leicesterhire	New Primary School	C of E	240	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Sefton	Savio RC High School	RC	1,050	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Salford	New Our Lady of Mount Carmel RC Secondary	RC	750	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved with modifications
Trafford	New RC Secondary School	RC	1,050	Secondary	Co-ed	Rejected
Lancashire	Our Lady's and St. John's RC High School	RC	900	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved with modifications
Lancashire	St. Bede's RC High School	RC	900	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved with modifications
North Tyneside	Wallsend CE Primary	C of E	240	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Berkshire	New St. Ethelbert's RC Combined School	RC	480	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Harrow	New St. George's First and Middle School	RC	560	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Dorset	New CE First School Shaftesbury	C of E	120	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Kent	New CE Primary School	C of E	224	Primary	Unknown	Approved with modifications
Isle of Wight	New Primary School	C of E	300	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Cleveland	New RC/CE Primary School	RC/C of E	180	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Wirral	New Comprehensive	RC	1,400	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Birmingham	New CE Secondary	C of E	600	Secondary	Single-sex	Rejected
Staffordshire	Great Haywood the Anson Primary	C of E	n/a	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Surrey	New Secondary School	RC	930	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Rochdale	New RC Secondary	RC	1,350	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved with modifications
Dudley	New Jesson's CE Primary	C of E	620	Primary	Co-ed	Rejected
Dudley	New CE Secondary School	C of E	750	Secondary	Co-ed	Rejected
Lancashire	New Preston St. Bernard's RC Primary	RC	280	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Lancashire	New Preston St. Maria Goretti RC Primary	RC	420	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Lancashire	New RC Primary School	RC	84	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Norfolk	New Primary School	C of E	80	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Lancashire	New Primary School	RC	315	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Lancashire	New Secondary	RC	900	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Lancashire	New Secondary	RC	900	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Lancashire	New Secondary	RC	900	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
South Tyneside	New Jarrow St. Bede's RC Primary	RC	240	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Hertfordshire	New CE Middle School	C of E	360	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Devon	New Pinhoe CE Combined	C of E	280	Primary	Co-ed	Approved with modifications
Norfolk	New CE Primary	C of E	80	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
North Tyneside	St. Thomas More RC Comprehensive	RC	1,000	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Cambridgeshire	New Inter-Church Secondary	Unknown	600	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Hampshire	New CE Aided Junior and Infant School	C of E	n/a	Primary	Unknown	Approved
Ealing	New Mixed High School	Non-denom	n/a	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Gloucestershire	New 11-18 Grammar School	Non-denom	n/a	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Durham	New Tow Law Infant and Junior	RC	n/a	Primary	Co-ed	Approved
Salford	New Pope John RC High	RC	n/a	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved
Knowsley	New RC Comprehensive School	RC	n/a	Secondary	Co-ed	Approved

Aberdeen University (Funding)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects the University Grants Committee to make a statement regarding the provision of transitional funding for Aberdeen university in the current and subsequent financial years.

Mr. Jackson: The University Grants Committee's initial allocations of recurrent grant to universities for 1988-89, and provisional allocations for 1989-90, were announced on 9 February. The provision of any additional transitional funding for Aberdeen is a matter for the UGC in the light of its continuing discussions with the university.

Axe Valley (Secondary Education)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to make a decision on the proposals from Devon county council on the reorganisation of secondary education in the Axe valley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The proposals are under consideration: my right hon. Friend will make a decision as soon as possible.

St. George's Medical School

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take steps to carry out an urgent inquiry into allegations of bias in the selection

of medical students at St. George's medical school; and if he will set up a general inquiry into discrimination against women and students from the ethnic minorities in selection for places in higher education.

Mr. Jackson: The Commission for Racial Equality has carried out an inquiry into the allegations regarding St. George's hospital medical school, and published a report on 25 February. The school accepts that the allegations of bias are proven and has revised its admissions procedures.

Admissions procedures are a matter for higher education institutions, within the law. My right hon. Friend considers that all institutions of higher education should monitor their applications processes to ensure that they are not acting in breach of their duties under Section 17 of the Race Relations Act 1976 by allowing either direct or indirect discrimination to take place. Discussions have already taken place with the relevent national admissions registries regarding possible monitoring of applicants to teacher training. The Department proposes to open discussions with the polytechnic central admissions system and with the Universities Central Council on Admissions on the possible introduction of such monitoring for their applicants.

My right hon. Friend intends also very shortly to issue a consultative document regarding the monitoring of enrolments by ethnic origin in those institutions covered by the further education statistical record, including the polytechnics and colleges sector of higher education. He hopes that the universities will introduce a parallel system.

My right hon. Friend has no evidence in general of discrimination against women, who constitute almost 50 per cent. of enrolments in higher education, a proportion which has increased in recent years.

My right hon. Friend is committed to the development of a higher education system open to all those who are able to benefit from it, irrespective of gender or ethnic origin. He is confident that higher education institutions in general fully share that commitment.

Inner London Education

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will indicate the number and the nature of responses from organisations and individuals involved in the field of adult education within inner London in response to his consultative document on the organisation of education within inner London, published in September 1987; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many responses to the consultation document issued on 11 September 1987 indicated support for the retention of the Inner London education authority in its present unitary form;

(3) if he will indicate the nature of responses from the churches within inner London to his document on the organisation of education within inner London, published in September 1987; and if he will make a statement;

(4) how many responses have been received since he issued his consultative document on the organisation of education in inner London on 11 September 1987; and how many of these relate to the inner London education authority in particular, and to education within inner London in general;

(5) if he will indicate what the views of voluntary groups working in the field of special education were on his consultative document on the organisation of education within inner London, published in September 1987; and if he will make a statement;

(6) if he will indicate the numbers of parents expressing concern about the future of nursery education within inner London in response to his consultative document on the organisation of education within inner London, published in September 1987; and if he will make a statement;

(7) if he will indicate the response of business interests, in particular the London Chamber of Commerce, to his consultation document issued on 11 September 1987 on the organisation of education in inner London; and if he will make a statement;

(8) if he will indicate the views expressed by voluntary organisations within inner London in response to his consultative document on the organisation of education within inner London published in September 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The Department received some 5,500 responses on the proposals contained in the consultative document on the organisation of education in inner London, issued on 11 September 1987. Copies of the responses, other than those from individuals, have been placed in the Library of the House. My right hon. Friend has made it clear that we do not intend to publish analyses of these responses.

Horniman Museum

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what additional resources will be made available to the London borough of Lewisham in the event of the Horniman museum being transferred to the borough;

(2) if he intends to bring forward proposals to safeguard the Londonwide status of the Horniman museum;

(3) what information he has on the average number of visitors to the Horniman museum over the last two years and the number of Inner London education authority schoolchildren who made visits during the same period and the division from which they came.

Mr. Dunn: My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) made it clear in the debate on the Inner London education authority on 17 February at column 1069 that the Government will be considering the arrangements that are most appropriate for securing the future of the Horniman museum. We will wish to consider all the possibilities. Information about visitors to the museum is published by the Inner London education authority in its annual report.

TRANSPORT

M40 Extension

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, *Official Report*, 23 February column *153*, on the percentage of traffic using the M1 which will use the M40, what is the basis for his Department's calculation that a two-lane M40 extension will be adequate to meet expected traffic flows.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The M40 motorway extension between Oxford and Birmingham is proposed to be built as a dual three-lane motorway except for the section

between Waterstock and Wendlebury, where dual two-lanes are proposed. The forecast flows between Waterstock and Wendlebury in 2,006 are in the range 30,000 to 38,000 vehicles per day. This is well below the desirable maximum flow of 54,000 vehicles per day for a dual two-lane motorway. We await the inspector's report on the public inquiry into the proposals for the Waterstock to Wendlebury section.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 23 February, *Official Report*, column 153, what is the evidence on which he bases his estimate that between 11 per cent. and 17 per cent. of traffic presently using the M1 will use the M40 when it is complete.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The estimates of the traffic effects of building the M40 extension, including the transfer of traffic from the M1, were based on forecasts derived from the Oxford to Birmingham route traffic model developed by the Department for use in designing the scheme.

Travel Concessions

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether, in the light of recent United Kingdom and European Community legislation forbidding sex discrimination, he will make an order under section 93(7)(*f*) of the Transport Act 1985 that would empower local authorities to grant travel concessions to men and women on a non-discriminatory basis.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend has no plans to change the categories of persons eligible to receive travel concessions under the powers conferred on him by section 93(7)(*f*) of the Transport Act 1985.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, for every EEC country, the vehicle excise duty or its equivalent, for (*a*) a 1,000 cc private car and (*b*) a 50-seat coach.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In the United Kingdom, the vehicle excise duty for all private cars is £100, and for a 50-seat coach £84. Information is not available in a comparable form for other EEC states, some of which tax vehicles by reference to unladen weight or horse power rather than engine or seat capacity.

Drigg (Development)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to make additional transport infrastructure investment available in the Drigg area of West Cumbria, following the decision last year to make Drigg Britain's only low-level radioactive waste site.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We were already planning several major and minor schemes to deal with problem points on the A595/6 trunk route which serves Drigg. We shall take account of the volume of Drigg traffic as necessary in preparing these and any future proposals.

Investment in local roads and rail access are matters for Cumbria county council and British Rail respectively

Roads (Capital Allocations)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the total capital allocation for highway work allotted to London boroughs and the Greater London council for each year between 1983 and 1987.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The total for each financial year is as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1983-84	91·0
1984-85	72·0
1985-86	104·5
1986-87	104·0
1987-88	108·8

The figures up to and including 1986-87 include provision for parking. Expenditure requirements from 1986-87 onwards have been affected by the trunking of 72 miles of roads.

Road Safety

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many responses he has received from local authorities about the leaflet 1/87 "Measures to Control Traffic for the Benefit of Residents, Cyclists and Pedestrians"; and if he will make a statement on progress in implementing its proposals to reduce road deaths.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We received 16 written responses and a similar number of telephone inquiries from local authorities to traffic advisory unit leaflet 1/87. The main purpose of the leaflet was to publicise and exchange information on ways of controlling traffic in residential areas in the interests of improved safety and environmental improvement. Implementation is primarily a matter for local authorities.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish formal responses to replies received to the document "Road Safety: The Next Steps"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Government's commitment to seek to reduce casualties by a third, and the report's range of ideas and suggestions for consideration have been generally welcomed. Discussions are continuing with a wide range of bodies on many aspects commented on in their memoranda, letters and at meetings with the Department.

Action is being pressed ahead on urgent items such as vehicle safety improvements, research on road behaviour and attitudes, road engineering features and measures to improve the skills of young motorcyclists.

We propose to take stock later this year of the directions and priorities that have emerged from the consultative process.

M63 (Noise Insulation)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of progress in providing insulation for the homes and properties eligible for this assistance as a result of stage 4, junctions 3 to 5, of the improvements to the M63.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Insulation of homes which qualify because of construction noise is under way. When

the 90 or so houses in the priority category have been dealt with, we shall turn as quickly as possible to the 340 properties qualifying because of future traffic noise increases.

Ferries

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to defray the cost of the weighing of freight before it is loaded on to class II and class II(A) roll-on/roll-off ferries in places which do not at present have weighing facilities.

Mr. David Mitchell: My Department's consultative document No. 7, issued on 23 December 1987, proposed the individual weighing of all lorries before loading on to class II and II(A) roll-on/roll-off passenger ferries. Some of the responses to the Document drew attention to the cost of compliance with this proposal particularly in remote areas. These responses are now being considered.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Airbus

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he has received representations from British Aerospace or any of the Airbus partners or their Governments that additional launch aid may prove necessary for the A330-A340 programmes following the decline in the United States dollar; and whether such concerns have been aired in recent meetings between the representatives of these Governments.

Mr. Atkins: The United Kingdom Government have agreed to provide up to £450 million in launch aid for the Airbus A330-A340 programmes. Senior representatives of British Aerospace have discussed with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster the effects on their Airbus business of the decline in the value of the dollar. They have not made any request for further launch aid for the A330-A340. Representatives of the United Kingdom Government have not discussed such a possibility at recent meetings with other Governments.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the implications of the United States dollar's fall for the prospects of economic and commercial viability of the A330-A340 projects.

Mr. Atkins: A full assessment of the A330-A340's economic and commercial viability, including the possible effects of exchange rate fluctuations, was made by the Government prior to its offer to British Aerospace of up to £450 million launch aid for these programmes.

Consumer Goods

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of caravans and parts (786.11,89), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information can be found in the "Business Monitor" series — copies of which are available in the Library. Sales data are in PQ 3522/3 for 1981 to 1986 and PQ 381.2 for earlier years. The percentage exported and import penetration figures can be found in MQ 12 (previously M 12).

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of electric lamp bulbs (778.21), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information is as follows:

£ million

	Sales[1]	*Imports (cif)*	*Exports (fob)*
1975	44	8	12
1976	51	12	17
1977	63	17	21
1978	75	20	22
1979	82	20	22
1980	87	16	23
1981	75	18	16
1982	76	27	16
1983	79	29	12
1984	79	32	13
1985	87	37	15
1986	94	39	16

[1] Sales data relate primarily to units in the United Kingdom with a minimum employment of 25 up to 1980 and of 75 thereafter.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of car radios (762.1), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken up by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information can be found in "Business Monitor" PQ 365.2, "Broadcast receiving and sound reproducing equipment", for the fourth quarter of the years 1975 to 1977. This publication is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of electric kettles (775.86), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken up by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: Information is available in the "Business Monitors" PQ 368 — Electrical appliances primarily for domestic use for 1975 to 1980 — and PQ 3460 — Domestic electrical appliances for 1981 to 1986 for the fourth quarter of each year. These publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of electric shavers (775.4), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken up by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The information is not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of compact disc players (762.80), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken up by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The information is not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output

of music centres (762.8), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken up by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information for 1981 to 1987 can be found in the fourth quarter issue of each year of "Business Monitor" PQ 3454, "Electronic consumer goods and miscellaneous equipment" (previously PQ 365.2, "Broadcast receiving and reproducing equipment"). This publication is available from the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of loadspeakers (764.2), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken up by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information is published in "Business Monitor" PQ 3453, "Electronic sub-assemblies and active components" (formerly PA 364, "Radio and electronic components"), for the fourth quarter of each year. This publication is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of clock radios (762.2,8), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken up by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information is shown in the table:

Clock Radios

	£ million 1979
Sales[1]	0·3
Exports (fob)	0·6
Imports (cif)	26·5

[1] Sales data relate primarily to units in the United Kingdom with a minimum employment of 25.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of amplifiers (764.2,92), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken up by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information is as follows:

Audio Frequency Amplifiers

£ millions

	Sales[1]	Exports (fob)	Imports (cif)
1979	4·2	11·1	16·4
1980	5·2	9·3	17·7
1981	6·4	n.a.	22·4
1982	6·5	8·4	19·4
1984	4·6	8·6	19·3
1985	5·6	12·2	19·4
1986	6·5	10·0	14·7

[1] Sales data relate primarily to units in the United Kingdom with a minimum employment of 25.
n.a. Not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of alarm clocks (885·12 + 885·22), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken up by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information is as follows:

Alarm Clocks

£ millions

	1975	1976	1977	1978
Sales[1]	6	7	7	8
Imports (cif)	5	5	5	9
Exports (fob)	2	2	2	2

[1] Sales data relate primarily to units in the United Kingdom with a minimum employment of 25.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what was the total domestic output of automatic data processing machine parts (759·9), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken up by imports in each year since 1975;

(2) what was the total domestic output of automatic data processing machines, systems and units (752·0), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information is published in the "Business Monitor" PQ 3302, "Electronic data-processing equipment" (formerly PQ 366, "Electronic computers") for the fourth quarter of each year, which is available from the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of domestic electric cookers and microwaves (775.86), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information is as follows:

Domestic electric cookers and microwave ovens

£ million

	Sales[1]	Imports	Exports
1975	44	2	3
1976	54	5	4
1977	65	5	5
1978	79	23	8
1979	89	17	9
1980	98	18	9
1981	104	54	9
1982	98	57	8
1983	129	111	8
1984	143	203	10
1986	179	257	20

[1] Sales data relate primarily to units in the United Kingdom with a minimum employment of 25 up to 1980 and of 100 thereafter.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of computer disks, tapes and cartridges (898,31,32), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: I regret that this information is not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what was the total domestic output of motor cycles (785.1), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken up by imports in each year since 1975;

(2) what was the total domestic output of bicycles (785.2), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information can be found in the "Business Monitor" series — copies of which are

available in the Library. Sales data can be found in PQ 3633/34/50 for 1981 to 1986 and PQ 382 for earlier years. The percentage exported and import penetration figures can be found in MQ 12 (previously M 12).

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of ball point pens, pencils and parts (859.21), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information for SITC code 895.21 is as follows:

Sales, Exports and Imports of the Products of SITC 895.21 (Pens, Propelling Pencils and Parts)

	Sales £ million	*Exports £ million*	*Imports £ million*	*Apparent consumption £ million*	*Exports sales ratio Percentage*	*Import penetration Percentage*
1975	25·3	7·0	12·5	30·8	28	41
1976	29·1	11·0	17·6	35·7	38	49
1977	37·2	15·1	22·9	45·0	41	51
1978	49·0	19·3	24·8	54·5	39	46
1979	52·6	21·0	29·9	61·5	40	49
1980	60·7	25·9	32·9	67·7	43	49
1981	46·0	29·4	32·1	48·7	64	66
1982	35·7	22·3	38·1	51·5	62	74
1983	43·8	38·6	41·9	47·1	88	89
1984	—	53·7	55·0		—	—
1985	54·5	43·7	56·6	67·4	80	84
1986	68·9	44·0	58·9	83·8	64	70
1986[1]	47·6	31·0	40·9	57·5	65	71
1987[1]	55·2	36·7	51·3	69·8	66	73

[1] January to September.

Sources:

Business Monitor PQ495 (up to and including the fourth quarter of 1982) and PQ4954 (from the first quarter of 1983).

Overseas Trade Statistics for exports and imports.

Definitions:

Sales: Propelling and other mechanical pencils, and parts of fountain and stylographic pens, propelling and other mechanical pencils are excluded for the fourth quarter of 1983.

Figures are not available for 1984 because of disclosure.

Rolling ball pens are included from 1986 and refills for rolling ball pens are excluded throughout.

Exports and imports: SITC 895.21.

Coverage: Sales figures relate only to firms employing 25 or more people up to and including 1980 and to firms employing 75 or more people from 1981. Therefore, the exports/sales ratios and import penetration figures are likely to overstate the true position.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of electric food mixers and processors (775.73), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The information is not available.

Patent Royalties

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish the latest figures for spending on patent royalties for the United Kingdom and the other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries.

Mr. Maude: No information is available on expenditure on patent royalties within the United Kingdom, but figures are compiled and published annually on the United Kingdom's overseas royalties and similar transactions. An article in *British Business* of 4 September 1987, page 24, gives the most recent data.

Information compiled by the OECD from reports by national authorities on foreign expenditure on intellectual property by OECD countries is given in the table. Information on expenditure within each country on intellectual property is not available for OECD countries.

OECD countries: Foreign expenditure on intellectual property[1] in 1985

	US $ million
United Kingdom	598
United States	847
Japan	2,361
Germany	1,207
France	979
Italy	1,533
Canada	[2]753
Austria	115
Belgium/Luxembourg	388
Denmark	161
Finland	107
Netherlands	546
Norway	76
Portugal	33
Spain	236
Sweden	285
Australia	256

Source: OECD

[1] The amounts relate to foreign transactions in patent royalties, licences, trade marks and copyrights. There are variations in coverage between countries.

[2] Relates to 1984.

London Regional Passenger Committee

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if, pursuant to the reply of 18 February to the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett),

Official Report, column *745-46*, he will list in the *Official Report* the occupations of each of the 28 members of the London regional passenger committee.

Mr. Butcher: The information, which in some cases may have changed since appointment, is as follows:

Dr. E. C. Midwinter *(Chairman)*
Director of the Centre for Policy on Aging.
Mr. S. J. Beavan
Research Director.
Mrs. B. E. Carroll-Brown
Civil Servant (retired).
Mr. R. J. Caton
Secretary of a national charity.
Mr. D. Chaney
Switchboard Operator.
Mrs. H. M. Fogg
Housewife and part-time English language teacher.
Mr. R. P. Govindia
Education Officer.
Miss J. Harvey
Charity worker (retired).
M. C. S. Heaps
Solicitor.
Mr. M. J. Kilker
Postman.
Miss F. C. Lawson
Local Authority Housing Needs Manager (retired).
Mr. L. A. Mack
Employee of Methodist Church.
Mrs. D. Manley
Employed in publishing.
Mrs. S. C. May
National Treasurer of Women's Institute.
Mrs. J. Phillips
Housewife.
Mrs. F. M. P. Rea
General Secretary, national charity.
Mr. M. J. Seddon
Data Processing Executive.
Mr. D. J. H. Senior, OBE
Deputy Director, London Chamber of Commerce.
Mr. G. P. Theobald
Company Director (semi-retired).
Mrs. J. Williams
Secretary at a national charity.
Ms. M. Winterbotham
Housewife, previously employed by local authority Health Council.
Mrs. K. Wood
Speech Therapist.

Since the list of membership was first recorded in the *Official Report* at column *746* one member of the Committee—Mr. S. Bradshaw—has resigned.

Exports

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish a table showing the value of exports from each standard planing region of the United Kingdom to the other member states of the European Community.

Mr. Alan Clark: Data of value of exports on a regional basis are not processed.

House of Fraser (Holdings) plc

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether the inspectors appointed to investigate the affairs of House of Fraser (Holdings) plc have been made aware of a possible breach by Lonrho plc of section 204 to 206 of the Companies Act 1985 in relation to share dealings in House of Fraser plc during the period from the date of the inspector's interim report into share dealings in House of Fraser to the date of its acquisition by Al Sayed Investment and Trust (UK) Ltd.

Mr. Maude: The inspectors are aware of representations made in relation to an alleged breach of sections 204 to 206 of the Companies Act 1985.

Consarc (Exports)

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about Her Majesty's Government's involvement in the export by the Consarc company to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of furnaces capable of making carbon carbon for nuclear war heads.

Mr. Alan Clark: In February 1985 the Government amended the Export of Goods (Control) Order to prevent the export of some equipment needed to complete a contract undertaken by Consarc in the USSR. The action followed an assessment that the Soviet plant might be used to manufacture carbon-carbon for strategic uses. The equipment to be supplied under the contract was not at the time subject to multilateraly agreed COCOM controls and therefore not controlled by national export licensing of the United kingdom or other COCOM partners. Subsequently, COCOM partners agreed to amend their controls similarly.

Outward Direct Investment

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the totals of outward direct investment by Britain in the Third world and by the Third world in Britain in each of the last five years.

Mr. Alan Clark: The latest available information was given in my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry's reply to the hon. Member on 4 November 1987 at columns *717-720*. Information for 1986 will be published shortly.

Belgian Textile Industry

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the investigation by the European Commission of the Belgian Government's proposed £34 million aid scheme for its textile industry.

Mr. Alan Clark: The European Commission has yet to announce its decision concerning the proposed aid.

Turkish Acrylic Yarn

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will give the level of imports of acrylic yarn from Turkey for each of the years 1985, 1986 and 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: United Kingdom imports of acrylic yarn from Turkey were: 1985, £1·6 million; 1986, £8·1 million; and for the 11 months to November 1987, £9·8 million.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has as to how many workers employed by United Kingdom acrylic spinners are on short-time working as a result of imports of acrylic yarn from Turkey; if he has received any representations on this subject; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I understand that no official statistics are available. However, I have received information from the industry that there is now extensive short-time working in this sector. I have received many representations from hon. Members and the industry, and I met representatives of the Confederation of British Wool Textiles on 9 February. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) on 26 February 1988.

Mr. Steel: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy to encourage the European Economic Community to place greater restrictions on imports of Turkish acrylic yarns.

Mr. Alan Clark: There is nothing I can add to the Answer which I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) on 26 February 1988.

Regional Aid

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will give the aid received in each of the last three years by textile companies, man-made fibre companies and clothing companies under the following categories *(a)* regional development grants, *(b)* regional selective assistance and *(c)* other assistance, under the Industrial Development Act 1982; and how many of the companies involved had less than 500 employees.

Mr. Atkins: Payments to these industries[1] in the last three calendar years were as follows:

£ million

	1985	*1986*	*1987*
Regional development grants (RDG)[2]	8·0	21·5	11·3
Regional selective assistance	7·2	9·4	9·7
Other schemes[3]	0·5	0·2	0·4

[1] Payments have been categorised by reference to the 1968 Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) in respect of the original RDG scheme (textiles, including man-made fibres—order XIII; clothing and footwear—order XV). For all other schemes of assistance including the revised RDG scheme data has been provided by reference to the 1980 SIC (textiles—class 43, man-made fibres—class 26 and clothing—class 45, excluding footwear).

[2] Consists of original and revised RDG payments.

[3] Other assistance has been defined as payments under the Support for Major Projects, Innovation Linked Investment, and Advanced Manufacturing Technology schemes.

Information on the proportion of these payments made to companies with fewer than 500 employees is not available.

GATT

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the progress of the general agreement on tariffs and trade working party on trade and workers' rights.

Mr. Alan Clark: The proposal by the United States Administration for the establishment of a GATT working party to examine the relationship between labour standards and trade was discussed at the GATT council on 4 February. No conclusions were reached. Informal discussions are continuing to find a consensus solution, but opposition remains widespread, particularly from developing countries.

Post Office (Delivery Service)

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will meet the chairman of the Post Office, to raise the subject of increasing complaints about the deterioration in the Post Office's delivery service.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend has discussed the quality of the Post Office's service regularly at his meetings with the chairman. We agree with the chairman that the service needs to be improved and are in no doubt about his commitment to improve it.

Commercial Arbitration

Mr. Page: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress the departmental advisory committee on arbitration is making in its consideration of the UNCITRAL model law on international commercial arbitration and the Arbitration Acts.

Mr. Maude: The departmental advisory committee on arbitration put out a consultative document on the UNCITRAL (United Nations Commission on International Trade Law) model law on international commercial arbitration in October last year. Responses are presently being received. It is hoped that the committee will be able to put forward a recommendation on the model law in the near future. The committee has already reported on a number of other matters concerning arbitration law and practice. I have arranged for copies of the committee's recommendations to date to be placed in the Library.

Child-resistant Closures

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will include bleach in the regulations requiring child-resistant closures for certain types of household products.

Mr. Butcher *[holding answer 26 February 1988]:* I am not prepared to extend the Child Resistant Packaging (Safety) Regulations to cover household bleach, since the best medical advice available from leading paediatricians shows that it rarely if ever causes actual injury to children who ingest it. Indeed, the Scobie committee, which made the case for child-resistant closures for hazardous household chemicals, recommended them for bleach only with over 10 per cent. active chlorine. All household bleaches contain less than this.

Coal Imports

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what would be the cost to the balance of payments of closing the Scottish coalfield and importing the equivalent amount of coal.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have been asked to reply.

Colliery closures are a matter for British Coal. But the best defence against the situation described is for the industry to produce reliable supplies of coal at prices which are competitive on the world market.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Cheque Encashment Service

30. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he has any proposals to change the

arrangements for the cheque encashment service at the Post Office in the Palace of Westminster; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: There are at present no proposals to alter the long-standing arrangements for cheque encashment at the post offices in the Members' Lobby and the Central Lobby. However, following representations from the Post Office, the Services Committee recommended on 2 February that the fee for cashing non-standard "club" cheques should be increased to £1·25 from 1 April 1988. Normal cheques will continue to be charged at the present rate of 20p per cheque. The increased fee for club cheques was approved by the House of Commons Commission on 8 February 1988, on the basis of the long-standing policy that Members and others should pay the going rate for this service.

Veal

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Lord President of the Council what steps he takes to satisfy himself that no veal sold in House of Commons restaurants has come from calves killed by methods of ritual slaughter.

Mr. Wakeham: I am satisfied that the General Manager of the Refreshment Department, who has responsibility for purchasing veal for the restaurants in the House, has been given the necessary assurances by his suppliers to this effect.

DEFENCE

Consultants

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the cost to his Department of employing management or computer consultants for each year from 1983 to 1987.

Mr. Sainsbury: Figures for expenditure by the Ministry of Defence on management and computer consultancies are as follows:

	£ million
1984-85	2·0
1985-86	3·8
1986-87	14·5
1987-88	[1]14·8

[1] Estimate

Figures for earlier years cannot be produced without disproportionate effort.

Stand-off Nuclear Missile

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the current discussions on the possible development of a stand-off nuclear missile envisage the use of existing warheads; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Any weapon system acquired by the United Kingdom as a successor to the free fall bombs which currently provide our independent sub-strategic nuclear capability, would be armed with a new British nuclear warhead. However, no decisions on this have yet been taken.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent the current discussions on the possible development of a nuclear stand-off missile flow from the Montebello decisions on the modernisation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's nuclear inventory; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The development of a tactical air to surface missile for NATO's aircraft was among the measures recommended by SACEUR in his 1985 proposals for implementing the Montebello decision.

Ionising Radiation

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence further to his reply of 25 February to the hon. Member for Davyhulme in regard to the levels of ionising radiation to which members of Her Majesty's forces were exposed in the course of the British atmospheric nuclear weapons test and experimental programme *(a)* what proportion of those participating were issued with personal dosimeters, *(b)* what was the highest dose to which any individual was exposed, *(c)* how this level compared with the maximum permitted dosage and *(d)* how this level compares with the current maximum permitted dosage.

Mr. Sainsbury: About a quarter of participants were issued with dosimeters. The highest exposure recorded, for two individuals, was 30R, equivalent in modern dosimetric terms to 200 milliSieverts effective dose equivalent. The current United Kingdom limit for radiation workers is 50 mSv per annum. ICRP recommends that planned special exposures above the annual limit should not exceed 250 mSv in the lifetime of any individual. The most recent NRPB guidance suggests that the risks associated with an average of 15 mSv per annum, corresponding to about 300 mSv in a working career of 20 years, are not unacceptable, although it recommends that all exposure should be "as low as reasonably practicable", the ALARP principle.

International Commission of Historians

Mr. Rhodes James: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has taken steps to assess whether the report of the independent international commission of historians is consistent with the earlier findings of his Department.

Mr. Ian Stewart: As announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 16 February, the Ministry of Defence, in conjunction with other interested Departments, is conducting a review of the results of the investigation which it carried out in 1986 into the fate of captured British service men and the involvement, if any, of the then Lieutenant Waldheim in the light of the report of the independent international commission of historians. The commission had access to a wider range of sources than was available to the team which carried out the investigation in 1986, and we therefore wish to reconsider the question taking account of the commission's findings.

It is our intention that the review, which will re-examine all aspects relating to the fate of the captured British service men, should be as thorough and comprehensive as possible. Anyone who has concrete evidence that might be relevant to the review is encouraged to submit it to the Ministry of Defence for examination by the review team.

The review will be pursued as quickly as is consistent with proper consideration of the evidence and the need for accuracy. When it had been completed, it is the intention that a report should be published.

I am grateful to Professor Sir Harry Hinsley, the master of St. John's college, Cambridge, for agreeing to scrutinise the results of the review in order to ensure its objectivity and thoroughness.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked the review team to report to me on the conduct of the review. I very much hope that anyone who has information to give will do so without delay so that the review can be completed as soon as possible.

Volunteer and Reserve Forces

Mr. Mates: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is yet in a position to make a further statement on his Department's consideration of the outstanding recommendations of the National Employer Liaison Committee for the Volunteer and Reserve Forces.

Mr. Freeman: Careful consideration has been given to the central recommendation made by the National Employer Liaison Committee that a major publicity campaign should be set in hand covering a number of years to win and maintain employers' support for the volunteer reserves. I am now able to announce that this recommendation has been accepted and work is now proceeding on its implementation.

Red Cross Sign

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the use of the Red Cross sign for party political purposes, by the Labour party in a pamphlet about the National Health Service; and if he will instigate immediate proceedings to protect the rights to the use thereof residing with his Department.

Mr. Freeman: On 17 February 1988, the British Red Cross Society drew to the attention of my Department a pamphlet and a leaflet published by the Labour party about the National Health Service which appeared to bear the Red Cross emblem or an emblem closely resembling it. Under the terms of the Geneva conventions, Her Majesty's Government are under an obligation to take measures to prevent unauthorised use of the Red Cross emblem or any sign or designation which constitutes an imitation of it. The Geneva Conventions Act 1957 makes it an offence for any person to use the Red Cross emblem without the authority of the Defence Council, or, without the authority of the Board of Trade, any design so nearly resembling it as to be capable of being mistaken for it. As no such authorities have been given, the matter has been referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Army Medical Board

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what safeguards the Army has to prevent false information being given to the Army medical board.

Mr. Freeman: The Army medical board considers both the clinical assessment and information provided by the patient. The clinical assessment may be confirmed by a second opinion, where this is considered appropriate, by the doctor treating the patient.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which type of Army medical board sat on the case of Captain (retired) Fred Holroyd in June 1975.

Mr. Freeman: No medical board was held on Captain (Retd) F. Holroyd in June 1975. However, a full medical board was held on 1 July 1975, following a special confidential report written in June 1975.

Castledillon (Troop Deployments)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if a Royal Engineer survey troop or a Northern Ireland training and advisory team was stationed at Castledillon in 1974-75.

Mr. Freeman: A Royal Engineer survey troop was stationed at Castledillon at that time. There was no Northern Ireland training and advisory team stationed there.

Northern Ireland Training and Advisory Team

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the role and composition of the Northern Ireland training and advisory team.

Mr. Freeman: There are two Northern Ireland training and advisory teams responsible for advising and assisting in the training of all units due to deploy to Northern Ireland in the internal security role; a team of 41 officers and men for units of the United Kingdom Land Forces and a team of 43 for units of the British Army of the Rhine.

Captain Holroyd (Allegations)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the special investigation branch of the Royal Military Police carried out their investigation into the allegations of Captain (retired) Fred Holroyd; what conclusions were reached; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave the hon. Member on 8 February 1988, at column 83.

Service Personnel (Downgrading)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 1987, *Official Report*, column *311*, he will specify the exact regulations under which the downgrading of Army service men and women may be recommended.

Mr. Freeman: The regulations under which medical downgrading of Army personnel may be recommended is contained in the following Service publications: "A Joint Service System of Medical Classification 1976" (JSP 346); The PULHEEMS Administrative Pamphlet 1987; Regulations for Army Medical Services 1975; Queens Regulations For the Army 1975 and where relevant, the Army Commissioning Regulations 1981.

Medical Reports (False Information)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what safeguards there are to prevent false information being given in non-adverse medical reports.

Mr. Freeman: The terms "adverse" or "non-adverse" are inappropriate to medical reports. The medical report is exclusively a clinical summary of the patient's condition which recommends an appropriate fitness/health grading. It does not comment upon the character or ability of the individual to perform his duties.

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment (Calculations)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, in the light of the recent figures for unemployment in Durham compiled by the unemployment unit, a copy of which has been sent to him, he has any plans to review his Department's method of calculating those figures; and if he will made a statement.

Mr. Lee: I have no such plans. The count of claimants at unemployment benefit offices remains the only reasonable means of obtaining monthly unemployment figures, including figures for local areas such as Durham.

YTS

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he has made of the number of YTS places needed in order to ensure that there will be enough suitable places for every individual in every area; and if he plans to provide more places than there will be entrants to ensure that entrants have a choice of places.

Mr. Cope: The Government have given an undertaking that a YTS place will be made available for all 16 and 17-year-olds who want one. The Manpower Services Commission will provide 545,000 YTS places in 1988-89. This figure is over 100,000 more than the expected number of YTS trainees, and sufficient to ensure that young people do not necessarily have to take the first place offered to them.

YTS (Leeds)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people under the age of 18 years in the Leeds, West constituency and in the Leeds metropolitan district council area, will be offered a YTS place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: In 1988-89, about 2,400 young people in the Leeds metropolitan district area are expected to be offered a place on YTS. A separate figure for Leeds, West is not readily available.

The Government have given an undertaking that a YTS place will be made available for all young people under the age of 18 years who want one.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment by what percentage January's unemployment figures have changed in each region of the United Kingdom over the last *(a)* year, *(b)* two years, *(c)* three years and *(d)* four years.

Mr. Lee: The following information is available from the Library. The table shows in percentage terms, the change in the numbers of unemployed claimants, excluding school leavers, adjusted for discontinuity and seasonality, in each standard economic planning region of the United Kingdom, over the periods requested by January 1988.

Region	*Percentage change over:* *One year*	*Two years*	*Three years*	*Four years*
South East	−23·1	−24·6	−22·6	−17·2
(Greater London)	(−18·3)	(−18·9)	(−15·7)	(−9·3)
East Anglia	−25·4	−25·9	−21·6	−18·3
South West	−20·7	−22·8	−19·9	−13·5
West Midlands	−19·2	−21·4	−21·5	−19·4
East Midlands	−17·5	−18·2	−17·0	−11·5
Yorkshire and Humberside	−15·8	−16·6	−12·3	−7·0
North West	−15·5	−17·5	−16·9	−14·9
North	−14·0	−17·4	−15·9	−10·8
Wales	−16·3	−21·1	−19·0	−13·5
Scotland	−12·2	−8·3	−5·6	−2·5
Great Britain	−18·1	−19·4	−17·5	−13·3
Northern Ireland	−7·1	−1·4	4·9	5·6
United Kingdom	−17·6	−18·7	−16·7	−12·5

Employment Service

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of the new employment service.

Mr. Lee: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), on 28 January, at column *333*.

Since then, the Government have set out in the recent White Paper, "Training for Employment", on priorities for the Employment Service; in particular to help unemployed people, and especially long-term unemployed people, to get back into work. An important part of this task will be to serve as a gateway to the new training for employment programme through jobcentre applications and restart interviews.

The Government have identified the employment service as a possible candidate as a departmental agency under the approach described in the efficiency unit report "Improving Management in Government — The Next Steps". We shall be looking closely at how agency status for the employment service could help to improve efficiency in the use of resources and in the delivery of services to the public.

Tourism (North-West) England

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met the chairman of the British Tourist Authority to discuss the promotion of tourism in the north-west of England.

Mr. Lee I have met the chairman of the British Tourist Authority a number of times in the past few months to discuss matters relating to the promotion of tourism in all parts of the country.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

ANC and SWAPO

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends meeting representatives of *(a)* the African National Congress of South Africa or *(b)* the South West Africa People's Organisation of Namibia.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend has no present plans to do so.

Western European Union

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the next meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Western European Union will take place; and what guidelines are to be discussed on co-location and the future work of the Western European Union.

Mr. Eggar: The next ministerial Council of the Western European Union will take place in the Hague on 18-19 April. Our approach to the issue of co-location remains as set out in my right hon. and learned Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) on 5 November 1987. The meeting will consider how to implement the platform on European security interests which was adopted at the last ministerial meeting.

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions have been taken and what statements have been made, by the Council of Ministers of the Western European Union, in response to the exchange of views on European security between the presidential committee of the Western European Union and the committee of the supreme soviet of the Soviet Union in Moscow; and what proposals there are to further these exchanges of views in Paris.

Mr. Eggar: The visit to Moscow in April 1987 by a delegation from the Western European Union Assembly was not discussed by the Western European Union ministerial Council at its meetings in that month or in October. It is for the Assembly itself, not for the Governments of WEU member states, to decide whether and how to pursue the contacts made during it.

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of the Western European Union, in the light of changing nuclear defence policy, and on the part it has to play in the verification processes.

Mr. Eggar: There is no change in our nuclear defence policy, nor in that of the North Atlantic Alliance. The Western European Union does not have a role to play in verification of nuclear arms control agreements reached between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Weapons Limitation

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to examine the evolution of relations between Eastern and Western Europe and to report to Parliament at regular intervals on satisfactory systems of verification, the balance in negotiations in the context of the three baskets and the progress towards an early conclusion of an agreement on the limitation of conventional weapons and chemical weapons.

Mr. Eggar: It is already policy to keep East-West relations continually under review, and we report regularly to the House on the topics mentioned.

Belize

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the United States Government about the sudden ending of military assistance to the Government of Belize; and with what result.

Mr. Eggar: We have expressed our concern to the United States Government about the ending of the United States military assistance programme to Belize.

Antarctica

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy, in the current New Zealand discussions on the future of Antarctica, to give scientists a central role in future policy forming and decision taking in relation to Antarctica.

Mr. Eggar: The Antarctic treaty meeting in question was the most recent round of the negotiations aimed at establishing an Antarctic minerals regime. Within the treaty and the successful system of agreements which has developed from it, we and our treaty partners seek independent expert scientific advice (eg from the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research) as part of the regular policy-formulation process. The minerals regime currently being negotiated would continue that practice, through the establishment of an advisory committee to ensure the availability of relevant scientific, and other, advice at all important stages.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for the assessment of environmental impact in Antarctica.

Mr. Eggar: At the XIVth Antarctic treaty consultative meeting (Rio de Janeiro, 5-16 October 1987) the United Kingdom tabled a recommendation reflecting work already done by the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research and by the United Nations environment programme. This recommendation, which was adopted, sets out guidelines for carrying out environmental impact assessments in advance of any scientific and logistic activities likely to have a significant impact on the Antarctic environment. This is already the practice of the British Antarctic Survey.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to protect unique life forms in Antarctica.

Mr. Eggar: Protection of all Antarctic life forms is already provided for under the Antarctic treaty agreed measures for the conservation of Antarctic flora and fauna 1964, the convention for the conservation of antarctic seals 1972, and the convention for the conservation of antarctic

marine living resources 1980. Both conventions have been ratified by the United Kingdom, while effect was given to the agreed measures by the Antarctic Treaty Act 1967.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the need for tighter controls for the preservation of the ecosystem of Antarctica.

Mr. Eggar: Since the inception of the Antarctic treaty in 1959 the United Kingdom has been a prime mover in negotiating a progressive series of environmental protection measures for Antarctica. We continue to be guided by scientific advice as to any necessary precautionary measures concerning the preservation of the Antarctic ecosystem. We shall be taking full account of such advice in our preparations for this year's Antarctic living resources meetings.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of disturbance in Antarctica on the regulatory efect on the global climate.

Mr. Eggar: As part of the international programme of environmental research in Antarctica, scientists from the British Antarctic Survey and the Meteorological Office have been actively involved with other Antarctic treaty countries in experimental studies of the Antarctic ozone hole, most recently in September 1987. The results of their studies will be presented at an international meeting in Colorado in May.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for legal safeguards for mining in Antarctica.

Mr. Eggar: The Antarctic treaty 1959 makes no mention of minerals resources, but the consultative parties, including the United Kingdom, have recognised that unregulated minerals activity would be undesirable. We are consequently participating in the negotiation of an Antarctic minerals regime which would ensure that if minerals activity ever takes place it should do so within a legal framework of operational control and environmental protection.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the regulatory committee of 10 nations about the future of mining in Antarctica.

Mr. Eggar: No regulatory committee of this kind yet exists. Such bodies are envisaged as part of the future Antarctic minerals regime currently under negotiation by the Antarctic treaty consultative parties.

Bulgaria

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Bulgarian authorities about the denial of human rights to the ethnic Turks in Bulgaria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: We share the hon. Member's concern about reports of human rights abuses in Bulgaria. We have discussed the position of the ethnic Turks with the Bulgarian authorities on several occasions and will continue to do so until it is clear that there is no longer any problem. My right hon. and learned Friend raised the matter with the Bulgarian Foreign Minister during his visit to this country in September 1987. The United Kingdom and others have also raised the question at CSCE meetings and in other international forums, including the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Turkey

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, in the light of the increased trade with Turkey, he proposes to increase diplomatic representation in that country; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Following a recent inspection of Her Majesty's diplomatic posts in Turkey and in the light of our increased trade with Turkey, the commercial sections at Her Majesty's embassy in Ankara and at the consulate-general in Istanbul have been significantly strengthened.

Currently staffing levels are considered to be sufficient to meet exporters' present requirements, but we are keeping the situation under constant review.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of *(a)* the steps taken to speed up the interview relating to the application for entry clearance of M.A., (ref. Imm 63217) about whom the hon. Member for Stretford wrote on 10 November 1987 and subsequently and *(b)* the expected date of interview; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to my letter to him of 26 February 1988.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice he gives to entry clearance officers concerning those applicants for entry clearance who do not have to provide information about accommodation and funds and who are not subject, on acceptance, to an initial 12-month restriction on first arrival in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar: None. Entry clearance officers consider applications in accordance with the relevant provisions of the immigration rules (HC 169, as amended).

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give for the different parts of the Indian sub-continent the latest information he has on the length of time from application for entry clearance to first interview for those now being interviewed, and the expected time for those applying now for *(a)* fiancés, *(b)* fiancées, *(c)* husbands, *(d)* wives and *(e)* dependant children.

Mr. Eggar: The waiting time in the Indian sub-continent as at 31 December 1987 were:

	Actual waiting time (in months)	*Expected (estimated)*
New Delhi		
Fiancé(e)s	7	7
Spouses	3	3
Dependent children	3	3
OI	0	0
Bombay		

	Actual waiting time (in months)	*Expected (estimated)*
Fiancé(e)s	9	9
Spouses	6	6
Dependent children	6	6
Q1	2	2
Dhaka		
Fiancé(e)s	8	8
Spouses	8	8
Dependent children	8	8
Q1	3	3
Islamabad		
Fiancé(e)s	18	16
Spouses	8	10
Dependent children	8	10
Q1	3	3
Karachi		
Fiancé(e)s	10	10
Spouses	5	5
Dependent children	5	5
Q1	2	2

There are no queues in Madras and Calcutta.
Applications from persons with a claim to the right of abode are placed in queue 1.

Terrorism (Nuclear Materials)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to raise at the NATO Ministers meeting on 2 and 3 March NATO initiatives against prospective illicit use of nuclear materials by terrorist groups.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such plans.

Nuclear Missiles

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy at the NATO Ministers meeting on 2 and 3 March to raise the issue of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty article VI obligations of NATO member states in the context of the 1983 Montebello NATO agreement on nuclear force modernisation.

Mr. Eggar: No. The decisions taken at Montebello, including the agreement to remove 1,400 nuclear warheads from NATO's stockpile, are in keeping with NATO members' obligations under article VI of the non-proliferation treaty. The recent conclusion of the INF agreement and our commitment to a START treaty are further illustrations of NATO's desire to bring about reductions in the level of nuclear weapons. However, nothing in the non-proliferation treaty requires the nuclear weapons states to allow their existing nuclear weapons to decay into obsolescence.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy at the NATO Ministers meeting on 2 and 3 March to raise the issue of the re-use of nuclear materials, including plutonium and highly enriched uranium, from warheads dismantled under the intermediate nuclear forces agreement of December 1987, in support of future NATO nuclear weapon modernisation programmes.

Mr. Eggar: The INF treaty does not provide for the elimination or dismantlement of warheads. Re-use of fissile material from such warheads is entirely a matter for the United States and Soviet Union, not one for the Alliance.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to raise at the NATO Ministers meeting on 2 and 3 March the implications for the continued adherence by NATO member states to the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty of United States research and development outside land-based laboratories of technologies in the strategic defence initiative star wars programme.

Mr. Eggar: No. The 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty is a treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union only. The United States strategic defence initiative is aimed at conducting research which is permitted by the treaty. The Soviet Union is also conducting an extensive research programme into ballistic missile defence.

Malaysia

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Malaysia concerning the detention of prisoners without trial.

Mr. Eggar: Representatives of the Twelve have discussed the recent detentions under the Internal Security Act with the Malaysian authorities and have made known our collective concerns.

UNESCO

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received concerning the Government's policy towards contacts with UNESCO; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: We have received no formal representations.

New Zealand

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to visit New Zealand; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no current plans to visit New Zealand.

Hong Kong (Crown Service Employees)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the categories of employees of the Hong Kong Government who are regarded as being in Crown Services for purposes of the British Nationality Act 1981.

Mr. Eggar: For the purposes of registration of certain British nationals as British citizens under section 4 of the British Nationality Act 1981,

"Crown Service under the Government of a dependent territory"

includes service by all persons employed as Hong Kong civil servants or as members of the Hong Kong judiciary.

International Committee of the Red Cross

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the significance of the worldwide services of the Red Cross in relieving suffering in all its aspects; and what recent contact he and his officials have had with the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. Eggar: We consider that the International Committee of the Red Cross has a vital role to play in promoting the 1949 Geneva Conventions and offering humanitarian relief to civilians and military victims in times of armed conflict, internal strife and other man-made disasters.

The President of the ICRC, Mr. Sommaruga, paid an official visit to the United Kingdom shortly after his appointment in June 1987. He called on my right hon. and learned friend the Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Overseas Development and myself. I met the vice-president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Aubert, in Geneva on 18 February. Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials in Geneva and London enjoy regular contact with the ICRC.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial contribution the United Kingdom makes towards the Red Cross in Geneva; and when the figure concerned will next be reviewed.

Mr. Eggar: We gave approximately £7 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1987. Of this, £240,000 went to the regular budget. This contribution is reviewed annually and the estimate for 1988-89 has been submitted for parliamentary approval. In response to ICRC special appeals, we contributed £6·75 million in 1987.

Plutonium

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received any representations from *(a)* the United States administration or *(b)* the United States Congress concerning plans to air freight British Nuclear Fuels Limited or United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority origin plutonium to the United States for onward shipment to Japan.

Mr. Eggar: The United States Administration approached us in 1986 about guidelines for the return to Japan by air of plutonium recovered after the reprocessing by British Nuclear Fuels plc of Japanese spent nuclear fuel. The guidelines subsequently formed an annex to the United States-Japan nuclear co-operation agreement signed on 4 November 1987. The United States Congress has made no representations to us on this matter.

SCOTLAND

Consultant Surgeons

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, for each consultant surgeon in receipt of a merit award, he will give statistical information on *(a)* the level A + A, B and C, *(b)* their average waiting time for in-patient treatment, *(c)* the length of their waiting list for in-patient treatment, and *(d)* their average waiting time for an out-patient appointment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No. The names of award holders are confidential, subject only to their being available in confidence to consultants generally within their board on request to the chief administrative medical officer.

Medical Posts

Mr. McTaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of medical posts unfilled in each Scottish health board area, in junior and senior grades.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on the number of medical posts currently vacant is not available centrally.

Translucent-roofed Buildings

Mr. Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to exempt translucent-roofed buildings up to 30 sq m in ground area from building regulations.

Mr. Rifkind: A public consultation paper on the reform of the Building Standards (Scotland) Regulations, issued on 30 November 1987, has invited comment on the proposals to exempt consevatories, greenhouses, carports and covered areas of up to 30 sq and porches of up to 8 sq m.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applications were received in the last year for which figuers are available from registered fishing ports in Scotland for grants for modernisation or construction of fishing vessels; and what proportion were successful.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The new national grants scheme for the construction and modernisation of fishing vessels came into force on 4 July 1987. Between that date and 31 January 1988, a total of 45 applications for grants towards the costs of construction of fishing vessels from fishermen based in Scotland was received and 15 of these have been approved to date. The corresponding figures for modernisation projects are 688 and 634.

No-fault Compensation

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what studies have been carried out into the feasibility of a no-fault compensation scheme to replace the present law of negligence in cases of medical accidents in Scotland; and what information he has as to in which other countries such a scheme is operating.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There have been no studies relating only to Scotland. The British Medical Association recently submitted the report of a working party on no fault compensation to the Department of Health and Social Security and Scottish Home and Health Department. The introduction of no-fault compensation was examined by the Royal Commission on civil liability and personal injury which reported in 1978. The commission considered that there would be serious difficulties in designing and administering such a scheme and concluded that it should not be introduced. The Government accept that view.

No-fault compensation schemes operate in New Zealand and Sweden.

Inverclyde Initiative

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much public money has been spent by the Inverclyde initiative in Inverclyde since its inception.

Mr. Lang: Since inception of the Inverclyde initiative in March 1985, £8·75 million of public money has been spent in the area.

Scottish Fire Service Training School

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a further statement on the subject of allegations of malpractice at the Scottish fire service training school at Gullane, in the light of new material published recently by the Lothian and Borders fire board and submitted to him; if he will review the procedures of his Department's fire service inspectorate; and if he will order a fresh inquiry into these allegations.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The allegations were the subject of an independent inquiry by Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire Services and a senior officer from Strathclyde fire brigade well experienced in disciplinary matters.

The inquiry team interviewed those named in the original letter of allegation and, when some time later Lothian and Borders fire brigade decided to release their statements, they interviewed recruits from that brigade. The inquiry team also interviewed all other instructors named in the statements. Taking into account the oral and written evidence, the inquiry team concluded that the allegations of humiliation and degradation had not been substantiated. I am satisfied that a balanced picture emerged, allowing the inquiry team to come to reasonable conclusions. I am also satisfied that the inquiry was carried out in a proper manner; and that those said to be complaining and those against whom allegations were made were given the opportunity to provide full explanations to the inquiry team, which enabled the incidents complained of to be seen in context.

Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire Services made certain recommendations and suggestions for the improvement of teaching techniques at the school and in liaison arrangements with brigades. These were accepted by the Department. Those affecting the day-to-day running of the school have been put into effect. Further consideration is being given to how best to improve liaison arrangements and proposals will be put to brigades soon. In addition, improved access arrangements have been offered to and accepted by the Fire Brigades Union.

The Scottish Home and Health Department received no complaints from any other brigade; and I am not aware of any other brigade receiving any complaints from any of its recruits who had attended the course in question.

I see no need to review the procedures of the fire inspectorate or to order a fresh inquiry.

Special Branches

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the total number of police officers and civilians serving in, or responsible to, the special branches of Scottish police forces in each year from 1968 to the latest available date.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not available in the form requested. The available data are as follows:

	Police officers	*Civilians*
30 June 1978	72	Not known
31 December 1979	112	Not known
31 December 1980	117	Not known
31 December 1981	118	Not known
31 December 1986	164	21
31 December 1987	164	24

Salmon Net Fishing

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to lay the order concerning the extension of the weekly close time for salmon net fishing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is intended that an order will be made shortly and laid before the House under the negative resolution procedure as soon as possible thereafter.

Firearms Incident (Mull)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the appropriate procurator fiscal will instigate inquiries into the incident in early February in which foreign gunmen fired shots at an alleged poacher on Mull; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The procurator fiscal at Oban has already received a report in relation to the incident, which he is presently considering.

SDA Investments

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list Scottish Development Agency investments in companies in *(a)* Scottish constituencies and *(b)* Scottish districts since November 1987.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 1 February 1988]:* The information is as follows:

Scottish Development Agency investments in companies by Scottish constituencies and districts, November 1987 to January 1988

Scottish Constituencies	*November 1987*		*December 1987*		*January 1988*		*Total*	
	Number	*£*	*Number*	*£*	*Number*	*£*	*Number*	*£*
Angus East	2	35,000	1	15,000	—	—	3	50,000
Argyll and Bute	1	25,000	—	—	—	—	1	25,000
Banff and Buchan	—	—	3	305,000	—	—	3	305,000
Carrick Cumnock and Doon Valley	1	9,300	—	—	1	5,525	2	14,825

Scottish Constituencies	November 1987		December 1987		January 1988		Total	
	Number	£	Number	£	Number	£	Number	£
Clydebank and Milngavie	—	—	1	17,800	2	24,251	3	42,051
Clydesdale	—	—	—	—	1	10,000	1	10,000
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	—	—	1	10,000	—	—	1	10,000
Cunninghame North	—	—	2	75,000	—	—	2	75,000
Cunninghame South	—	—	3	550,000	—	—	3	550,000
Dumfries	2	20,000	1	70,000	—	—	3	90,000
Dundee East	1	250,000	—	—	—	—	1	250,000
Dundee West	—	—	1	7,500	—	—	1	7,500
Dunfermline East	—	—	—	—	1	10,000	1	10,000
Dunfermline West	—	—	1	40,000	—	—	1	40,000
East Kilbride	1	10,000	2	50,000	2	286,746	5	346,746
East Lothian	—	—	1	150,000	1	25,000	2	175,000
Edinburgh Central	1	5,000	3	169,999	1	477,473	5	652,472
Edinburgh Leith	—	—	2	31,000	—	—	2	31,000
Falkirk East	—	—	2	27,000	—	—	2	27,000
Falkirk West	—	—	1	15,000	—	—	1	15,000
Fife North East	2	50,700	1	8,500	—	—	3	59,200
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	1	10,000	—	—	1	6,000	2	16,000
Glasgow Central	—	—	—	—	2	60,000	2	60,000
Glasgow Maryhill	1	10,000	—	—	—	—	1	10,000
Glasgow Pollok	—	—	1	10,000	—	—	1	10,000
Glasgow Shettleston	—	—	1	20,000	—	—	1	20,000
Gordon	—	—	—	—	2	35,000	2	35,000
Inverness Nairn and Lochaber	—	—	—	—	1	150,000	1	150,000
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	1	2,500	1	10,000	—	—	2	12,500
Kincardine and Deeside	—	—	—	—	1	100,000	1	100,000
Linlithgow	3	150,000	—	—	1	10,000	4	160,000
Livingston	—	—	1	250,000	—	—	1	250,000
Monklands East	—	—	1	31,585	1	22,561	2	54,146
Moray	1	18,750	1	6,250	—	—	2	25,000
Motherwell North	—	—	1	25,000	—	—	1	25,000
Roxburgh and Berwickshire	—	—	1	7,500	—	—	1	7,500
Stirling	1	5,000	—	—	1	6,000	2	11,000
Strathkelvin and Bearsden	—	—	—	—	1	10,000	1	10,000
Total	19	601,250	34	1,902,134	20	1,238,556	73	3,741,940

Scottish districts	November 1987		December 1987		January 1988		Total	
	Number	£	Number	£	Number	£	Number	£
Roxburgh	—	—	1	7,500	—	—	1	7,500
Falkirk	—	—	2	25,000	—	—	2	25,000
Stirling	1	5,000	—	—	1	6,000	2	11,000
Annandale and Eskdale	2	20,000	—	—	—	—	2	20,000
Nithsdale	1	10,000	1	70,000	—	—	2	80,000
Wigtown	—	—	—	—	1	6,000	1	6,000
Dunfermline	—	—	1	40,000	1	10,000	2	50,000
North East Fife	2	50,700	1	8,500	—	—	3	59,200
Banff and Buchan	—	—	3	305,000	—	—	3	305,000
Gordon	—	—	—	—	2	35,000	2	35,000
Kincardine and Deeside	—	—	—	—	1	100,000	1	100,000
Moray	1	18,750	1	6,250	—	—	2	25,000
Inverness	—	—	—	—	1	150,000	1	150,000
East Lothian	—	—	1	150,000	1	25,000	2	175,000
Edinburgh City	1	5,000	5	200,999	1	477,473	7	683,472
West Lothian	3	150,000	2	267,000	1	10,000	6	427,000
Argyll and Bute	1	25,000	—	—	—	—	1	25,000
Bearsden and Milngavie	—	—	—	—	1	10,000	1	10,000
Clydebank	—	—	—	—	2	24,251	2	24,251
Clydesdale	—	—	—	—	1	10,000	1	10,000
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	—	—	1	10,000	—	—	1	10,000
Cumnock and Doon Valley	1	9,300	1	17,800	1	5,525	3	32,625
Cunninghame	—	—	5	625,000	—	—	5	625,000
East Kilbride	1	10,000	2	50,000	2	286,746	5	346,746
Glasgow City	1	10,000	2	30,000	2	60,000	5	100,000
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	1	2,500	1	10,000	—	—	2	12,500
Monklands	—	—	1	31,585	1	22,561	2	54,146
Motherwell	—	—	1	25,000	—	—	1	25,000
Angus	1	25,000	1	15,000	—	—	2	40,000
Dundee City	2	260,000	1	7,500	—	—	3	267,500
Total	19	601,250	34	1,902,134	20	1,238,556	73	3,741,940

WALES

Roads

5. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the funding of road improvements in rural areas of Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The public expenditure White Paper (Cm. 288) published on 25 January 1988 sets out the Department's proposals for funding of road improvements throughout Wales.

East Dyfed Health Authority

17. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will consider giving extra funds to the East Dyfed health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The authority's recurring revenue allocation has increased by £4,989 million or 9·7 per cent., by comparison with 1986-87, and next year will increase by a further £3·4 million, or 6·1 per cent. In addition, in the current financial year it has received supplementary non-recurring revenue allocations amounting to £0·43 million. Its capital allocation has increased by over £0·2 million, or 14 per cent., over 1986-87 and will increase by a further £0·4 million, or 21 per cent., in 1988-89. The authority has also been given loans amounting to £0·534 million this year, mainly in relation to capital schemes. Further allocations in 1988-89 from funds earmarked for centrally funded developments will be announced in due course.

NHS (Funding)

18. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from health workers concerning funding of the National Health Service in Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have received no direct representations from NHS staff about the overall funding of the NHS in Wales. However, I met representatives of the Welsh board of the Royal College of Nursing on 11 February to discuss its general concerns about the NHS. Arrangements are in hand for a similar meeting with other trade unions representing Health Service staff in Wales.

Opencast Mining

19. **Mr. Raffan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has completed his review of the current guidelines for opencast mining in Wales, as contained in his Department's circular 13/84.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend expects to do so soon.

Welsh Water Authority

20. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chairman of the Welsh water authority; and whether he intends to issue any change in the guidelines or priorities laid down by his Department for the authority's activities.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend met the chairman of the Welsh water authority on 4 December. He wrote to the chairman on 19 February 1988 setting out the Government's financial targets for 1988-89. Other than circulars, the only guidelines presently proposed are those referred to in paragraph 37 of the document "The National Rivers Authority" published last December.

University Hospital, Cardiff

21. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects building work *(a)* to start and *(b)* to be completed on the paediatric cardiology department proposed for the University hospital of Wales, Cardiff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: I understand from South Glamorgan health authority, the managing authority, that work on site is expected to commence this year and to be completed in 1990 subject to satisfactory progress in design and construction.

Housing (Senior Management)

22. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he is prepared to re-examine the efficacy of his Department's circular 30/86.

Mr. Grist: No.

South Wales Coalfield

23. **Mr. Coleman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has discussed recently the south Wales coalfield with the area director of British Coal.

Mr. Peter Walker: The area director was present when I met the deputy chairman of British Coal on 21 January. We discussed a range of issues affecting the coal industry in south Wales.

Trawsfynydd Power Station

24. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received over the proposed test at Trawsfynydd power station.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have received a number of representations expressing concern about the proposed test at Trawsfynydd nuclear power station. The test has since been postponed.

Nursery Education

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many three and four-year-old children in each local education authority in Wales are in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time, nursery education, in nursery schools and nursery classes of primary schools, excluding any children in reception classes in primary schools and any children in private schools; what percentage of the estimated three and four-year-old population in each local education authority area this represents; and what is the average hourly attendance, per week, of these children in (i) full-time, and (ii) part-time nursery education for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information as at January 1987 is as follows:

	Pupils in nursery schools			Pupils in nursery classes in Primary schools[1]		
	Full-time	Part-time	Pupils as percentage of three and four year old population	Full-time	Part-time	Pupils as percentage of three and four year old population
Clwyd	—	372	3·8	112	3,623	38·5
Dyfed	147	109	3·2	935	914	23·1
Gwent	289	835	10·0	429	2,263	24·0
Gwynedd	—	—	—	901	560	27·1
Mid Glamorgan	783	440	5·5	3,639	1,467	35·7
Powys	—	—	—	784	34	31·5
South Glamorgan	94	669	7·3	142	2,198	22·5
West Glamorgan	—	222	2·5	114	4,602	52·4

[1] Data relate to pupils of all ages, three and four year olds are separately identifiable
Figures for average hourly attendance are not available.

Grants (Alyn and Deeside)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the amount of regional development grants and regional selective grants made in Alyn and Deeside for each year since 1980.

Mr. Peter Walker: Expenditure on regional development grants and regional selective assistance in the Alyn and Deeside parliamentary constituency for the financial years 1980-81 to 1986-87 was as follows:

£ million

	Regional development grant[1]	Regional selective assistance[2]
1980-81	1·4	0·3
1981-82	6·1	0·7
1982-83	6·5	1·8
1983-84	6·7	1·8
1984-85	11·4	1·5
1985-86	13·1	2·7
1986-87	8·2	3·5

[1] Regional development grant expenditure represents payments under the original scheme (RDG I) and since 1985-86, the revised scheme (RDG II). Records of RDG I expenditure at a sub-Wales level are kept on the basis only of individual payments exceeding £25,000 and by employment office areas. RDG I expenditure has been apportioned to the Alyn and Deeside parliamentary constituency are on the most accurate basis consistent with these records.

[2] Regional selective assistance expenditure represents payments of industry and training grants. Expenditure on exchange risk losses on European loans and payments under the business improvement services scheme cannot be broken down to a sub-Wales level and is therefore excluded.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the amount of rate support grant paid to Alyn and Deeside council and Clwyd county council in the financial years 1979 to 1987 in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms in 1987-88 prices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: The amounts of rate support grant expressed in cash terms and in real terms at 1987-88 prices are given in the table. The basis for paying rate support grant was changed in 1981-82 and so figures for individual local authorities before that year are not comparable with those for 1981-82 onwards.

£ thousands

	Alyn and Deeside		Clwyd	
	Cash	Real terms	Cash	Real terms
1979-80	6,541	11,381	28,341	49,311
1980-81	6,938	10,182	33,829	49,644
1981-82	3,621	4,839	76,600	102,361
1982-83	3,222	4,015	84,833	105,710
1983-84	3,220	3,833	84,772	100,913
1984-85	3,297	3,757	85,582	97,529
1985-86	3,217	3,460	89,887	96,673
[1]1986-87	3,360	3,503	93,200	97,161
[1]1987-88	3,495	3,495	101,423	101,423

[1] Provisional

Shopping Centre (Dee Estuary)

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the proposed shopping centre on the Dee estuary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations both for and against the proposed redevelopment, of which the shopping centre is but a part. However, as he may be called upon to exercise statutory planning functions in respect of this proposal, it would not be appropriate for us to comment further on the matter.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of the projects for which the decommitted European regional development fund grants, referred to in his Department's press notice of 23 February, had been intended; and if he will make a statement about the future of the projects.

Mr. Peter Walker: Since 1975, at total of £18·1 million of European regional development fund grant has been decommitted, involving some 188 projects. These projects have either been partially decommitted because they have not reached the maximum eligible expenditure level estimated at the time of application or they have been wholly decommitted because they have not proceeded as originally envisaged by the applicant.

The detailed information requested about these projects could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Brussels (Secretary of State's Visit)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of the programme for his recent visit to Brussels; and if he will list the names of the officials he met.

Mr. Peter Walker: I went to Brussels on 3 February 1988 for a meeting about integrated operations

programmes. I had talks with Commissioner Varfis, who is responsible for the co-ordination of structural instruments, Mr. Camhis, his deputy chef de cabinet, and Mr. Schutz of directorate XXII, who is head of the section dealing with integrated approach operations and co-ordination. I also had discussions with the office of the United Kingdom's permanent representative to the European Communities.

A55 (Expenditure)

Mr. Raffan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the dualling of the A55 expressway across North Wales to be completed; and how much has been spent and is to be spent on the A55, giving the amount for each individual bypass and improvement scheme, together with the dates when they have been or will be completed.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The upgrading of the A55 is expected to be completed in the early 1990s, subject to the completion of statutory procedures and availability of financial resources. Information on individual major schemes since 1979 is as follows:

1. Completed

£ million

Scheme	*Opened*	*Estimated gross cost*	*Expenditure to date*[1]
Holywell bypass stage I	1980	3·175	3·175
Diversion east of Abergele	1981	7·330	7·330
A5/A55 Bangor bypass	1983	28·393	28·393
Hawarden bypass	1984	32·463	32·429
Colwyn Bay bypass	1984-85	133·475	132·024
Holywell bypass stage II	1986	22·049	22·049
Bodelwydden bypass	1986	7·427	7·246

[1] February 1988.

2. Under Construction

Scheme	*Started*	*Estimated completion*	*Estimated gross cost £ million*	*Expenditure to date*[1] *£ million*
Penmaenbach-Dwygfylchi	1986	1989	24·129	16·646
Conwy Crossing	1986	1991	163·932	59·831
Penmaenmawr bypass	1987	1989	32·251	9·915
Llanfairfechan bypass	1987	1990	20·769	5·216
Northop bypass	1987	1989	11·845	1·400

[1] February 1988.

3. Planned

Scheme	*Estimated start*	*Estimated completion*	*Estimated gross cost £ million*	*Expenditure to date*[1] *£ million*
Travellers Inn improvement	1988-89	1989	3·862	0·283
Pen-y-Clip	1988-89	1991	30·427	2·927
Aber improvement	January 1988 to	—	8·360	0·510
Rhuallt Hill improvement	December 1990[2]	—	8·628	0·498

[1] February 1988.
[2] Roads in Wales timeband.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Sport and Recreation (Tax Exemptions)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking the conferral on non-profit distributing governing bodies of sport and recreation of tax-exempt status without charitable status, on lines analogous to exemption under section 362 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Representations have been received from the Central Council for Physical Recreation and the British Olympics Association.

Retirement Gratuity

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the lost income tax revenue if the tax-free retirement gratuity limit were raised to *(a)* £30,000, *(b)* £40,000 and *(c)* £50,000.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I regret that information is not available centrally on the number of recipients or amounts of retirement gratuities. The direct revenue costs, in 1987-88 terms, of increases in the tax-free limit for payments made on termination of employment are shown in the table. These estimates assume that the increase in the limit would not affect the distribution of termination payments.

Tax-free limit £	*Cost (£ million)*
30,000	2
40,000	5
50,000	6

Taxation

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he has any estimate of what a 1p, 2p, 3p, 4p, 5p, 6p and 7p cut in the standard rate of income tax would represent as a percentage increase in gross pay for a man on average national earnings;

(2) if he has any estimate of what a cut of 1p, 2p, 3p, 4p, 5p, 6p and 7p in the standard rate of income tax would represent as a percentage increase in gross pay for a man

on 75 per cent., 80 per cent., 90 per cent., 125 per cent., 150 per cent., 175 per cent and 200 per cent. of national average earnings.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information is in the table. The calculations assume that the man's earnings are his only source of income. Average earnings are those for men in all occupations paid at adult rates who work a full week and whose pay is unaffected by absence. This figure is projected to 1988-89 in accordance with the assumptions given to the Government Actuary for reviewing national insurance contribution in paragraph 3.02 of the Autumn Statement 1987. The married man's allowance and higher rate thresholds for 1988-89 have been calculated by reference to the statutory formula for indexation.

Reduction in basic rate of income tax pence	*Increase in Income after Tax as a Percentage of Gross Earnings for a Married Man, 1988-89*							
	Gross earnings as a percentage of average earnings							
	75	80	90	100	125	150	175	200
1	0·6	0·6	0·7	0·7	0·7	0·8	0·8	0·7
2	1·2	1·2	1·3	1·4	1·5	1·6	1·6	1·5
3	1·8	1·8	2·0	2·1	2·3	2·4	2·5	2·2
4	2·3	2·4	2·6	2·8	3·0	3·2	3·3	2·9
5	2·9	3·1	3·3	3·4	3·8	4·0	4·1	3·6
6	3·5	3·7	3·9	4·1	4·5	4·8	4·9	4·4
7	4·1	4·3	4·6	4·8	5·3	5·5	5·8	5·1

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, in the manner of the answer given on 11 February 1986, *Official Report*, columns 427-28, he will update and publish the table detailing the breakdown of the costs or yields of reinstating the 1978-79 tax regime, taking the 1987-88 income tax base.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 15 February 1988]*: If the 1978-79 income tax regime were indexed to 1987-88 levels by reference to the statutory formula and applied to the 1987-88 income tax base, the direct revenue effect would be an additional yield of £11·7 billion in a full year.

The levels of the main allowances and thresholds, compared with the actual 1987-88 values would be:

Personal allowances	*Indexed 1978-79 regime* £	*1987-88* £
Single and wife's earned income allowance	2,055	2,425
Married man's allowance	3,205	3,795
Additional personal allowance	1,150	1,370
Aged single allowance (over 65 but under 80)	2,720	2,960
Aged single allowance (over 80)	2,720	3,070
Aged married allowance (either partner over 65 but neither partner over 80)	4,335	4,675
Aged married allowance (either partner over 80)	4,335	4,845
Aged income limit	8,400	9,800

Rate of tax (percentage)	*Bands of taxable income* *Indexed 1978-79 regime* £	*1987-88* £
25	0—1,600	—
27	—	0—17,900
33	1,601—16,700	—
40	16,701—18,800	17,901—20,400
45	18,801—20,900	20,401—25,400
50	20,901—23,000	25,401—33,300
55	23,001—26,200	33,301—41,200
60	26,201—29,400	Over 41,200
65	29,401—33,600	—
70	33,601—38,900	—
75	38,901—50,400	—
83	Over 50,400	—

Investment Income Surcharge: Indexed 1978-79 regime

Non-aged £	*Aged* £	*Rate of surcharge (percentage)*
0-3,550	0-5,250	Exempt
3,551-4,700	5,251-6,300	10
Over 4,700	Over 6,300	15

Investment income surcharge was abolished in 1984-85.

Taking the 1987-88 income base as given, the direct revenue costs of the 1987-88 tax regime compared with the indexed 1978-79 tax regime can be broken down as follows:

	Yield (+) Cost (−) £ million
Increases in personal allowances	−3,970
Abolition of reduced rate band at 25p	+2,850
Decrease in basic rate of 6p	−7,980
Increase in basic rate limit of £1,200	−400
Changes in higher rate thresholds up to 60 per cent.	−800
Abolition of higher rates above 60 per cent.	−590
Abolition of investment income surcharge	−830
Total	−11,720

In the table above, the effect of each change has been calculated on the assumption that each of the changes which precede it has already been made.

Sporting Rights

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revaluation is currently being undertaken of sporting rights; and whether the revised assessments of the value of sporting rights over particular areas of land will be included in a document accessible to the public.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Sporting rights are currently being revalued as part of the general revaluation of all non-domestic properties in England and Wales. The revaluation, which will take effect from 1 April 1990, will be based on the levels of rental values as at 1 April 1988. The new valuation list will be accessible to the public.

Luncheon Vouchers

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider allowing luncheon vouchers to be tax-free in the hands of employees up to a minimum of £1 per day; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend considers a wide range of matters in the run-up to the Budget.

Nominal Income Tax

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to the lowest rate of nominal income tax, and the date on which each such rate was set, in *(i)* Italy, *(ii)* Luxembourg, *(iii)* the Netherlands, *(iv)* Portugal, *(v)* Spain, *(vi)* Japan, *(vii)* Denmark, *(viii)* the United States of America, *(ix)* New Zealand, *(x)* Canada, *(xi)* Australia, *(xii)* Belgium, *(xiii)* West Germany, *(xiv)* France and *(xv)* Greece; and what assessment he has made in each case of the effect on the international competitive position of the United Kingdom economy.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Below is a table of countries showing in each case the lowest rate of nominal income tax and the date on which such rate was set.

Country	*Lowest nominal rate Per cent.*	*Effective from year*
Italy	12·0	1986
Luxembourg	10·0	1987
Netherlands	14·0	1988
Portugal	4·0	1979
Spain	25·0	1988
Japan	10·5	1984
Denmark	22·0	1987
United States of America	15·0	1988
New Zealand	15·0	1987-88
Canada	17·0	1988
Australia	24·0	1987-88
Belgium	24·2	1987
Federal Republic of Germany	22·0	1975
France	5·0	1973
Greece	6·0	1985

Explanatory Notes:
(a) In Luxembourg, Spain Australia, Belgium, France and Greece the lowest bracket on the tax table is actually 0 per cent. For these countries the first figure appearing after 0 per cent. has been chosen.
(b) In some countries local income tax is also charged.
(c) In Germany it is proposed to reduce the lowest rate of nominal income tax to 19 per cent.

This Government's policy of reducing income tax rates has increased incentives and encouraged enterprise, thereby improving the international competitive position of the United Kingdom economy.

Farming (Taxes)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to review the effect of capital transfer tax and capital gains tax on the farming industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The hon. Gentleman will understand that I cannot anticipate the Chancellor's Budget Statement.

Fraud

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many prosecutions were brought in the Durham constabulary area for income tax fraud offences in each of the last five years.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I regret the Inland Revenue does not keep records of tax prosecutions by locality.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average amount of money recovered annually by *(a)* a senior Department of Health and Social Security fraud inspector and *(b)* a senior investigation officer in the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 17 February 1988]:* The yield from DHSS investigations is not a matter for me. As regards the yield from Inland Revenue investigations, I have nothing to add to my replies to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 29 January 1988 at column *371*.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, pursuant to the answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *425*, he will give the information requested about cases of tax fraud for such categories as can be provided without undue cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 18 February 1988]:* I have nothing to add to my answer of 20 January at column *725*. This is because smaller cases include investigations by local offices. Such information could not be collated without very substantial cost.

"Paying for Local Government"

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many copies of the Green Paper "Paying for Local Government" (Cmnd. 9714) were distributed free to right hon. and hon. Members; and how many were sold to the general public.

Mr. Brooke: On publication in January 1986, 800 copies of "Paying for Local Government" (Cmnd. 9714) were supplied to the Vote Office. A further 4,022 copies have been recorded as official issues, which include sales to Government Departments and may include further supplies to the Vote Office. All other sales total 6,949 copies: it is not possible to say how many were bought by the general public, as Her Majesty's Stationery Office's retail customers include local authorities and other public bodies.

HMSO Publications (Prices)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to reduce the general level of prices of Her Majesty's Stationery Office publications, particularly Government Green and White Papers and *Hansard*.

Mr. Brooke: I am satisfied that Her Majesty's Stationery Office is taking all reasonable steps to keep the prices of its publications as low as possible while still meeting its financial targets as a trading fund. In recent years the average price of parliamentary publications, except *Hansard*, has risen much less than the increase in the RPI for books.

Hansard is treated exceptionally in that it has long been supported by an annual Vote from Parliament which

enables the prices to be set at a lower level than would be necessary to recover the high costs of overnight production. It is this Government's policy to reduce dependence on this subsidy and, while Her Majesty's Stationery Office continues to take steps to reduce the costs involved, recent increases in the price of *Hansard* have been steeper than for other Her Majesty's Stationery Office publications.

Less Developed Countries

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the amount of United Kingdom-registered banks' claims on less developed countries for 1987.

Mr. Lilley: An analysis as at end-June 1987 of the claims, by country, of United Kingdom registered monetary sector institutions and their branches and subsidiaries worldwide can be found in table 15 of the February 1988 edition of the *Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin*.

Government Telecommunications Network

Mr. Terry Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the new switch SL100 for the interface between Government telecommunications network numbers was installed; when the switch failed; and what action is being taken by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency as a result of this failure.

Mr. Brooke: The SL100 switch on the Government telecommunications network was brought into operation on Monday 27 July 1987. Major problems have occurred on two occasions since then. The first was due to the severe storm on 16 October 1987. As a result of the interruption to the mains power supply throughout Greater London, and the failure of the emergency standby power supplies, the switch ceased to function for some 4½ hours until the mains power supply had been restored. The Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency subsequently worked closely with the Property Services Agency to determine and implement improvements to the emergency standby power supplies.

The second problem occurred on the morning of Thursday 11 February 1988 and continued for most of that day. This seriously affected the majority of telephone calls passing through London on the Government telecommunications network. The CCTA worked closely with the company maintaining the switch to ensure that full service was restored as rapidly as possible, but some random intermittent difficulties on the GTN have persisted since then. The fault was due to corruption of software within the switch and urgent detailed investigations are continuing to determine the cause of this and to clear up the remaining difficulties.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) by what amount the private medical insurance premium tax offset rule reduced the revenue received from income tax in 1985-86 and 1986-87; and what is the estimated figure for 1987-88;

(2) how much the medical insurance premium tax offset rule would yield in the current years if it applied (*a*) for earnings of less than £12,500 per annum, (*b*) for earnings of less than £15,000 and (*c*) for earnings of less than £20,000; and whether he has available any estimates of the yield in previous years.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answers 8 and 9 February 1988]:* I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the £8,500 earnings threshold below which employees are not in general taxable on benefits in kind provided by reason of their employment. These rules have applied since 1982-83 to private medical insurance.

It is tentatively estimated that the cost of exempting employees who earn less than £8,500 from tax on employer-provided private medical insurance premiums is of the order of £10 million in each of the years 1985-86 to 1987-88.

The table shows the estimated direct revenue yield in both 1985-86, the latest year for which data are available and the projected yield in 1987-88 arising from the taxation of the benefit of employer-provided medical insurance received by directors and by employees with earnings above the thresholds shown.

Earnings threshold £	*Estimated yield 1985-86* £ *million*	*Projected yield 1987-88* £ *million*
8,500	58	80
12,500	49	70
15,000	45	65
20,000	29	50

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the average medical insurance premium paid per taxpayer in receipt of private medical insurance as a fringe benefit for the years 1978-79 to 1987-88; and how many taxpayers have been in receipt of such benefit.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 29 January 1988]:* I regret the delay in answering this question.

Information is available in respect of the years shown. The benefit of employer-provided private medical insurance premiums was taxable for all employees up to 1981-82 but only for directors and for employees with earned income of £8,500 a year or more from 1982-83 onwards. The estimates of the number of recipients relate to the number of taxpayers liable to tax on the benefit and exclude employees earning below £8,500 per year where appropriate. The average premium is net of any contribution made by the employee to the employer.

	Numbers	*Average net premium* £
1980-81	[1]315,000	100
1983-84	[1]530,000	150
1985-86	625,000	250
1987-88	[2]735,000	300

[1] Excludes married women in receipt of the benefit.
[2] Projection.

These estimates are derived from the surveys of expenses and benefits. I regret that information is not available for the intervening years.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the annual cost of providing tax relief on private medical insurance.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in receipt of medical insurance as a fringe benefit are currently eligible for tax

relief on the premium: what is the cost to the Exchequer of this relief; and what estimate he has of the projected cost to the Exchequer of extending eligibility to tax relief to all those covered by private medical insurance.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answers 29 January 1988]*: I regret the delay in answering these questions.

The direct revenue cost, at 1987-88 levels, of giving relief at marginal rates of income tax on private medical insurance premiums, including contributions made by employees towards employer-paid premiums, is estimated to be about £150 million. If the benefit of employer-paid premiums paid on behalf of directors and of employees with earned income of £8,500 per year or more were also exempted from income tax, there would be an additional cost of £80 million. These estimates make no allowance for any behavioural changes. Granting tax relief on private medical insurance would be expected to lead to an increase in the number of subscriptions and to an increase in the cost of relief.

It is tentatively estimated that, in 1987-88, about 150,000 employees receive the benefit of private medical insurance from their employer but are not taxed on the benefit because their earned income is below £8,500 a year. The cost of this exemption is of the order of £10 million.

Income Tax

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the estimated income tax forgone in 1986-87 by the Treasury from taxpayers earnings *(a)* between £20,000 and £50,000 and *(b)* more than £50,000 as a result of employee contributions to approved pension schemes.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 4 February 1988]*: I regret the delay in replying to this question.

The latest estimate of the cost of tax relief in respect of employees' contributions to approved pension schemes in 1986-87 is £1·6 billion. I regret that it is not possible to provide an analysis of this amount by range of earnings.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the estimated income tax forgone in 1986-87 by the Treasury from taxpayers earnings *(a)* between £20,000 and £50,000 and *(b)* more than £50,000 as a result of employer contributions to approved pension schemes.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 4 February 1988]*: I regret the delay in replying to this question.

The latest estimate of the cost of tax relief in respect of employers' contributions to approved pension schemes in 1986-87 is £3 billion. I regret that it is not possible to provide an analysis of this amount by range of earnings.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what economic and econometric evidence he has which indicates *(a)* the effects of cutting the higher rates of income tax on the work effort and efficiency of those high paid workers affected by the cuts and, *(b)* the effects of cutting the standard rate of income tax the effects on the national work effort.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 19 February 1988]*: Cutting marginal tax rates undoubtedly gives a stimulus to enterprise, initiative and effort. The effect inevitably takes some time to build up. Econometric studies identify a positive incentive effect, though they tend to look only at short term effects. I know of no recent United Kingdom studies specifically on the effect of reducing higher rates of income tax.

Tax Evasion

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for each of the six cases of tax evasion in 1987 in which more than £1 million was recovered, whether the evasion involved a company or an individual; and what was the amount of *(a)* income tax, *(b)* corporation tax, *(c)* capital gains tax, and *(d)* inheritance tax owed.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 17 February 1988]*: It is not the practice to give information that may be related to the affairs of a particular taxpayer. Of the total tax involved, almost 80 per cent. was corporation tax; almost 18 per cent. was income tax: and the remainder capital transfer tax and capital gains tax.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for each of the 19 cases of tax evasion in 1987 for which more than £500,00 was recovered, what was the proportion of the sum recovered that was *(a)* tax, *(b)* interest, and *(c)* penalty.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 17 February 1988]*: It is not the practice to give information about individual cases. Of the 19 cases for 1986-87, the proportions for the total of the net settlements were:

Tax	*Interest*	*Penalties*	*Penalties as percentage of tax*
Per cent.	*Per cent.*	*Per cent*	*Per cent.*
64	21	15	24

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Budget)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the average amount each taxpayer in the United Kingdom contributed through direct and indirect taxes to the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for each year since 1978-79; and what will be the contribution in 1987-88.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 19 February 1988]*: The information is as follows:

	Expenditure by Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food[1] *£ million*	*Number of taxpayers*[2] *million*	*Contribution per taxpayer* *£*
1978-79	340·5	21·4	15·9
1979-80	469·8	21·6	21·8
1980-81	550·7	21·0	26·2
1981-82	537·6	20·8	25·8
1982-83	580·4	20·8	27·9
1983-84	535·3	20·5	26·1
1984-85	549·1	20·2	27·2
1985-86	531·7	20·4	26·1
1986-87	522·3	20·5	25·5
1987-88	[3]464·8	20·9	22·2

[1] *Source*: Appropriation Accounts

[2] *Source*: Inland Revenue Statistics, 1987. Married couples are counted as one unit. Figures for 1985-86 and subsequent years are provisional.

[3] Forecast outturn—Expenditure in Northern Ireland excluded.

The figures exclude expenditure by the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce and other agriculture departments. They also exclude costs of agricultural support borne by consumers through higher prices.

Funeral Insurance

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking tax relief to those who take out simple and inexpensive insurance to cover the cost of their own funeral and to plan for their own funeral arrangements.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer Monday 22 February 1988]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has received no such representations.

Revenue Contributions

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will estimate the average contribution to total Exchequer revenues which would, on average, be made by an individual during the course of his life.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* An individual's lifetime tax contributions will depend on a large number of factors, including date of birth, marital status, pension provision, lifetime profile of earnings, assumptions about public expenditure; fiscal policy, and changes in the tax system. CSO figures (*Economic Trends* November 1986) suggest that in 1985, the latest year available, the average individual paid £744 in income tax and employee's national insurance contributions and £528 in taxes on final goods and services.

Public Bodies (Audits)

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place a list in the Library of the auditing arrangements for each public body.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* Government Departments are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General and his counterpart in Northern Ireland. The nationalised industries are audited by commercial auditors. Local authorities are audited by the Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales, the Commission for Local Authority Accounts in Scotland and the Local Government Audit Service in Northern Ireland. For details of the audit arrangements of the health authorities, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) by my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) on 13 January at columns *330-31*. Information about the audit arrangements for other public bodies is set out in column 5 of "Public Bodies 1987", a copy of which was placed in the Library on 2 December.

Appropriation Accounts (Certification)

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under what statutory authority accounting officers seek certification by the Comptroller and Auditor General of appropriation accounts.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* The statutory authority for the Comptroller and Auditor General's certification of appropriation accounts is contained in section 22 of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1866.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish an index of currency movements against the pound sterling, with a base of December 1983 = 100, for each quarter since January 1984, relating to United States dollar, Canadian dollar, yen, Swiss franc, Australian dollar, Swedish krona, Finnish mark, Norwegian krone, Austrian schilling, French franc, Belgian franc, Dutch guilder, Spanish peseta, deutschmark, Danish krone, Italian lire and Irish punt; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* Movements of the £ sterling against the Australian dollar, Finnish mark, Norwegian krone and Austrian schilling are set out in the table. For the other currencies, I refer my hon. Friend to Table 13·1 in "Financial Statistics" published monthly by the Central Statistical Office, copies of which are in the House of Commons Library.

December 1983 = 100

	Australian dollar/£	*Finnish mark/£*	*Norwegian krone/£*	*Austrian schilling/£*
1984				
January	97·6	93·1	100·2	100·3
April	96·7	95·7	97·5	95·1
July	99·3	94·6	97·9	94·9
October	91·6	92·5	97·7	94·7
1985				
January	86·9	89·1	93·5	90·4
April	118·2	95·2	99·8	96·8
July	123·8	99·8	105·0	101·4
October	127·0	96·2	101·5	95·0
1986				
January	127·7	91·7	97·0	87·8
April	130·1	91·3	96·7	85·9
July	150·3	91·0	101·7	82·2
October	140·3	83·1	94·8	72·4
1987				
January	143·2	83·1	97·5	70·9
April	143·9	85·6	99·6	74·6
July	142·7	85·9	98·2	75·2

	Australian dollar £	Finnish mark £	Norwegian krone £	Austrian schilling £
October	146·6	86·0	99·3	75·9
1988				
January	158·8	82·9	103·1	75·3

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many firearms, shotguns and other items covered by the Firearms Act 1968 have been entered, for each week in 1987 and in 1988 to date, in the register at London Heathrow airport terminal 1 as part of the personal baggage of passengers that are *(a)* held on a Great Britain firearms or shotgun certificate, *(b)* the Northern Ireland or *(c)* the Republic of Ireland equivalent;

(2) how many firearms, shotguns and other items covered by the Firearms Act 1968 have been entered, for each week in 1987 and in 1988 to date, in the register at London Heathrow airport terminal 4 as part of the personal baggage of passengers *(a)* that are held on a Great Britain firearms certificate, *(b)* with a Great Britain shotgun certificate and *(c)* not held on either a Great Britain firearms or shotgun certificate;

(3) how many firearms, shotguns and other items covered by the Firearms Act 1968 have been entered, for each week in 1987 and in 1988 to date, in the register at London Heathrow airport terminal 2, as part of the personal baggage of passengers which were held in the United Kingdom and out of compliance with the Firearms Act 1968;

(4) how many firearms, shotguns and other items covered by the Firearms Act 1968 have been entered for each week in 1987 and in 1988 to date, in the register at London Heathrow airport terminal 1, as part of the personal baggage of passengers, which were held in the United Kingdom and out of compliance with the Firearms Act 1968;

(5) how many firearms, shotguns and other items covered by the Firearms Act 1968 have been entered, for each week in 1987 and in 1988 to date, in the register at London Heathrow airport terminal 3 as part of the personal baggage of passengers *(a)* that are held on a Great Britain firearms certificate, *(b)* with a Great Britain shotgun certificate and *(c)* not held on either a Great Britain firearms or shotgun certificate;

(6) how many firearms, shotguns and other items covered by the Firearms Act 1968 have been entered, for each week in 1987 and in 1988 to date, in the register at London Heathrow airport terminal 2 as part of the personal baggage of passengers *(a)* that are held on a Great Britain firearms certificate, *(b)* with a Great Britain shotgun certificate and *(c)* not held on either a Great Britain firearms or shotgun certificate;

(7) how many firearms and shotguns and other items covered by the Firearms Act 1968 have been entered, for each week in 1987 and in 1988 to date, in the register at London Heathrow airport terminal 1, as part of the personal baggage of passengers *(a)* that are held on a Great Britain firearms certificate, *(b)* with a Great Britain shotgun certificate, and *(c)* not held on either a Great Britain firearms or shotgun certificate;

(8) how many firearms and shotguns and other items covered by the Firearms Act 1968 have been entered, for each week in 1987 and in 1988 to date, in the register at London Heathrow airport terminal 3, as part of the personal baggage of passengers, which were held in the United Kingdom and out of compliance with the Firearms Act 1968;

(9) how many firearms and shotguns and other items covered by the Firearms Act 1968 have been entered, for each week in 1987 and in 1988 to date, in the register at London Heathrow airport terminal 4, as part of the personal baggage of passengers, which were held in the United Kingdom and out of compliance with the Firearms Act 1968.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answers 25 February 1988]:* Customs and Excise keeps no register of the kind referred to by the hon. Member. However, firearms, shotguns and other items covered by the Firearms Act are liable to seizure by Customs if they are imported in contravention of import licensing restrictions. In the calendar year 1987, 39 firearms, two shotguns, and 58 other items covered by the Firearms Act were seized at Heathrow, together with a substantial quantity of ammunition.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Medical Students (Statistics)

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of *(a)* women and *(b)* men medical students who qualified in *(a)* 1958, *(b)* 1968 and *(c)* 1978 were found to be practising 10 years later.

Mrs. Currie: Information is not available in the form requested. The Department is funding a long-term project of research on doctors' careers. A survey of doctors five years after qualification has been published (*British Medical Journal* volume 285, 14 August 1982); a survey 10 years after qualification is about to be completed by the medical careers research group at Churchill hospital, Oxford.

Hospital Patients (Costs)

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the average cost per patient treated over each of the past three years in *(a)* each of the Birmingham hospitals, *(b)* the Burton upon Trent hospitals and *(c)* the other South East Staffordshire district health authority hospitals.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that this information could not be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, in 1986-87, costing returns submitted by the five Birmingham health authorities and by South East Staffordshire health authority show average costs per patient treated in major acute hospitals were as in the table. My hon. Friend may like to contact the West Midlands regional health authority for further information.

Health Authority and Hospital	Cost per in-patient day	Cost per in-patient case	Cost per out-patient attendance	Cost per new out-patient case	Cost per A & E attendance	Cost per new A & E case
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Central Birmingham						
Queen Elizabeth	126·38	1,289·55	57·75	359·67	[1]N/A	[1]N/A
General	97·98	800·40	18·75	92·11	27·95	42·67
East Birmingham						
East Birmingham	105·74	835·49	28·16	153·94	18·91	24·79
North Birmingham						
Good Hope DGH	87·99	632·89	28·11	114·31	20·70	26·39
South Birmingham						
Selly Oak	95·16	796·60	25·33	107·97	20·34	23·38
West Birmingham						
Dudley Road	108·29	762·80	26·32	128·95	21·96	24·39
South East Staffordshire						
Burton General	97·43	513·97	52·08	331·74	49·33	49·33
Burton District Hospital Centre	105·66	833·47	29·40	124·98	20·13	22·01
Regional average: Acute Hospitals over 100 beds	100·56	694·04	26·53	117·35	21·28	27·18

[1] This hospital had no A & E patients.

Notes: Other identified costs are: Good Hope DGH: Cost per day patient attendance £25·76
Cost per new day patient case £449·76
Cost per day case attendance £54·92
Dudley Road: Cost per day case attendance £41·40
Burton District Hospital Centre: Cost per day case attendance £40·55

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the latest figures for *(a)* the numbers of families with children dependent on supplementary benefit and *(b)* the number of children dependent on supplementary benefit.

Mr. Scott: In February 1986, the latest date for which information is available, the number of families with children under the age of 16 years dependent on supplementary benefit was 1,137,000. The number of children under the age of 16 years dependent on supplementary benefit was 2,123,000.

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiry 1986.

Retail Prices Index (Error)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the difference between the £8 special payments made to severely disabled war pensioners and the sum forgone as a result of the computer error on the retail prices index; and will he make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The £8 special payments fall short of the benefit lost by severely disabled war pensioners as a result of the error by amounts ranging from a few pounds to over £50, although cases of the latter are few in number. The position is complex and it will take some time to identify members of the high loser groups. We shall, however, be making additional compensation payments in the summer to those war and industrial disablement pensioners who have lost significantly more than £8.

Child Benefit

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the gross and net cost of raising child benefit in a full financial year in line with the rise in tax thresholds in 1988-89, assuming that they are uprated according to the statutory formula.

Mr. Scott: The rise in the retail prices index between December 1986 and December 1987 was 3·7 per cent. If child benefit were to be uprated in April 1988 by 3·7 per cent. the rate would be £7·50 per week. In 1988-89 the additional gross cost of this would be £156 million and the additional net cost would be just over £100 million.

Pension Schemes

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received concerning proposals by some employers with occupational pension schemes to withdraw death-in-service and other benefits from employees who opt for a personal pension; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I am not aware of any such representations. Any employee considering leaving an occupational scheme should, of course, weigh any benefits which might be lost against any advantages that might be gained from making alternative arrangements, and seek expert advice as necessary.

Consultants

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about the number of sessions worked by consultants in the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen hospitals, Liverpool; and what is his estimate of the number of additional sessions which could be worked if all consultants worked full-time for the National Health Service.

Mr. Newton: I regret that this information is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may therefore wish to contact the chairman of the Liverpool health authority, who may be able to provide the information requested.

Repetitive Strain Injury

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to reach a decision on the possible redefinition of repetitive strain injury for the purpose of compensation, in the light of research now being funded by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Scott: We are advised on matters relating to the industrial injuries scheme by an independent body, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council. I understand that the council expects the results of two research projects on repetitive strain injuries to be available by mid-1989 and that further consideration of this matter will be deferred until then.

Kaltostat Dressings

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when Kaltostat dressings will be agreed for use by by general practitioners; and what estimate he has made of how much will be saved annually by their use.

Mr. Newton: No decision has yet been taken on whether this product will be added to the list of dressings which general practitioners may prescribe.

Irish Nationals

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the circular to his Department's offices relating to the vetting of benefit applications by Irish nationals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: It is not the Department's policy to vet benefit claims on the basis of the claimants nationality. Guidance on the verification of identity as part of the process of establishing entitlement to benefit was published in Circular S50/85.

Central Register

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services which other Government Departments have access to the Department of Health and Social Security/ National Health Service central register list of patients.

Mrs. Currie: None.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether his Department's benefits staff have access to the Department of Health and Social Security/ National Health Service central register list of patients; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The Department's benefit staff do not have access to the list of patients maintained by the National Health Service central register.

Hypothermia

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many deaths from hypothermia-related causes were registered in *(a)* the Leeds West constituency and *(b)* the Leeds metropolitan district council area since 1983, by month of registration.

Mrs. Currie: The Leeds, West parliamentary constituency is wholly contained within Leeds metropolitan county district. The table shows the number of registrations of deaths to usual residents of both areas which contained a mention of hypothermia on the death certificate, by month of registration from 1983. Ward (and thereby constituency) data for 1987 are not yet available.

Number of deaths by month of registration to usual residents of (a) Leeds metropolitan county district and (b) Leeds, West parliamentary constituency which contained a mention of hypothermia on the death certificate 1983 to 1987[2]

Year and month	*Leeds metropolitan county district*	*Leeds, West*
1983		
January	1	0
February	2	0
March	2	0
May	1	0
November	1	0
December	1	0
1984		
January	2	0
February	2	0
March	2	0
April	1	0
June	1	1
October	1	0
November	1	0
1985		
January	1	0
February	3	1
September	1	0
October	1	0
December	1	0
1986[2]		
January	4	2
February	3	0
March	4	0
May	1	0
June	1	0
1987[1, 2]		
January	2	n/a
February	4	n/a
April	2	n/a
May	1	n/a

[1] 1987 is for January to September data only.
[2] Provisional.

Housing Benefits

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many one-parent families are in receipt of housing benefits; and how many are in receipt of *(a)* standard housing benefits, *(b)* certificated housing benefits and *(c)* housing benefit supplement, in Bristol, South and nationally.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Nurses

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of nurses presently employed by Leeds West district health authority; and what the numbers have been for each year since 1979.

Mr. Newton: Such figures as are available are shown in the table.

Because of the 1982 NHS reorganisation figures on a consistent basis with those for later years are not available centrally for the years prior to 1982.

National Health Service nursing and midwifery staff (including agency) Leeds western district health authority at 30 September

	Whole time equivalent[1]
1982	3,290
1983	3,250
1984	3,330
1985	3,380
1986	3,360

Source: Annual Census of NHS Non-Medical Manpower.
[1] Figures are rounded to nearest 10 whole-time equivalents.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give details of the total funds made available for each year between 1983 and the present for the post-basic training of nurses for neonatal intensive care and the number of nurses trained, by regional health authority.

Mr. Newton: Information on the funding made available by health authorities for post-basic training of nurses for neo-natal intensive care nursing is not held centrally. It is for health authorities to determine their post-basic training needs, and the resources which can be allocated, in the light of local needs and priorities.

The numbers of nurses who completed training for special-intensive care of the newborn in each region during the year ended 31 March 1987 were:

	Number
Northern	Nil
Yorkshire	Nil
Trent	47
East Anglian	24
North West Thames	51
North East Thames	21
South East Thames	12
South West Thames	11
Wessex	10
Oxford	23
South Western	45
West Midlands	47
Mersey	Nil
North Western	14

Similar information for earlier years is not readily available.

Mental Illness

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what have been the levels of spending on mentally ill people in the Leeds, West district health authority for each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mrs. Currie: Information on health authority expenditure by type of patient is not collected centrally. Hospital costing returns submitted to the Department show expenditure on hospitals of different types, and costing returns in respect of community health services show expenditure relating to the major areas of activity only. Thus we have information on expenditure by hospitals categorised as mental illness but not on expenditure on the growing volume of activity in psychiatric units in general hospitals etc.

Following is information derived from the hospital costing returns submitted by Leeds, West district health authority since its establishment on 1 April 1982:

Revenue expenditure on hospitals categorised "Mental Illness"

	£
1982-83	10,394,187
1983-84	10,652,452
1984-85	11,028,507
1985-86	11,314,123
1986-87	11,309,706

Note: The figures exclude expenditure incurred on the mentally ill within psychiatric units in general hospitals and so on and within the community health services. Such costs are not separately identifiable centrally.

Benefit (Training)

Dr. Moonie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether 16 and 17-year-olds who are unable to obtain a YTS place will be paid the same rate of benefit as those receiving training.

Mr. Portillo: The Government have guaranteed that all persons aged 16 and 17 who want a YTS place will be offered one before the end of the extended period of entitlement to child benefit. Once a YTS place has been obtained a training allowance of £28·50 per week will be payable (£35·00 per week in the second year). After the extended period of child benefit a bridging allowance of £15 per week will be paid by the Department of Employment for up to eight weeks a year to young people who apply for a YTS place having left or lost a job or a previous YTS place.

Freeline Social Security

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) when he established the Freeline Social Security service on 0800-666555; for what purpose; whether it has been in continuous service since that date; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many staff are employed to answer Freeline Social Security on 0800-666555; how many calls are dealt with on an average working day; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Freeline Social Security which succeeded Freefone DHSS was introduced on 6 April 1987 to provide a free advice and information service on general social security matters for members of the public and to supplement the service provided by DHSS local offices. The 10 Freeline Social Security centres which employ 90 staff have been in continuous service during normal working hours since their inception. In the year to 9 February 1988 they dealt with, on average, 3,073 calls a day.

The Department regards Freeline as a significant and successful enhancement of the service that it provides to the public.

Meals Allowance

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* details relating to the meals allowance payable to people in boarding accommodation but who do not have all the meals provided, showing *(a)* the percentage increase in

such meals in each year from 1982 to 1987, *(b)* figures available for each constituent within the United Kingdom and *(c)* regional variations in the cost of such meals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Statistics on the number of people in boarding accommodation who do not have all meals provided are not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Information on the regional variations in the cost of such meals is not collected.

The maximum payable by way of meals allowances has remained at £29·40 a week since November 1984. Percentage increases from 1982 to 1984 are set out in the table.

Percentage increase in Supplementary Benefit Meals allowance

	Per cent.
1982	7·35
1983	6·85
1984	7·69

RHAs (Clerical Officers)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of clerical officers employed by each regional health authority for each year since 1979 until the latest year for which figures are available, together with the estimated number of clerical officers required by each regional health authority.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have such information as is available as soon as possible. Information on the number required by each regional health authority is not available centrally.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the average salary of a clerical officer in each of the regional health authorities.

Mr. Newton: I regret that earnings information at this level is not available centrally.

Manchester Royal Eye Hospital (Cataract Unit)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the answer of 23 February, when he expects to be in a position to make a statement on the outcome of the recent discussions between the Central Manchester health authority and the regional health authority about the possible establishment of a day care cataract unit at the Manchester royal eye hospital.

Mrs. Currie: This matter, along with a range of other proposals for new patient service development in the region, will be considered by the regional health authority at its meeting on 22 March.

"Firecode"

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Stretford of 3 February, *Official Report*, column 663, what information he has about steps taken by district health authorities to follow the advice given in the "Firecode" documents;

(2) what steps he takes to monitor the compliance by district health authorities, with the advice given in the document "Firecode"; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: We regard fire safety in all NHS units as very important particularly as many patients are frail or immobile. Circular HC(87)24 asked health authorities to ensure that the fire precautions set out in the "Firecode" were scrupulously observed. Regional health authorities were asked to monitor district health authorities' observance of the precautions. During 1988-89 the Department's health building directorate will be reviewing each RHA's performance on fire safety in the premises for which it is responsible and its monitoring of DHAs. Any major shortcomings will be taken up in the National Health Service Board's review of the RHA and, if appropriate, in the ministerial review. As a result we should have significant information on compliance with the new "Firecode" by the end of the year.

Social Fund

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what contingency funds and arrangements exist for use in the event that a local office's social fund allocation for grants and loans appear unlikely to last the full financial year.

Mr. Scott: As the Secretary of State's directions and guidance to social fund officers in the "Social Fund Manual" make clear, social fund officers are expected to manage their local office budgets to meet needs of highest priority throughout the financial year and so as to remain within their budget for that year. There are some contingency arrangements at national level to meet, exceptionally, demands which were unforeseen and unexpected, for example, local disaster leading to extra demands for crisis loans.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give financial support to independent research to monitor the effects of the social fund on claimants, and to make the report of such a study publicly available.

Mr. Scott: We propose to commission independent research later in the year into the extent to which the social fund is meeting its objectives; the question of publication will be decided in due course.

Invalid Care Transfer

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services why invalid care allowance is not payable by credit transfer.

Mr. Scott: Payment by automated credit transfer requires a computerised database of claimants. Although it is the aim eventually to provide such a facility for the payment of all benefits, I regret that the necessary computer facilities are not yet available for invalid care allowance.

Speech Therapists

Mrs. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what difficulties are being experienced in the recruitment of trained speech therapists in *(a)* Wolverhampton and *(b)* the rest of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Information on the recruitment of speech therapists is not collected centrally. The position in a

particular district is a matter for the district health authority. Numbers of speech therapists in post in the NHS nationally have been increasing by about 8 per cent. on average per year.

Ethnic Monitoring

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, what steps he is taking to ensure that there is adequate representation of black, and ethnic minorities on *(a)* the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work and *(b)* similar bodies for which his Department is responsible.

Mr. Newton: We are aware of the concern to increase the number of members of ethnic minority origin on the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work. In making appointments to the council, and to similar bodies, efforts are made to identify members of ethnic minority groups who are able and willing to undertake public work.

Administrators

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the ratio of administrators to beds in *(a)* the National Health Service, *(b)* the South-West regional health authority and *(c)* the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly health authority on 1 January 1965, 1 January 1975, and 1 January 1985; and what is the projection for 1 January 1988.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 14 December 1987]:* Full information is not available in the form requested. For 1965, there are no comparable data with the later years. Projections for 1988 are not available centrally.

The work of administrative and clerical staff spans the whole range of health authority activity, not just hospital in-patient services, and a substantial number are engaged in direct clinical support roles. Crude ratios of administrative staff to available hospital beds, therefore, are misleading and do not provide helpful comparisons. The available information as requested, however, is shown in the table.

NHS Administrative and Clerical staff in post at 30 September per average daily available bed in NHS hospitals over calendar year

	1975	*1985*
England	0·24	0·34
South Western Regional Health Authority	0·21	0·30
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly District Health Authority	n/a	0·22

Benefit Offices (Staff Safety)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations have been made by trade unions representing staff in local offices about the safety of staff following benefit regulation changes in April.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 25 February 1988]:* No written representations have been received, but discussions have taken place about the safety of staff at departmental Whitley council meetings.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the percentage of patients awaiting operations in the Leeds, West district health authority who have been waiting for *(a)* under one month, *(b)* under two months, *(c)* under three months, *(d)* under six months, *(e)* under nine months, *(f)* under 12 months and *(g)* between 12 months and two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the September 1987 figures for in-patient waiting lists, urgent and non-urgent, for each district in the Yorkshire region.

Mr. Newton: The September waiting list figures are being compiled now and will be published as soon as possible.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when Her Majesty's Government intend to publish the quarterly waiting list returned filed by all district health authorities and special health authorities on 31 June 1987.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 18 January 1988]:* The returns for 30 June were seriously incomplete, due to initial difficulties in switching to the new and more detailed information system. Putting these figures into a form in which they might usefully be published requires extensive work, and we are currently giving priority to the returns for September, which I hope to be able to publish shortly.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table for each district health authority and special health authority, showing for each the total numbers of people waiting for treatment in September 1982 compared with the numbers at March 1987, the numerical change and the percentage increase or decrease, listed with the biggest increase first and the largest decrease last.

Mr. Newton *[pursuant to his reply 18 January 1988, c. 570]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Number of cases on in-patient waiting list with ranking of District Health Authorities/Special Health Authorities by percentage change September 1982 to March 1987

District Health Authority/ Special Health Authority	*September 1982*	*March 1987*	*Change September 1982 to March 1987*	
			Number	*Percentage*
Milton Keynes[1]	6	2,614	2,608	43,466·7
Halton	7	141	134	1,914·3
Islington	1,098	2,826	1,728	157·4
Huntingdon	471	922	451	95·8

District Health Authority/ Special Health Authority	September 1982	March 1987	Change September 1982 to March 1987 Number	Percentage
Hounslow and Spelthorne	3,127	5,863	2,736	87·5
East Surrey	1,257	2,327	1,070	85·1
West Essex	2,555	4,645	2,090	81·8
Lewisham and North Southwark	5,335	9,341	4,006	75·1
Bexley	1,123	1,953	830	73·9
Dartford and Gravesham	2,916	4,846	1,930	66·2
Harrogate	1,274	2,059	785	61·6
City and Hackney	4,586	7,140	2,554	55·7
Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's	2,167	3,247	1,080	49·8
Kidderminster and District	1,070	1,585	515	48·1
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	4,474	6,488	2,014	45·0
The Hospital for Sick Children	1,456	2,110	654	44·9
Mid Essex[2]	3,246	4,672	1,426	43·9
Bloomsbury	9,632	13,446	3,814	39·6
Redbridge	1,719	2,392	673	39·2
Bromsgrove and Redditch	1,475	2,052	577	39·1
Waltham Forest	3,271	4,504	1,233	37·7
West Suffolk	2,027	2,762	735	36·3
West Lambeth	6,038	8,111	2,073	34·3
North Warwickshire	1,944	2,576	632	32·5
South East Staffordshire	2,026	2,679	653	32·2
Worcester and District	2,651	3,477	826	31·2
Tower Hamlets	6,003	7,865	1,862	31·0
Hillingdon	6,009	7,867	1,858	30·9
Wolverhampton	3,677	4,802	1,125	30·6
Herefordshire	2,272	2,945	673	29·6
Lancaster	1,784	2,312	528	29·6
Eastbourne	2,552	3,298	746	29·2
West Surrey and North East Hampshire	3,708	4,763	1,055	28·5
The National Hospital for Nervous Diseases	441	564	123	27·9
South West Surrey	2,385	3,005	620	26·0
North West Surrey	2,315	2,915	600	25·9
Rochdale	2,342	2,933	591	25·2
Winchester	2,309	2,880	571	24·7
Airedale	1,686	2,100	414	24·6
Kettering	2,848	3,546	698	24·5
East Dorset	4,361	5,424	1,063	24·4
St. Helens and Knowsley	3,288	4,074	786	23·9
West Norfolk and Wisbech	1,688	2,088	400	23·7
Paddington and North Kensington	2,813	3,459	646	23·0
West Berkshire	3,256	3,999	743	22·8
Central Manchester	5,358	6,543	1,185	22·1
Cheltenham	1,782	2,157	375	21·0
Trafford	1,301	1,542	241	18·5
Chorley and South Ribble	651	770	119	18·3
Canterbury and Thanet	4,136	4,889	753	18·2
Wycombe	1,134	1,333	199	17·5
Southend	3,248	3,788	540	16·6
Bromley	1,931	2,242	311	16·1
Leicestershire	7,177	8,278	1,101	15·3
Rotherham	3,871	4,461	590	15·2
Bristol and Weston	7,142	8,213	1,071	15·0
East Cumbria	3,323	3,796	473	14·2
Greenwich	2,362	2,687	325	13·8
Hastings	2,547	2,882	335	13·2
Swindon	2,825	3,194	369	13·1
Maidstone	2,190	2,461	271	12·4
Northallerton	623	699	76	12·2
Sandwell	1,721	1,927	206	12·0
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	6,831	7,644	813	11·9
Basildon and Thurrock	5,888	6,541	653	11·1
Peterborough	3,770	4,176	406	10·8
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	4,117	4,546	429	10·4
West Birmingham	4,269	4,699	430	10·1
South Birmingham	6,878	7,569	691	10·0
Leeds Western	4,330	4,758	428	9·9

District Health Authority/ Special Health Authority	September 1982	March 1987	Change September 1982 to March 1987 Number	Percentage
Somerset	4,949	5,436	487	9·8
Brent	1,737	1,903	166	9·6
East Suffolk	3,097	3,381	284	9·2
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	2,313	2,521	208	9·0
North Devon	1,558	1,693	135	8·7
Bradford	6,663	7,172	509	7·6
South West Hertfordshire	1,986	2,136	150	7·6
Exeter	4,436	4,737	301	6·8
South Cumbria	1,152	1,217	65	5·6
Stockport	4,430	4,668	238	5·4
Shropshire	8,441	8,842	401	4·8
Brighton	3,863	4,022	159	4·1
Medway	3,273	3,393	120	3·7
North Hertfordshire	3,155	3,267	112	3·5
South West Durham	803	831	28	3·5
West Lancashire	2,433	2,495	62	2·5
North Staffordshire	8,862	9,058	196	2·2
West Dorset	2,015	2,057	42	2·1
Isle of Wight	1,349	1,368	19	1·4
South Bedfordshire	2,382	2,415	33	1·4
Ealing	1,489	1,504	15	1·0
Mid Surrey	2,150	2,157	7	0·3
Enfield	3,068	3,074	6	0·2
The National Heart and Chest Hospitals	1,073	1,065	−8	−0·7
Southport and Formby	1,373	1,360	−13	−0·9
Salisbury	4,770	4,717	−53	−1·1
Plymouth	5,897	5,800	−97	−1·6
Leeds Eastern	6,169	6,064	−105	−1·7
Hull	7,050	6,911	−139	−2·0
Barnet	3,628	3,545	−83	−2·3
Oldham	5,071	4,925	−146	−2·9
East Berkshire	8,244	7,905	−339	−4·1
Wigan	4,677	4,458	−219	−4·7
Moorfields Eye Hospital	1,458	1,387	−71	−4·9
York	2,710	2,575	−135	−5·0
Salford	5,371	5,101	−270	−5·0
Riverside	5,888	5,590	−298	−5·1
South Lincolnshire	4,428	4,190	−238	−5·4
North East Essex [2]	3,510	3,296	−214	−6·1
Chester	2,940	2,759	−181	−6·2
Bolton	3,348	3,138	−210	−6·3
North Bedfordshire	2,657	2,421	−236	−8·9
Southampton and South West Hampshire	9,080	8,217	−863	−9·5
Hartlepool	1,841	1,661	−180	−9·8
Liverpool	8,553	7,704	−849	−9·9
Chichester	2,786	2,464	−322	−11·6
Northumberland	1,896	1,668	−228	−12·0
Mid Downs	2,621	2,288	−333	−12·7
Preston	5,287	4,586	−701	−13·3
Camberwell	3,388	2,913	−475	−14·0
Wandsworth	3,239	2,768	−471	−14·5
Calderdale	1,166	996	−170	−14·6
Harrow	1,370	1,168	−202	−14·7
Gateshead	1,661	1,412	−249	−15·0
Gloucester	4,959	4,214	−745	−15·0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	5,238	4,434	−804	−15·3
Oxfordshire	7,003	5,901	−1,102	−15·7
Walsall	3,324	2,740	−584	−17·6
South Warwickshire	3,194	2,631	−563	−17·6
The Bethlem Royal and Maudsley Hospitals	128	105	−23	−18·0
Worthing	3,756	2,058	−698	−18·6
Croydon	3,093	2,518	−575	−18·6
Newcastle	11,524	9,363	−2,161	−18·8
Merton and Sutton	3,639	2,946	−693	−19·0
Pontefract	2,569	2,079	−490	−19·1
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	4,194	3,364	−830	−19·8
South Derbyshire	6,322	4,991	−1,331	−21·1
South Manchester	8,120	6,408	−1,712	−21·1
Scarborough	2,200	1,724	−476	−21·6
Doncaster	6,132	4,686	−1,466	−23·6

District Health Authority/ Special Health Authority	*September 1982*	*March 1987*	*Change September 1982 to March 1987 Number*	*Percentage*
Darlington	3,140	2,397	−743	−23·7
Rugby	864	659	−205	−23·7
Kingston and Esher	3,194	2,418	−776	−24·3
Wirral	4,714	3,564	−1,150	−24·4
Sheffield	14,678	11,051	−3,627	−24·7
Sunderland	4,889	3,659	−1,230	−25·2
Bury	979	731	−248	−25·3
West Cumbria	1,870	1,396	−474	−25·3
East Yorkshire	1,924	1,429	−495	−25·7
Cambridge	6,708	4,945	−1,763	−26·3
Newham	2,222	1,638	−584	−26·3
Tunbridge Wells	6,220	4,566	−1,654	−26·6
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	3,294	2,404	−890	−27·0
North Derbyshire	3,511	2,520	−991	−28·2
East Hertfordshire	1,847	1,325	−522	−28·3
Dudley	5,441	3,889	−1,552	−28·5
Central Birmingham	7,635	5,427	−2,208	−28·9
Wakefield	3,216	2,241	−975	−30·3
South Tyneside	1,047	727	−320	−30·6
Durham	1,489	1,032	−457	−30·7
Solihull	2,278	1,578	−700	−30·7
Central Nottinghamshire	7,154	4,955	−2,199	−30·7
Bath	8,079	5,570	−2,509	−31·1
Crewe	5,128	3,512	−1,616	−31·5
North Lincolnshire	4,129	2,819	−1,310	−31·7
Torbay	2,368	1,602	−766	−32·3
Mid Staffordshire	2,440	1,648	−792	32·5
Barnsley	3,934	2,600	−1,334	−33·9
Huddersfield	3,308	2,175	−1,133	−34·3
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	3,698	2,411	−1,287	−34·8
South East Kent	3,946	2,564	−1,382	−35·0
East Birmingham	4,600	2,865	−1,735	−37·7
Scunthorpe	4,609	2,832	−1,777	−38·6
Warrington	3,037	1,864	−1,173	−38·6
Northampton	6,793	4,144	−2,649	−39·0
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	3,542	2,148	−1,394	−39·4
North Tyneside	1,721	1,043	−678	−39·4
Nottingham	10,988	6,625	−4,363	−39·7
Grimsby	2,355	1,400	−955	−40·6
Frenchay	5,855	3,458	−2,397	−40·9
Haringey	1,708	1,004	−704	−41·2
Norwich	10,980	6,377	−4,603	−41·9
Tameside and Glossop	2,866	1,645	−1,221	−42·6
North West Hertfordshire	2,697	1,544	−1,153	−42·8
Coventry	8,759	4,813	−3,946	−45·1
South Sefton	6,332	3,409	−2,923	−46·2
North Manchester	4,726	2,528	−2,198	−46·5
South Tees	10,319	5,519	−4,800	−46·5
North West Durham	1,325	683	−642	−48·5
Aylesbury Vale[1]	6,450	3,300	−3,150	−48·8
Southmead	2,958	1,415	−1,543	−52·2
North Birmingham	2,723	1,300	−1,423	−52·3
North Tees	1,958	930	−1,028	−52·5
Bassetlaw	1,185	535	−650	−54·9
Dewsbury	1,181	429	−752	−63·7
Macclesfield	2,302	760	−1,542	−67·0
The Royal Marsden Hospital[3]	331	n/a	−331	—
The Eastman Dental Hospital[4]	n/a	250	250	—
Hampstead[3]	1,979	n/a	—	—

[1] The waiting list for Milton Keynes was formerly held by Aylesbury Vale Health Authority but was taken over by Milton Keynes Health Authority in 1984 following the development of Milton Keynes General Hospital. The above table shows a comparable reduction in the Aylesbury Vale figures.

[2] The waiting list figures for March 1987 are affected by the transfer of Black Notley Hospital from the North East Essex District to Mid Essex DHA on 1 April 1986.

[3] No March 1987 figures available for Hampstead Health Authority and the Royal Marsden Hospital.

[4] In September 1982 the data for the Eastman Dental Hospital was collected by another unit.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish figures showing the numbers of people waiting for treatment in March 1978 and March 1987; and if he will break this list down by regional health authority, district health authority and special health authority.

Mr. Newton *[pursuant to his reply, 18 January 1988, c. 570]*: The information requested is given in the table.

Number of cases on in-patient waiting list at 31 March 1978 and 31 March 1987

District health authority	*March 1978*	*March 1987*
Northern Region		
Hartlepool	1,523	1,661
North Tees	1,360	930
South Tees	4,543	5,519
East Cumbria[1]	..	3,796
South Cumbria[1]	..	1,217
West Cumbria	999	1,396
Darlington	2,088	2,397
Durham	1,286	1,032
North West Durham	1,080	683
South West Durham	907	831
Northumberland	1,477	1,668
Gateshead	1,787	1,412
Newcastle	8,903	9,363
North Tyneside	991	1,043
South Tyneside	646	727
Sunderland	2,917	3,659
RHA Total	30,507	37,334
Yorkshire Region		
Hull	5,076	6,911
East Yorkshire	1,361	1,429
Grimsby[1]	..	1,400
Scunthorpe	2,062	2,832
Northallerton	562	699
York	2,290	2,575
Scarborough	1,238	1,724
Harrogate	2,213	2,059
Bradford	3,019	7,172
Airedale	1,049	2,100
Calderdale[1]	..	996
Huddersfield	1,852	2,175
Dewsbury	829	429
Leeds Western[1]	..	4,758
Leeds Eastern[1]	..	6,064
Wakefield	1,873	2,241
Pontefract	1,840	2,079
RHA Total	25,264	47,643
Trent Region		
North Derbyshire	2,768	2,520
Southern Derbyshire	4,685	4,991
Leicestershire	8,252	8,278
North Lincolnshire	4,344	2,819
South Lincolnshire	4,628	4,190
Bassetlaw	1,467	535
Central Nottinghamshire	4,090	4,955
Nottingham	6,222	6,625
Barnsley	2,998	2,600
Doncaster[1]	..	4,686
Rotherham[1]	..	4,461
Sheffield[1]	..	11,051
RHA Total	39,454	57,711
East Anglian Region		
Cambridge[1]	..	4,945
Peterborough	2,760	4,176
West Suffolk[1]	..	2,762
East Suffolk[1]	..	3,381
Norwich	5,887	6,377
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	3,661	3,364
West Norfolk and Wisbech	3,221	2,088
Huntingdon[1]	..	922
RHA Total	15,529	28,015
North West Thames Region		
North Bedfordshire	1,516	2,421
South Bedfordshire	2,805	2,415
North Hertfordshire	2,317	3,267
East Hertfordshire	1,426	1325
North West Hertfordshire	2,412	1,544
South West Hertfordshire	2,830	2,136
Barnet	3,085	3,545
Harrow	955	1,168
Hillingdon	7,263	7,867
Hounslow and Spelthorne[1]	..	5,863
Ealing	1,298	1,504
Brent[1]	..	1,903
Paddington and North Kensington	2,280	3,459
Riverside[1]	..	5,590
RHA Total	28,187	44,007
North East Thames Region		
Basildon and Thurrock	5,708	6,541
Mid Essex[2]	2,837	4,672
North East Essex[2]	3,314	3,296
West Essex	2,506	4,645
Southend	2,267	3,788
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	4,436	6,488
Hampstead[1,3]	..	..
Bloomsbury[1]	..	13,446
Islington[1]	..	2,826
City and Hackney[1]	..	7,140
Newham	1,312	1,638
Tower Hamlets[1]	..	7,865
Enfield	2,539	3,074
Haringey	1,885	1,004
Redbridge	1,128	2,392
Waltham Forest	3,402	4,504
RHA Total	31,334	73,319
South East Thames Region		
Brighton	3,964	4,002
Eastbourne	1,624	3,298
Hastings	2,963	2,882
South East Kent	2,716	2,564
Canterbury and Thanet	3,660	4,889
Dartford and Gravesham	2,913	4,846
Maidstone	2,387	2,461
Medway	2,192	3,393
Tunbridge Wells	6,298	4,566
Bexley	707	1,953
Greenwich	1,992	2,687
Bromley	1,416	2,242
West Lambeth[1]	..	8,111
Camberwell	3,061	2,913
Lewisham and North Southwark	5,781	9,341
RHA Total	41,674	60,168
South West Thames Region		
North West Surrey	3,099	2,915
North Surrey and North East Hants	3,015	4,763
South West Surrey	2,698	3,005
Mid Surrey	940	2,157
East Surrey	1,059	2,327
Chichester	1,518	2,464
Mid Downs	1,780	2,288
Worthing	2,439	3,058
Croydon	2,535	2,518
Kingston and Esher[1]	..	2,418
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton[1]	..	2,521
Wandsworth	3,260	2,768
Merton and Sutton	3,069	2,946
RHA Total	25,412	36,148
Wessex Region		
East Dorset	4,549	5,424
West Dorset	2,282	2,057

District health authority	March 1978	March 1987
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	6,364	7,644
Southampton and South West Hampshire	5,267	8,217
Winchester	2,725	2,880
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	2,368	2,411
Salisbury	3,407	4,717
Swindon	1,404	3,194
Bath	4,701	5,570
Isle of Wight	1,184	1,368
RHA Total	34,251	43,482
Oxford Region		
East Berkshire	7,962	7,905
West Berkshire	3,012	3,999
Aylesbury Vale[1]	..	3,300
Wycombe	1,195	1,333
Milton Keynes[1]	..	2,614
Kettering	4,027	3,546
Northampton	4,895	4,144
Oxfordshire	6,800	5,901
RHA Total	27,891	32,742
South Western Region		
Bristol and Weston	8,090	8,213
Frenchay	5,977	3,458
Southmead	1,200	1,415
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	3,510	4,434
Exeter	3,484	4,737
North Devon[1]	..	1,693
Plymouth[1]	..	5,800
Torbay	3,369	1,602
Cheltenham[1]	..	2,157
Gloucester	..	4,214
Somerset	5,233	5,436
RHA Total	30,863	43,159
West Midlands Region		
Bromsgrove and Redditch	1,201	2,052
Herefordshire	2,135	2,945
Kidderminster and District	813	1,585
Worcester and District	1,884	3,477
Shropshire	6,134	8,842
Mid Staffordshire	2,347	1,648
North Staffordshire	8,325	9,058
South East Staffordshire	1,383	2,679
Rugby	764	659
North Warwickshire[1]	..	2,576
South Warwickshire[1]	..	2,631
Central Birmingham[1]	..	5,427
East Birmingham	3,727	2,865
North Birmingham	3,969	1,300
South Birmingham[1]	..	7,569
West Birmingham[1]	..	4,699
Coventry	5,254	4,813
Dudley	5,562	3,889
Sandwell	1,899	1,927
Solihull	..	1,578
Walsall	3,841	2,740
Wolverhampton	3,618	4,802
RHA Total	52,856	79,761
Mersey Region		
Chester	2,137	2,759
Crewe[1]	..	3,512
Halton	0	141
Macclesfield[1]	..	760
Warrington	2,623	1,864
Liverpool	7,704	7,704
St. Helens and Knowsley[1]	..	4,074
Southport and Formby	1,703	1,360
South Sefton	3,916	3,409
Wirral	3,168	3,564
RHA Total	21,251	29,147
North Western Region		
Lancaster	1,867	2,312
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	3,771	4,546
Preston[1]	..	4,586
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	4,978	2,404
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	3,864	2,148
West Lancashire	2,466	2,495
Chorley and South Ribble[1]	..	770
Bolton	3,599	3,138
Bury	1,075	731
North Manchester	4,549	2,528
Central Manchester	5,769	6,543
South Manchester	5,281	6,408
Oldham	3,024	4,925
Rochdale	2,629	2,933
Salford	3,669	5,101
Stockport	4,191	4,668
Tameside and Glossop	2,051	1,645
Trafford	1,821	1,542
Wigan	2,824	4,458
RHA Total	57,428	63,881
Special Health Authorities		
The Hospital for Sick Children	2,128	2,110
The National Hospital for Nervous Diseases	257	564
Moorfields Eye Hospital	915	1,387
The Bethlem Royal and Maudsley Hospitals	77	105
The National Heart and Chest Hospitals	921	1,065
The Royal Marsden Hospital[3]	158	..
Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's	319	3,247
The Eastman Dental Hospital[4]	..	250
Special Health Authorities Total	4,775	8,728

[1] Comparable figures not readily available because of National Health Service restructuring on 1 April 1982.

[2] The waiting list figures for March 1987 are affected by the transfer of Black Notley Hospital from the North East Essex District to Mid Essex district health authority on 1 April 1986.

[3] No March 1987 figures available for Hampstead Health Authority and The Royal Marsden Hospital.

[4] In September 1982 the data for the Eastman Dental Hospital was collected by another unit.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Surplus Commodities

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the effect on output of wheat, rapeseed and other commodities in surplus of the measures which the German Government have said they will introduce to cushion the effect of the decisions taken by the EEC at the meeting of the Council of Ministers and whether he expects other countries are likely to take similar measures.

Mr. MacGregor: I assume the hon. Member refers to set-aside. It is not possible to predict its effect on output, as this will depend on the uptake of the scheme in the individual member states.

EC (Depreciation of Stocks)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his statement on the meeting of the EEC Council, *Official Report*, 15 February, columns 705-17, why the cost of depreciation on

EEC stocks has not been written off under the guideline; and under what provision of the treaty of Rome the Commission decided not to include such depreciation in the annual budget.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 22 February by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at column *17*.

Agricultural Policy

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will meet representatives of the General Synod of the Church of England to discuss the social and economic prospects for agricultural tenants.

Mr. Gummer: No such meeting has been requested by the General Synod, nor has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales been approached by the Church in Wales, but I frequently meet representatives of landlords and tenants to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Negative Monetary Compensatory Amounts

Mr. Warren: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the result of the representations to the European Commission on the subject of negative monetary compensatory amounts as barriers to the efficiency of the United Kingdom's agricultural industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I expect this to be considered in the context of the forthcoming price-fixing.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Warren: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research Her Majesty's Government are sponsoring into alternatives to chlorofluorocarbons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: None. Although one chlorofluorocarbon (dichlorodifluoromethane) is currently permitted as a food contact freezant under the Miscellaneous Additives in Food Regulations 1980, its usage is very small, and alternative liquid freezants (carbon dioxide and nitrogen) are already permitted by the same regulations. The latter materials are already used preferentially by quick-frozen food manufacturers, as the processes utilising them are both more cost-effective and environmentally acceptable.

Houses (Land Slippage)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to how many houses, by county, have been affected in the last five years by land slippage through land drainage problems and coastal erosion.

Mr. Gummer: The information requested is not readily available.

Bass Fishery

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he proposes to take for the long-term management of the bass fishery.

Mr. Gummer: On 24 July 1986 I announced, in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) at column 500 that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I were undertaking consultations on measures recommended by the Ministry's directorate of fisheries research for the management of the bass fishery in England and Wales. Those consultations produced a full and detailed response from both commercial and recreational fishermen.

Following careful evaluation of this response and further investigation by our scientists, my right hon. Friend and I have reached conclusions about the sort of measures needed to protect young bass, safeguard recruitment to the spawning stock and maximise yields to the fishery. Although alternative options have been considered, we are of the view that the general line of the approach recommended by our scientists is the correct one, with an increase in the minimum landing size for bass, together with the introduction of mesh size controls for gill and other specified nets and the closure of nursery areas.

Our conclusions are therefore that the following measures would be appropriate:

(i) *minimum landing size*

to increase from 1 January 1989 the national mimimum landing size for bass from 32 to 36 cm

to prohibit from the same date the carriage of bass under 36 cm by British vessels

to ask the EC Commission to propose a corresponding increase in the Community minimum landing size

(ii) *mesh size controls*

to prohibit from 1 January 1990 the use of gill and other specified nets with mesh sizes of between 60 and 99 mm by British fishing vessels within British fishery limits, south of lines of latitude drawn through Donna Nook in Lincolnshire and Havering Point, Cumbria, subject to an exception for certain types of net between 60 and 99 mm used to catch grey mullet in specified fisheries

(iii) *nursery areas*

to establish from 1 January 1990 24 nursery areas to protect juvenile bass stocks, in which only fishing activities which are not considered detrimental to juvenile bass stocks would be permitted.

The intention would be to apply the minimum landing size throughout Great Britain. The prohibition on the carriage of under-size bass would apply to all British fishing vessels. The mesh size controls would not be applied to waters off Scotland, north east England, Cumbria and Northern Ireland, where the numbers of bass taken are negligible. Within the area in which the mesh size controls would apply there would also be a ban on the carriage of gill and other specified nets with mesh sizes of between 60 and 99 mm unless properly lashed and stowed in such a way that they could not be readily used.

Full details of these proposals are being sent to organisations representative of the commercial and recreational fisheries and other interests and copies are also being placed in the Library of the House. Written comments are being invited by 31 May. My officials will be looking to discuss the local implications of the proposed measures, and in particular the proposals for individual nursery areas, in detail with representatives of local fishing interests before final decisions are taken.

Chernobyl

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the exact date and time when he first became aware of the high level of rainfall at the time the Chernobyl nuclear accident plume was over West Yorkshire in early May 1986.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the last sentence of my previous reply to this matter on 10 February 1988, at column *240*. The exact date of receipt was 30 June 1986; the time of receipt was not recorded.

ENERGY

Energy Subsidies

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether his Department has commissioned or intends to commission, studies evaluating the cost-effectiveness of the subsidies, both direct and indirect, including tax reliefs, given to *(a)* the nuclear industry, *(b)* the oil and gas industry, *(c)* the coal industry and *(d)* the energy efficiency-renewable energy industries; what these are in 1987 prices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Parkinson: My Department's current support for the areas in question is described in volume II, chapter 6 of the public expenditure White Paper "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1988-89 to 1990-91", Cm. 288, published in January 1988. The cost-effectiveness of this support is kept under regular review.

Nuclear Research

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the current percentage levy by *(a)* the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority and *(b)* the Energy Technology Support Unit on (i) nuclear and (ii) non-nuclear research work to fund underlying nuclear research; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Department of Energy's contribution to the UKAEA's funding of the underlying research programme is made through a 10 per cent. levy on the majority of its nuclear programme letters, and smaller levies on contracts for non-nuclear work, including a charge of 6 per cent. on the work undertaken by the energy technology support unit. The balance of programme funding comes from levies on work for the UKAEA's other customers, and other arrangements designed to produce comparable levels of funding.

Imported Coal

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has on the level of direct or indirect subsidy enjoyed by imported coal from: South Africa, the United States of America, Poland, Colombia, Australia and China.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Government do not collect information about any subsidies which may be paid to overseas coal producers, as few coal-producing countries publish such information.

Scottish Coalfield (Work Force)

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what would be the net cost of making the work force of the Scottish coalfield redundant and paying them benefits instead of wages.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This information is not available.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next expects to meet the chairman of British Nuclear Fuels Limited to discuss the future of Sellafield and the effects of reprocessing of nuclear waste on the inhabitants of the east coast of Ireland and west coast of Britain.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of BNFL regularly. I shall meet him next on Monday 29 February when I open the company's exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall. Reprocessing is a proven and safe technology which keeps open the possibility for recycling valuable uranium and plutonium as fuel.

Nuclear Policy

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received from the Irish Government and their Minister for Energy regarding nuclear energy policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) on 15 February 1988 at column *516*.

Nuclear Material (Transport)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether any nuclear material of any kind has been transported to the Drigg or Sellafield sites from the Mol site in Belgium; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I am informed that irradiated fuel from a joint United Kingdom/Belgium irradiation test programe in the BR3 reactor at Mol was returned to Sellafield on completion of the programme. The last receipts were in 1984-85.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what progress the Government have made towards clarifying guidelines for the use of third party financing in the public sector, for energy efficiency investment provided by private sector energy management companies.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The guidelines issued by the Treasury and the Energy Efficiency Office last May clarified the use and assessment of contract energy management in the public sector, and these still apply. A number of public sector projects are under way or in development.

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what progress he is making towards launching a suitable scheme for labelling the energy efficiency of homes; and when he expects to launch such a scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My Department's Energy Efficiency Office jointly funded (with the Department of the Environment) the development of the Building Research Establishment domestic energy model, which provides the technical basis for the Milton Keynes energy cost index for new houses. Meanwhile, the EEO continues to advise and encourage private sector firms seeking to stimulate market demand for home energy labels in new or existing homes.

Private Sector Energy Producers

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when the Government expect to resolve the difficulties in relation to establishing a rating system for private sector electricity power stations and combined heat and power producers, which will permit them to be assessed for rating on an equitable basis with power stations operated by the Central Electricity Generating Board.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I will be making a statement on the rating of independent electricity suppliers very shortly.

Home Insulation

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many projects are now operating under the neighbourhood energy action home insulation scheme; how many homes have been insulated; what is the estimated target for the current year; and what is the total level of support from public funds through the Government and their agencies.

Mr. Peter Morrison: There are now 434 such projects operating; the number of homes insulated to date is estimated at 450,000; the target number of homes to be insulated is 200,000 in 1987-88 and a further 300,000 in 1988-89. Total Government funding (for start-up costs, wage costs, and for the draught-proofing work of projects) is estimated at £45 million in 1987-88 rising to £55 million to £60 million in 1988-89.

Energy Labelling Scheme

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to launch an energy labelling scheme for electrical appliances; when discussions with the industry first started on a voluntary scheme; and what progress has been made.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I have no plans to launch an energy labelling scheme for electrical appliances.

My Department has, since before 1980, been in discussion with the manufacturers of electrical appliances, and a pilot energy cost labelling scheme was developed by the John Lewis Partnership and Eastern Electricity in collaboration with the Energy Efficiency Office. As a result of this study, all John Lewis Partnership stores and all electricity board showrooms now display simple energy cost labels on refrigeration goods on a voluntary basis. Many other manufacturers and retailers as a matter of course provide energy consumption data for electrical appliances, either in their sales brochures or in the form of "energy labels".

In the period 1986-87, the Energy Efficiency Office produced two leaflets: one for consumers which explains the basis for energy cost labels on refrigeration goods, and one for retailers and manufacturers explaining the standard method of estimating the annual energy costs for refrigeration goods, washing machines and dishwashers from the basic energy consumption data provided by the manufacturer. Any retailer or manufacturer who so wishes may draw upon these leaflets to produce a simple energy cost label. Copies of these leaflets are available from the Energy Efficiency Office.

Electricity (Private Producers)

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he has taken to satisfy himself, in the light of the conclusions of the Price Waterhouse Report on electricity tariffs available to private producers, that the existing tariffs offered by the electricity boards comply with the provisions of the Energy Act 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have no reason to believe that in setting tariffs in the light of the Price Waterhouse report, the electricity supply industry has acted otherwise than in accordance with the provisions of the Energy Act 1983.

Tariffs fixed under the 1983 Act have to be based on the "avoided cost" principle, must not show undue preference and should be published; they must also be set after consultation with the consultative council and the Electricity Council.

Spent Magnox Fuel

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the average percentage of each batch of spent Magnox nuclear fuel processed at BNFL b205 factory deemed to be accounted as a process loss; and what covering agreements there are with customers to accept such process losses.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Processing of spent Magnox nuclear fuel at Sellafield releases both uranium and plutonium for future use. I am informed that up to 3 per cent. by weight of waste is produced; which is isolated for safe storage.

There are arrangements with overseas customers for the eventual return of such waste.

Nuclear Materials (Safeguards)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether the European Commission has fully informed *(a)* the United Kingdom Government and *(b)* other Governments of the partner countries in supply and co-operation agreements or contracts, of the safeguards convention applied to the accounting of nuclear materials subject to these agreements in mixed civil-military installations.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The United Kingdom Government participate in the negotiation of arrangements for the application and implementation of Euratom safeguards in the mixed civil-military installations in the United Kingdom. Other Governments are not involved in these negotiations.

Power Stations (Environmental Impact)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas), *Official Report*, 11 February, columns *346-47*, on European Economic Community environmental impact assessment regulations, which of the projects *(c)*, *(e)*, *(f)*, *(g)* in the original question are to be subject to applications for planning consent on or before 2 July under current Departmental plans.

Mr. Michael Spicer: An application for outline planning consent for the European demonstration reprocessing plant at Dounreay (project C), which is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, was submitted on 30 May 1985. The CEGB sought my consent to construct the proposed coal-fired power station at Fawley (project E) on 3 February this

year. I am advised that those concerned have no plans to submit planning applications for projects F or G before 2 July 1988.

Electricity (Privatisation)

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the cost of supplying the statement and White Paper on privatising electricity to every employee of the electricity supply industry in England and Wales.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The cost of supplying the statement and the White Paper was met by the Electricity Council. I have therefore asked the chairman of the council to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of non fossil-fuelled generating capacity the proposed privatised electricity distribution companies will be required to contract for.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I will be consulting the industry on this question. I anticipate that the level will be set to reflect, first, the existing level of nuclear power generation and, secondly, an appropriate level of other non-fossil fuel sources.

Electricity Supply

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he intends to introduce legislation to *(a)* provide powers to restructure and privatise the electricity supply industry, *(b)* establish a regulatory system for the electricity supply industry and *(c)* modernise the law on electricity supply.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Government intend to introduce legislation at the earliest opportunity.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the power stations that he proposes should form a new private generating company comprising 30 per cent. of existing capacity.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The new company will own a broad spread of plant of various sizes and ages to enable the new company to compete at all levels of system demand. The precise allocation of plant is a matter for consultation with the industry.

Nuclear Materials

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) in how many nuclear installations in the Unietd Kingdom nuclear materials from the safeguarded and unsafeguarded nuclear cycle are processed simultaneously;

(2) in how many, and at which, nuclear installations in the United Kingdom civil safeguarded and military unsafeguarded nuclear materials are processed or stored simultaneously.

Mr. Michael Spicer *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* There is one facility at British Nuclear Fuels Springfields where some civil natural uranium is co-processed with defence uranium. Both safeguarded and unsafeguarded material is present at various BNFL and Atomic Energy Authority sites.

Sellafield (Safeguards)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) how many installations at British Nuclear Fuels plc, Sellafield site are open to continuous physical inspection by either: *(a)* Euratom or *(b)* International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards inspectors;

(2) how many installations at the British Nuclear Fuels plc, Sellafield site contain civil and military materials together, either simultaneously or sequentially.

Mr. Michael Spicer *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and the Border (Mr. Maclean) on 4 June 1986 at columns *594-95.*

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) for each of the installations under particular safeguards provisions at British Nuclear Fuels plc, Sellafield, if he will list the date on which the reporting to Euratom of isotopic data on plutonium was begun;

(2) for how many installations at British Nuclear Fuels plc, Sellafield all plutonium stocks and flows recorded for and reported to Euratom include the plutonium isotopic data;

(3) for how many of the installations at British Nuclear Fuels plc, Sellafield the particular safeguard provisions to which reference is made in Commission regulation 3227/76 have been brought into force;

(4) whether the inspection reports, without giving specific details, of meetings to discuss implementation questions regarding the Euratom safeguards provisions agreed in June 1986 for Sellafield, have identified any areas where British Nuclear Fuels plc recording or reporting systems require improvement.

Mr. Michael Spicer *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 20 July 1987, at column *19.* The meetings referred to in my reply are continuing and include discussion of particular safeguards provisions for Sellafield, none of which are yet in force, and the reporting of plutonium isotopic data.

British Nuclear Fuels plc

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many installations on the British Nuclear plc, Sellafield site are designated for civil use only.

Mr. Michael Spicer *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* The facility for the production of fuel for the Dounreay prototype fast reactor is used exclusively for civil purposes as will be the thermal oxide reprocessing plant (THORP) which is currently under construction.

Nuclear Facilities (Safeguards)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy for how many, and which, nuclear facilities in the United Kingdom facility attachments, pursuant to the 1978 United Kingdom-International Atomic Energy-Euratom tripartite safeguards agreement are in force.

Mr. Michael Spicer *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* There are facility attachments in force for the prototype

fast reactor and its associated reprocessing plant at Dounreay and the centrifuge enrichment plants at Capenhurst.

Plutonium

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what formal agreements there are between Japan and the United Kingdom concerning the physical protection of reprocessed plutonium being transported from Sellafield to Japan in the 1990s;

(2) what formal agreements there are between United States of America and the United Kingdom concerning the physical protection of reprocessed plutonium being transported from Sellafield to Japan in the 1990s.

Mr. Michael Spicer *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* All exports of nuclear materials are made within the guidelines set out in the statement by the then Foreign Secretary, James Callaghan, on 31 March 1976 at columns 514-516. This includes the requirement for adequate physical protection.

Detailed arrangements for these shipments will be agreed nearer the time.

ENVIRONMENT

Planning Applications

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give for the last calendar year or 12 months for which figures are available, the total number of planning applications submitted to local authorities, the number refused, the number appealed against, the number of appeals subsequently upheld, and the number of times costs were awarded; and what the comparable figures have been in each of the past five years.

Mr. Waldegrave: The tables include the information requested.

Figures for planning applications are taken from Government statistical service news release number 52 dated 1 February 1988. The figures for planning appeals are published in the chief planning inspector's report April 1986 to March 1987. These documents are in the Library of the House.

Planning applications

England

	Decisions	*Applications refused*
1982-83	382,000	48,000
1983-84	404,000	51,000
1984-85	399,000	54,000
1985-86	402,000	58,000
1986-87	426,000	66,000

Appeals under sections 36 and 37 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971

	Received	*Decided*	*Allowed*
1982	13,900	12,915	4,003
1983	13,699	11,221	3,633
1984	16,192	11,643	3,773
1985	17,053	14,639	5,477
1985-86	17,839	14,130	5,581
1986-87	19,856	15,613	6,208

Approximately 13 per cent. of planning appeals are withdrawn by appellants before any decision is reached.

Applications for the award of costs (all categories of appeal)

Year	*Decided*	*Awards against*		*Cases where no award made*	
		Local authority	*Appellant*		*Per cent.*
1982	355	87	18	250	70·4
1983	277	53	20	204	73·6
1984	310	43	15	252	81·3
1985	351	94	7	250	71·2
1985-86	360	102	8	250	69·4
1986-87	569	174	18	377	66·3

Homelessness

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest numbers of homeless people in the London borough of Newham; and what is the cost to the borough.

Mrs. Roe: The number of households accepted as homeless by the London borough of Newham in July to September 1987 appears in "Local authorities' action under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act: England. Supplementary tables".

The latest information available from the borough on the costs incurred in the operation of the homelessness provisions appears in "Homeless Statistics, 1984-85 actuals", published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. Newham did not respond to the 1985-86 and 1986-87 surveys. The figures cover all the costs falling outside the Housing Revenue Account and the hostel and lodging house costs falling on the HRA: the costs of HRA dwellings used either permanently or temporarily to house the homeless are not included.

Copies of both publications are available in the Library.

Planning Appeals

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration is being given to introducing legislation whereby individual members of the public, singly or collectively, would have the right of appeal to him where a local authority grants planning permission.

Mr. Waldegrave: In our response (Cm. 43) to the fifth report from the Environment Committee, Session 1985-86, we endorsed the Committee's view that it would not be appropriate to give to third parties rights to appeal against the grant of planning permission.

Lead-free Petrol

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* official cars and *(b)* other vehicles operated by his Department use lead-free petrol.

Mr. Chope: There are 16 cars in the Department of the Environment running exclusively on unleaded petrol. There are a further 700 vehicles capable of running on unleaded fuel where it is available.

Planning Permission (Appeals)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in how many cases a local authority's refusal of planning permission was *(a)* the subject of an appeal

to him and *(b)* upheld by him in the last year for which figures were available; and what equivalent figures he has for the city of Durham.

Mrs. Roe: In 1987, the number of appeals received against planning decisions of local authorities, or their failure to determine applications, the number of such appeals decided by the Secretary of State or inspectors appointed by him, and the number dismissed were as follows:

	England	*City of Durham*
(a) Received	21,548	15
Decided	17,113	15
(b) Dismissed	10,589	5

Lambeth (Housing)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many housing investment programme approvals have been given to Lambeth council in 1987-88 under the estates action programme; and how many he estimates will be given in the following year.

Mrs. Roe: Lambeth Council did not apply for estate action funding in 1987-88 but have submitted four outline bids for 1988-89. These are now being considered. We will tell Lambeth shortly which of these bids we should like them to work up more fully. Any approvals and additional allocations will follow as soon as the council can give us firm information on costs, phasing and other details of the schemes.

Water

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the location of public water supplies in the area of the Anglian water authority which failed to meet the bacteriological standards set out in the EEC drinking water directive in 1985, 1986 and 1987.

Mr. Moynihan: I am not aware of any public water supplies in the Anglian water authority area failing to comply with the bacteriological standards in the EC drinking water directive in 1985, 1986 and 1987.

Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the households currently housed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in England and Wales are one-parent families; and what percentage this is of the total number of households in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Mrs. Roe: At 30 September 1987, there were about 11,300 households temporarily placed in bed — and — breakfast accommodation by English and Welsh local authorities under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act. Information on the number of one-parent families placed in such accommodation is not collected.

Homeless People

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the latest estimate for the number of homeless people in Leeds; how many are under 21 years of age; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Roe: Numbers of households accepted as homeless are reported by local authorities, but not information on ages or on numbers of people. The households accepted by Leeds city council in the third quarter of 1987 appears in the latest issue of "Local authorities' action under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act: England. Supplementary tables", which is available in the Library.

Nuclear Waste

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether any nuclear waste material of any kind has been transported to the Drigg or Sellafield sites from the Mol site in Belgium; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: Irradiated fuel from a joint United Kingdom/Belgium irradiation test programme in the BR3 reactor at Mol has been returned to Sellafield on completion of the programme. The last receipts were in 1984-85.

Drigg (Development)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to make additional infrastructure investment available in the Drigg area of West Cumbria, following the decision in 1987 to make Drigg Britain's only low-level radioactive waste site.

Mr. Ridley: It is for BNFL and the local authorities to make additional infrastructure investment available in the Drigg area.

BNFL has already contributed some £10 million towards the development of infrastructure in west Cumbria.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the Drigg Action Group, Cumbria, concerning the status of, and future developments at, the Drigg site; and what reply he has sent.

Mr. Ridley: I have received representations from the organiser of the Drigg Action Group about the Drigg site. A copy of the reply has been sent to the hon. Member.

Sports and Leisure Management

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to bring sports and leisure management within the class of defined activities as set out in the Local Government Finance Bill; and what timetable he proposes for the implementation of the provisions relating to all such defined services.

Mr. Chope: The Department issued consultation papers on both these issues last autumn. We are still considering the responses.

Rating Reform

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he proposes to take on the introduction of the new community charge to ensure that the inequalities of the grant-related expenditure formula for Harborough and similar large rural type authorities are not perpetuated in the new system of local government finance, either in the transitional period or in the longer term.

Mr. Howard: The needs assessment to be introduced in the new community charge system will continue to reflect

the real disparities in the circumstances of different areas which affect authorities' need to spend in order to provide a standard level of service efficiently, but they will be simpler and more stable than at present. The details of the methodology will be decided after discussion with local authority representatives.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 19 November 1987, *Official Report*, column *671*, if he is now in a position to list the precise parts of a farm business liable to pay the non-domestic rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: A farm business may take many forms. However all such businesses are liable to be rated unless they come within the terms of section 26 of the General Rate Act as amended by the Rating Act 1971.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his definition of agricultural buildings in the context of the proposed uniform business rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to section 26 of the General Rate Act 1967 as amended by the Rating Act 1971. The Government have tabled amendments to the Local Government Finance Bill which would replicate those provisions in the new non-domestic rating system.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 1 March 1988

SCOTLAND

Orthopaedic Consultants (Ayrshire and Arran)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average waiting time for each orthopaedic consultant employed by the Ayrshire and Arran health board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and will arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the average waiting time for operations for each orthopaedic consultant employed by the Highland health board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and will arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library.

Mobile Homes

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many licensed residential mobile home stances there are in each district and islands authority in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available centrally.

Monofilament Nets

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what reference was made to the EC Commission about his Department's ban on the carriage of monofilament nets; and what representations were received from the Commission.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As was stated to the hon. Member on 17 April 1986, at column *457*, the Commission of the European Communities was consulted about the terms of the order before it was laid. In reply the Commission indicated that the order was compatible with Community law and in conformity with the common fisheries policy.

On 5 November 1987, the Commission confirmed that the measures in the order could now be regarded as technical measures, covered by article 14(1)(b) of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 3094/86 which replaced Council Regulation (EEC) No. 171/83 on 14 October 1986.

Rural Areas (Assistance)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount of all central Government assistance to rural areas for the last financial year in Scotland on a per capita basis.

Mr. Lang: The information is not readily available in the form requested.

Homelessness

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish figures for the number of households accepted as homeless in Scotland in each year from 1978 until the latest available year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The numbers of applicant households under the homelessness legislation who were assessed as homeless by local authorities are set out in the following table.

Financial year	*Number of homeless cases*
1978-79	7,494
1979-80	7,443
1980-81	7,022
1981-82	8,268
1982-83	8,665
1983-84	8,094
1984-85	9,851
1985-86	[1]10,906
1986-87	[1]9,668

[1] Provisional.

Children (Education)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many four-year-old children in each local education authority in Scotland attend reception classes in primary schools; what percentage of the estimated four-year-old population in each local education authority area this represents; and what is the average pupil-to-teacher ratio in each local education authority area for these classes, for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is not available.

Bridges (Tolls)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he proposes to abolish tolls on the Forth road bridge and the Tay road bridge; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the costs of the collection of tolls on the Tay road bridge in the years 1986 and 1987; and what were the interest charges paid in respect of the Tay road bridge during the same period.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The collection of tolls on the bridge is the responsibility of the Tay Road Bridge joint board. However, I understand that collection costs for the years 1985-86 and 1986-87 amounted to £352,000 and £350,000 respectively. Interest charges on the loan outstanding to the Secretary of State amounted to £208,096 and £206,328 respectively.

Health Workers (Disruptive Action)

Mr. Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many operations in Scotland had to be cancelled as a result of the disruption by health workers on the day of action on 24 February.

Mr. Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many operations have been cancelled as a result of disruptive action by health workers in the current year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: 2,447.

Mr. Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what effects detrimental to patients have resulted from disruptive action by health workers in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: If significant numbers of staff or staff in key areas withdraw their labour, health care is bound to be affected in a wide range of ways: for instance, inadequate levels of nursing cover in a major psychiatric hospital; geriatric and psychogeriatric patients having to be fed cold evening meals off paper plates; disruption of the normal delivery of supplies, including laundry and food, to hospitals; and long-stay patients having to use disposable paper sheets. I am informed by the health boards that on 24 February there was inadequate emergency cover for one or more services in more than 20 hospitals, as shown in the following list. Over 2,400 operations have not taken place this year because of industrial action, a needless waste of highly skilled manpower and advanced facilities. Industrial action is adversely affecting existing patients and is bound to lengthen waiting lists.

Argyll and Clyde
Vale of Leven, Hawkhead, Barshaw, Merchiston.

Fife
Lynebank, Dunfermline and West Fife, West Fife District General Hospital.

Forth Valley
Royal Scottish National Hospital.

Greater Glasgow
Knightswood, Victoria Southern General, Canniesburn, Duke Street.

Lothian
Herdmanflat, Western General, Roodlands, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, West Lothian Unit.

Tayside
Royal Liff, Strathmartine, King's Cross, Dundee Royal Infirmary, Ninewells.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the statistics for the assisted places scheme in the 1987-88 school session in Scotland, and the income scale which will apply to the scheme in school session 1988-89.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: At the beginning of the current school session there were 2,591 pupils receiving assistance under the assisted places scheme. Additional pupils will be admitted to assisted places throughout the 1987-88 school session and I expect that the final total will exceed that for the 1986-87 session.

The scheme continues to concentrate assistance on lower income families. In 1987-88 1,183 pupils (46 per cent. of those in the scheme) will be receiving full fee remission because they have a family income of £6,972 per annum or less. A further 223 pupils (9 per cent.) have family incomes between £6,973 and £8,000 per annum and 99 (4 per cent.) between £8,001 and £8,500.

For school session 1988-89 I propose to lay regulations before the House in due course providing for progressive parental contributions for one assisted pupil in relation to family income as follows:

Part of relevant income to which the specified percentage applies	*Parental contribution (percentage)*
That part (if any) which exceeds £7,092 but does not exceed £7,711	9
That part (if any) which exceeds £7,711 but does not exceed £8,341	12
That part (if any) which exceeds £8,341 but does not exceed £9,591	15
That part (if any) which exceeds £9,591 but does not exceed £11,513	21
That part (if any) which exceeds £11,513 but does not exceed £14,023	24
That part (if any) which exceeds £14,023	33

The relevant income scale is open ended, but the remission can of course be given only where the parental contribution is less than the school tuition fee.

Housing Expenditure

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the total local authority capital expenditure on housing from 1974, including the estimated expenditure for 1988-89, where appropriate by block allocation, at current prices.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The following table shows total expenditure at current prices on the relevant blocks from 1 April 1974 including estimated expenditure for 1987-88 and planned expenditure for 1988-89.

	£ million
HRA	4,169
Non-HRA	1,357
Other	118
Total LA expenditure	5,644

Argyll and Clyde Health Boards

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many senior officials of the Argyll and Clyde health boards have been suspended or paid off in the last six weeks.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Two senior officials have been suspended during the last six weeks.

Pay Beds

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, by each health board, the average number of pay beds occupied by private patients daily in Scottish National Health Service hospitals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information in the form sought is not available centrally. The figures show numbers of pay beds in National Health Service hospitals in Scotland, the number of bed days available annually and the annual number of bed days occupied by private patients. Pay beds, when not occupied by private patients, are available for use by National Health Service patients.

Health board	Number of pay beds	Available bed days	Bed days occupied by private patients
Argyll and Clyde	13	4,745	290
Ayrshire and Arran	11	4,015	1,076
Borders	1	365	109
Fife	1	365	28
Forth Valley	5	1,825	612
Grampian	17	6,205	1,175
Greater Glasgow	31	11,315	288
Highland	5	1,233	182
Lothian	19	6,935	1,157
Tayside	9	3,285	874
	112	40,288	5,791

HOME DEPARTMENT

Durham Prison

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the prisoner capacity for which Durham prison was designed and *(b)* the number of prisoners currently held there.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The certified normal accommodation for male prisoners at Her Majesty's prison, Durham, is 675 and for female prisoners 39. On Friday 26 February there were 1,074 male prisoners and 36 female prisoners held there.

Fines

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the numbers of persons imprisoned for non-payment of fines in the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is published annually in "Prison Statistics England and Wales" (table 7.4 of the latest issue, Cm. 210, for 1986), a copy of which is in the Library. Information for 1987 will be published later in the year.

Leicester (Official's Visits)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the recent visit of his Department's officials to Leicester on 16 February, showing the number of *(a)* officials and *(b)* members of the public present at the meeting;

(2) what was the cost to public funds of the visit to Leicester of his Department's officials on 16 February.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to his question on 15 February at column *439*. There were five officials at the meeting in Leicester on 16 February. A picket of the hall was organised by the Indian Workers Association and only about a dozen members of the public were present. The cost to the Department was approximately £500.

Lunar House

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date the public enumerator board in the public inquiry office at Lunar house, Croydon, was made operative again after its recent period out of service.

Mr. Renton: It was restored to operation on 19 February 1988.

Custody

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to reduce the inconsistencies in the use of custody in different magistrates' courts in England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: The handbook for the courts, "The Sentence of the Court", gives guidance on the use of custody and aims to promote uniformity of approach. We take opportunities to stress this guidance in speeches and in discussions with magistrates. We provide the courts with information so they can compare their decisions on custody with those of other courts. Some differences in sentencing patterns are to be expected, since some courts have a higher proportion of more serious offenders.

Offenders (Electronic Tagging)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to introduce electronic surveillance as a condition of bail, probation, parole or executive release on a trial basis in either the Greater London area or any other part of England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 9 February, at col. *140*, to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley).

Recidivism

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons who were granted parole in 1985 and 1986 whose original offence involved violence, sex or robbery were reconvicted *(a)* during the period of their parole licence or *(b)* within 12 months of the expiration of that licence.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information is not available in the form requested. In 1985 and 1986, 409 and 537 parolees respectively were recalled to prison for committing further offences of some kind; but it is not known how many of these had been released on parole licence following imprisonment for offences involving violence, sex or robbery.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of persons who were the subject of a prison sentence in England and Wales had re-offended within two years of the completion of the sentence, for the latest convenient period;

(2) what percentage of persons who were the subject of a period of youth custody in England and Wales had re-offended within two years of the completion of the order, for the latest convenient period.

Mr. John Patten: Reconviction rates for offenders discharged in 1983 were published in table 8 (b) of "Prison Statistics England and Wales 1986" (Cm. 210), a copy of which is in the Library. Figures for 1984 are not yet available.

Police Cells

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were detained in police cells in England and Wales on the last day of August, September, October, November and December 1986, each month in 1987 and January 1988.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The numbers of prisoners held in police cells in England and Wales on the dates specified by the hon. Member were as follows:

	Number
31 August 1986	91
30 September 1986	131
31 October 1986	106
30 November 1986	219
31 December 1986	67
31 January 1987	338
28 February 1987	323
31 March 1987	380
30 April 1987	286
31 May 1987	355
30 June 1987	581
31 July 1987	753
31 August 1987	313
30 September 1987	818
31 October 1987	910
30 November 1987	912
31 December 1987	474
31 January 1988	758

Prisoners (Suicides)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* sentenced prisoners and *(b)* remand prisoners in England and Wales committed suicide whilst in custody in each year since 1974.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The following figures refer to deaths in prison department custody in respect of which suicide verdicts were subsequently returned:

	Sentenced	*Remand*
1974	2	4
1975	6	8
1976	9	11
1977	7	4
1978	8	8
1979	12	9
1980	9	12
1981[1]	8	7
1982	8	9
1983	12	9
1984	10	13
1985[2]	7	14
1986	5	12
1987[3]	13	26

[1] Excludes one inmate who had been committed to Broadmoor and who was awaiting removal there.
[2] Excludes one inmate awaiting extradition proceedings.
[3] Excludes three inmates (two sentenced, one remand) who apparently committed suicide but whose inquests have not yet been held and one inmate held under Immigration Act powers.

Prisoners (Self-inflicted Injuries)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* sentenced prisoners and *(b)* remand prisoners in England and Wales inflicted a serious injury upon themselves whilst in custody in each year since 1974.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The only available statistical information relates to 1976 and later years. The information, which is reproduced in the following table, does not distinguish between sentenced and unsentenced prisoners or between different types or degrees of injury.

Annual number of prisoners reported as having caused self-injury between 1 January 1976 and 31 March 1987.

Period	*Number of Prisoners*
1976	1,132
1977	1,077
1978	1,204
1979	1,267
1980	1,145
1981	1,166
1982	1,027
1983	1,012
1.1.84—31.3.85	1,382
1.4.85—31.3.86	1,155
1.4.86—31.3.87	1,559

Police, Prison and Probation Officers

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons from ethnic minority groups are employed as *(a)* police officers, *(b)* prison officers and *(c)* probation officers in England and Wales.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There were 1,108 police officers from the ethnic minority communities as at 31 December 1987. Because of a low response rate to ethnic monitoring surveys, I regret that accurate information on numbers in the prison service is not yet available. Nor is it available for the probation service, where manpower returns seeking this information are still being analysed.

Young Offenders

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department where the prison department intends to hold 14 to 17-year-old males and 15 to 17-year-old females, who are sentenced to less than four months custody after the Criminal Justice Bill has been passed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Male offenders aged 14 to 16 sentenced to less than four months custody will in due course be accommodated separately from young adult offenders aged 17 to 20, either in separate young offenders institutions or in discrete units of them. Female offenders aged 15 to 16 may not be sentenced to custody for less than four months; those aged 17 will be held as now in female establishments with designated provision for young offenders.

Strip Searches

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many female prisoners in England and Wales were strip-searched during 1986 and 1987; and on how many occasions illegal contraband or smuggled drugs were found.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This information is not collected centrally.

Probation and Community Service

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of persons placed on a probation order in England and Wales during 1985 and 1986 completed their period of supervision without a further appearance before a court;

(2) what percentage of persons placed on a community service order in England and Wales during 1985 and 1986 completed their period of supervision without a further appearance before a court.

Mr. John Patten: The readily available information can be found in table 7.42 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1986" (Cm. 233), copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of persons who were the subject of a probation order in England and Wales had re-offended within two years of the completion of the order, for the latest convenient period;

(2) what percentage of persons who were the subject of a community service order in England and Wales had re-offended within two years of the completion of the order, for the latest convenient period.

Mr. John Patten: The available information is published in Home Office statistical bulletins issue 18/83 "Reconvictions of those given Community Service Orders" and issue 34/86 "Reconvictions of those given Probation Orders". Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Probation Officers

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many extra probation officer posts will be created during the financial years 1988-89 and 1989-90 in England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: The following figures are taken from table 11.8 of the 1988 public expenditure White Paper, Vol. II (Cm. 288-II):

	1987-88 Estimated Outturn	*1988-89 Plans*	*1989-90 Plans*
Probation Officer Manpower	5,711	5,733	5,745

The creation of specific main-grade probation officer posts is a matter for individual area probation committees.

Police Officers

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many extra police officer posts will be created during the financial years 1988-89 and 1989-90 in England and Wales.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Under the programme announced in May 1986 there would be 500 additional police officer posts available in 1988-89 for allocation to provincial forces if the specific need for them is established. Three hundred posts would be available for the Metropolitan police subject to my right hon. Friend being satisfied with the use made by that force of the increase allowed in 1986-87 and 1987-88. The programme allows for similar growth in 1989-90.

Prison Officers

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many extra prison officer posts will be created during the financial years 1988-89 and 1989-90 in England and Wales.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: 1,360 additional prison officers will be recruited in 1988-89. Decisions for 1989-90 have not yet been made.

Murder

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been convicted of murder since 1965; how many of these have been subsequently released from prison; and how many of these have been subsequently charged with another crime.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 25 February 1988]:* The number of persons convicted of murder is published annually in table S2.1(A) of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables Vol. 2"; the figures for 1965-86 are given in the following table. The corresponding figure for 1987 is not yet available. The readily available information on those re-convicted after release on licence relates to all offences of homicide, most of which are murder, and is published in tables 2 and 6 of Home Office statistical bulletin, issue 18/87 "Reconvictions and Recalls of Life Licensees". Copies of both publications are in the Library.

Persons convicted of murder in England and Wales

Year	*Number*
1965	57
1966	72
1967	63
1968	74
1969	75
1970	97
1971	97
1972	79
1973	90
1974	112
1975	107
1976	104
1977	115
1978	105
1979	136
1980	169
1981	126
1982	184
1983	132
1984	156
1985	173
1986	179

Life Sentences

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons sentenced to life imprisonment were released from prison in each of the most recent five years for which figures are available; and what was the average sentence served by all those released over that five year period.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 15 February 1988]:* The readily available information is as follows.

The average times served under sentence in prison department establishments in England and Wales by those first released on licence from life sentences in 1982, 1983 and 1984 was about ten and a half years; for those in 1985 was about ten and a quarter years and for those in 1986 was about 11 years. There are wide variations in the periods served in custody from which this average is

calculated. Reasons for this may include the range of offences for which life sentences are passed and any time which may have been served in other custodial care before entering a prison department establishment which is not included in the estimate. The average figure is lower because it excludes the long periods being served by some of those given life sentences following the abolition of capital punishment in 1965, who have not yet been released. The Home Secretary has made clear that his policy, other than in exceptional circumstances, is that those found guilty of certain heinous categories of murder will serve a minimum of 20 years in custody; those who are judged to remain a danger to the public will not be released. This average excludes persons who have died in custody or been discharged for other reasons.

The corresponding numbers first released on licence from life sentences in these five years were:

Year	*Number*
1982	101
1983	102
1984	66
1985	61
1986	43

Further details of the lengths of the periods served before release are given in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales", table 1(f) of the latest issue, for 1986 Cm. 210, a copy of which is in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Turkey

Q49. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Prime Minister whether she will seek to pay an official visit to Turkey.

The Prime Minister: I hope to visit Turkey in the first half of this year.

London Docklands

Q80. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to make an official visit to the London docklands.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Brussels Council (Annexe to Presidential Notes)

Q135. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government treat annexe V of the presidential notes published after the Brussels Council meeting of 12 February, which sets out circumstances in which the budgetary restraints may be disregarded, as part of the Council agreement; if she agreed to the inclusion of this annexe; if Her Majesty's Government treat the implementation of the annexe as falling to be considered by majority vote of the Council or by unanimity; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Annex V of the note from the presidency (SN 461/1/88) was, with minor amendments, attached to the final conclusions of the European Council (SN 517/88) as annex I. It is free standing and has no effect on the arrangements for budget discipline in agriculture agreed at the Council. It refers to existing provisions in the treaty and does not confer any new powers on the Council.

Special Advisers

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister what is her policy towards the appointment by a Minister of a special adviser *(a)* who is employed by a political lobbying firm with interests in that Minister's departmental policies and decisions, *(b)* whose employers are currently under investigation by that Minister's Department for possible illegal conduct and *(c)* whose employers are paid advisers to companies whose activities are the subject of investigation by that Minister's Department in relation to possible illegal conduct; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Special advisers are civil servants, and their terms of appointment are similar to those of other civil servants: apart from certain exceptions which reflect the special nature of their role they are subject to the same rules of conduct (including paragraph 9870 of the Civil Service code which sets out general principles of conduct). They are required to avoid conflicts of interest between their business affairs and their work in a Department. It is for each Minister to ensure that the necessary steps are taken to avoid such conflicts arising.

Engagements

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 1 March.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 1 March.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 1 March.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 1 March.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 1 March.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 1 March.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having meetings with Secretary Shultz and with King Hussein later today. This evening I hope to have an Audience of Her Majesty The Queen.

DEFENCE

YTS

93. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many places are provided currently on the YTS by Her Majesty's Forces; and how many of these are taken up.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on Thursday 18 February at column *737*.

Atomic Weapons Research Establishment

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many scientific seminars and conferences within the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment have been open to scientists from universities and other such educational institutions during the last two years; and on what occasions.

Mr. Sainsbury: Our records do not show any such seminars or conferences during the last two years, though from time to time scientists from academic institutions visit AWE sites by invitation.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel from the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment have taken part in scientific seminars and conferences within United Kingdom universities and other such institutions of higher education during the last two years; and on what occasions.

Mr. Sainsbury: AWE staff participate from time to time in seminars and conferences which are relevant to their fields of expertise. Details of such participation are not, however, held centrally and could not be collected without disproportionate effort.

War Widows

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to review Government policy on the withholding from pre-1973 war widows of the enhanced pension benefits paid to post-1973 war widows.

Mr. Freeman: When improvements were introduced into the armed forces occupational pension scheme in 1973 it was recognised that in view of the very great costs which would have been involved, and in accordance with normal superannuation practice, the new provisions could not be given retrospective effect. That remains the position.

Cemeteries

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will give details of cemeteries by name, location and number of graves maintained in London by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission;

(2) if he will give details by graveyard location of crosses of sacrifice maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in London;

(3) if he will give details by each London graveyard of the amount expended by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission on maintenance in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* There are 22,625 war graves in 265 cemeteries in the London area. These graves are maintained by various agencies (usually the cemetery owners) on behalf of the commission. Some maintain them free of charge; others are paid fees. It is not possible to identify the cost of maintaining London cemeteries alone; the current cost nationally is approximately £1·57 million per annum. The commission maintains 65 crosses of sacrifice in cemeteries in the London area.

ENERGY

Nuclear Waste

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to the reply by the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), *Official Report*, 10 February, column *289*, on the meeting of nuclear experts, he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting to which reference was made; and if he will arrange for a copy of the final communiqué to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The expert meeting, which was held in Brussels on 15 February, was initiated by the EC Commission for a discussion and exchange of views on the handling, reprocessing and storage of radioactive waste in member states. No conclusions were drawn and no communiqué was issued.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Cyprus

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether it is his practice to inquire before committing public money by way of aid to Cyprus what proportion of it will be applied for the benefit of *(a)* Greek Cypriots and *(b)* Turkish Cypriots.

Mr. Chris Patten: When allocating aid funds for specific purposes for Cyprus we now check whether the intended beneficiaries are from the Greek or Turkish communities.

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether aid given to Cyprus by Her Majesty's Government in the last three financial years has been applied predominantly for the benefit of Greek Cypriots.

Mr. Chris Patten: Both communities have benefited, but the larger share has gone to the Greek Cypriot community.

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the £222,000 proposed to be allocated to Cyprus by way of bilateral aid in 1987-88 will be applied for the benefit of Turkish Cypriots.

Mr. Chris Patten: The exact proportion will not be known until the 1987-88 accounts close later this year, but it is provisionally estimated that 42 per cent. of aid funds for Cyprus will benefit Turkish Cypriots.

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with reference to paragraph 9 of Cm. 232, what he regards as an appropriate proportion of aid for training Turkish Cypriots.

Mr. Chris Patten: Our general view is that the proportion of aid for training Turkish Cypriots should be rather less than half the total, bearing in mind the ratio of Greek to Turkish Cypriots. But this will vary from year to year, depending on the quality of the candidates coming forward and on other factors.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Child Benefit

Mr. Squire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the savings would be if child benefit were taxed for *(a)* all taxpayers, *(b)* taxpayers on all the higher rates of tax and *(c)* taxpayers on the 60 per cent. rate of tax, in 1987-88 and in 1988-89.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The direct revenue yield from taxing child benefit is estimated to be about £1,200 million in 1987-88 and 1988-89. If child benefit were taxable only for taxpayers whose marginal tax rate was higher than the basic rate, the yield would be expected to be about £150

million in 1987-88 and £170 million in 1988-89. It is tentatively estimated that the yield from taxing child benefit for top-rate taxpayers only is of the order of £20 million to £30 million in both years.

The estimates for 1988-89 assume no change to current tax rates and statutory indexation of allowances and thresholds.

Disposable Income

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has as to average per capita disposable income for each region in the United Kingdom after taking account of average mortgage repayments in each region.

Mr. Major: The only available regional information on average per capita disposable income after taking account of mortgage repayments is from family expenditure surveys. Data for 1985 and 1986 combined are:

	£ per person per week
North	58·77
Yorkshire and Humberside	59·44
East Midlands	63·43
East Anglia	67·77
Greater London	82·43
Rest of the South East	76·87
South West	69·63
West Midlands	59·84
North West	62·16
Wales	60·73
Scotland	62·54
Northern Ireland	52·16
United Kingdom	66·83

Data from the family expenditure survey are subject to sampling variation. Comparisons between these regional figures should also be interpreted carefully as mortgage repayments per capita vary between regions according to the proportion of mortgaged dwellings as well as with the average size of mortgages.

Departmental Spending Programmes

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list in the *Official Report* the relative price effect experienced for each Department's spending programme for each year since 1979, and the retail price index for each year since 1979.

Mr. Major: Since the introduction of cash planning in 1981 the Government have not compiled information on price movements systematically in the way that would be needed to calculate relative price effects for each departmental programme (or the planning total itself). Some Departments produce specific price indices for their own use. Appendix 3 to the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee (HC 292) lists the information which is available.

The retail prices index is published each month in the *Employment Gazette*. However, the GDP deflator is the measure of inflation used by the Government for public expenditure comparisons. This measures the rise in general inflation across the United Kingdom economy as a whole while the RPI is a consumer price index. The latest estimates of GDP deflators for the years since 1979 are as follows:

	GDP deflators
1978-79	51·3
1979-80	59·9
1980-81	71·0
1981-82	78·0
1982-83	83·7
1983-84	87·6
1984-85	91·5
1985-86	96·9
1986-87	100·0
1987-88	104·3

Wildfowling Clubs

Mr. Allan Roberts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the area of foreshore and intertidal land leased to wildfowling clubs; and if he will list in the *Official Report* the names of the clubs and the areas involved in each case.

Mr. Lawson *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* The Crown Estate Commissioners do not lease Crown foreshore to wildfowling clubs. In some areas, with a total linear mileage of approximately 160 miles, they have granted leases of shooting rights to the trustees of 12 clubs affiliated to the British Association of Shooting and Conservation. These leases are subject to comprehensive management plans agreed with all interested parties such as the Nature Conservancy Council, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, local authorities and adjoining landowners. Under these leases some 35 miles of foreshore are shot over. It is not normal practice for the names of these organisations to be published.

Wildfowlers

Mr. Allan Roberts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what circumstances bona fide wildfowlers are permitted to enter on to, or participate in hunting activities on, foreshore and intertidal land in England and Wales which is held by the Crown Estate Commissioners but not leased to another party.

Mr. Lawson *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* Where shooting rights have not been granted over areas of foreshore in England and Wales by the Crown Estate Commissioners, they have given an authority to members of the British Association for Shooting and Conservation to be on the foreshore in question with shotguns and ammunition. This authority does not extend to the discharge of shotguns, which is, of course, subject to common law and any other legislation relevant to particular areas.

Treasure Trove

3. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his review of treasure trove procedures.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* I have now received the report of the review of ex gratia awards to finders of treasure trove. That report makes a number of recommendations for improvements to the existing arrangements for handling treasure trove. I am considering those recommendations and expect to make an announcement shortly.

Wildlife Conservation

Mr. Allan Roberts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the area of foreshore and intertidal land leased to wildlife conservation organisations; and if he will list in the *Official Report* the names of the organisations and the areas involved in each case.

Mr. Lawson *[holding answer 5 February 1988]:* Approximately 55 per cent. of the foreshore of England and Wales is part of the Crown estate. Of the remainder, the bulk of it is owned by the Duchies of Lancaster and Cornwall.

The Crown Estate Commissioners lease about 280 miles of foreshore to wildlife conservation organisations. The organisations and approximate amounts are as set out:

Organisation	*Foreshore mileage*
National Trust	37
Nature Conservancy Council	65
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	12
Pembrokeshire Coast National Park	159
Devon Trust for Nature Conservation	¼
Landmark Trust	¼
West Wales Naturalists Trust	3
Essex Naturalists Trust	2
Kent Trust for Nature Conservation	1

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EC Treaties

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he now expects to publish the treaties of the European Communities, as amended by the Single European Act treaty, in the treaty series of the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Chalker: We have now received from the Community Publications Office the text of the treaties of the European Communities as amended by the Single European Act. The test is being reprinted by HMSO for publication in the treaty series.

Cyprus

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with reference to paragraph 7 of Cm. 232, what proportion of the funds available for Cyprus under the FCO scholarships and awards scheme was applied in 1986-87 and will be applied in 1987-88 for the benefit of Turkish Cypriots.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1986-87 Turkish Cypriot students benefited from approximately 20 per cent. of the funds available for Cyprus under the Foreign and Commonwealth Office scholarships and awards scheme and about 64 per cent. in 1987-88.

Plutonium

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, *Official Report*, 19 November 1987, column *618*, on plutonium and safeguards, he will make a further statement on the current effectiveness of safeguards accounting systems in the European Community, in the light of new information recently revealed concerning the Mol SCK/CEN nuclear centre in Belgium, the Nukem nuclear facility in the Federal Republic of Germany and the nuclear transport company Transnuklear.

Mrs. Chalker: A joint inspection by Euratom and the International Atomic Energy Agency into the safeguards aspects of the Mol/Transnuklear affair has produced no evidence of any failure of Euratom safeguards. We therefore have no further statement to make on our assessment of procedures for safeguarding weapons-grade nuclear material.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to ensure that recent evidence concerning the inadequacy of EURATOM's capacity to safeguard weapons grade nuclear materials in Belgium and the Federal Republic of Germany are discussed at the meeting of NATO Ministers on 2 and 3 March, in the context of protection measures of NATO facilities against prospective threats from nuclear-armed terrorists.

Mrs. Chalker: A joint inspection by Euratom and the International Atomic Energy Agency into the safeguards aspects of the Mol/Transnuklear affair has produced no evidence of any failure of Euratom safeguards. My right hon. and learned Friend does not therefore intend to raise the subject at the NATO ministerial meeting.

Council of Ministers

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community Council of Ministers.

Mrs. Chalker: The usual forecast was deposited in the House earlier today. At present seven meetings of the Council of Ministers are planned for March.

The Economic and Finance Council will meet on 7 March to discuss the European Court of Auditors' annual report on the 1986 financial year; prepare for the April IMF interim committee meeting; and consider the Commission's quarterly review of the economic situation in the Community. The agenda may also include a follow-up to the European Council agreement on the future financing of the Community.

The Agriculture Council meets on 7/8 March to discuss follow-up action on agricultural stabilisers; olive oil production aid; set-aside of farmland; cessation of farming (early retirement); hormones; pesticide residues; and materials and articles in contact with food.

The Transport Council will meet on 14/15 March. Discussion will cover access to the road haulage market; increasing the road haulage permit quota; draft proposals on international bus liberalisation; vehicle taxation; the Commission's proposed amendments to social regulations (driver's hours); the width of refrigerated lorries; vehicle weights and dimensions and road haulage tariffs.

The Environment Council meets on 21 March to consider proposals for the control of emissions from large combustion plants; the control of discharges of chromium into water; the reduction of wastes from the production of titanium dioxide; the control of chloroform; emission standards for small cars; and the protection of the ozone layer from chlorofluorocarbons. The Council will also

discuss a proposal for a five-year programme illustrating the favourable impact of environmental projects on unemployment.

The Foreign Affairs Council meets on 22 March to discuss follow-up action to the European Council conclusions on financing the Community; the 1988 guidelines for the Community's programme of aid to developing countries in Asia and Latin America; the Commission's recent sectoral negotiations with Japan; and progress made in negotiations with Hungary on a trade and co-operation agreement.

The Internal Market Council will meet on 22 March to discuss a number of measures relevant to completion of the single European market.

The second Agriculture Council this month, on 28 and 29 March, will concentrate on the 1988 price-fixing proposals.

THE ARTS

Business Sponsorship

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will list in the *Official Report* the total grants made under the business sponsorship incentive scheme in each financial year since its inception and the total related business sponsorship for the same years.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 25 February 1988]:* Grants paid and related sponsorship in each year, inclusive of administration costs, amounted to:

	£ million grants	*£ million related sponsorship*
1984-85	0·5	2·6
1985-86	1·3	2·7
1986-87	1·75	3·6
1987-88 (to date)	1·5	2·7

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will provide a breakdown of the total grant made under the business sponsorship incentive scheme for the most recent complete financial year in the following categories *(a)* drama, *(b)* opera, *(c)* dance, *(d)* music, *(e)* visual arts, *(f)* film and *(g)* museums and galleries.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 25 February 1988]:* The grant paid in 1986-87 amounted to £1·75 million. It was distributed among a wide range of art forms as follows:

	£
Theatre	264,342
Opera	80,500
Dance	137,500
Music	371,147
Visual Arts	181,079
Film	59,334
Museums	45,733
Festivals	372,077
Other art forms and administration	238,288
Total	1,750,000

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for the Arts what are the latest estimates of total business sponsorship of the Arts in the years 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88; and if he will give a detailed breakdown of how these estimates were made.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 25 February 1988]:* The latest estimates of arts sponsorship are as follows:

	£ million
1985-86	20
1986-87	25

A figure for 1987-88 is not yet available but current indications are that it will be in the region of £30 million. The estimates are based on membership surveys carried out by the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts and statistics from the business sponsorship incentive scheme.

Percentage-for-art Legislation

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for the Arts what information he has about which EEC countries have percentage-for-art legislation; and if he will introduce similar legislation in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 25 February 1988]:* I understand that there are some arrangements along these lines in France but comprehensive information is not available. I have no plans to introduce such legislation in the United Kingdom.

Museums and Galleries (Government Funding)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister for the Arts (1) if he will publish figures showing *(a)* central Government funding in real terms, and *(b)* the percentage change in central Government funding in real terms for each of the national museums and galleries for each year since 1974;

(2) if he will publish figures showing the total percentage change in Government funding in real terms for each of the national museums and galleries between 1979-80 and the most recent years for which figures are available.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* The allocations to individual national museums and galleries may not be directly comparable from one year to the next because the system (prior to 1986-87) of re-voting excess receipts in the second financial year after they were earned, and changes in the needs and responsibilities of particular institutions, distort the figures. Also the expenditure on building and maintenance work, which will continue to be managed by the PSA as a single programme until the end of this financial year, cannot be accurately attributed to individual museums.

The aggregate cental Government funding for the national museums and galleries for which I am responsible (including the British Museum (National History) but excluding the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside which have been funded by central Government since 1986-87) in each year since 1974-75 is shown in 1974-75 prices (using the GDP deflator for this purpose).

	£'000	*Percentage change*
1974-75	16,457	—
1975-76	18,406	11·8
1976-77	18,488	0·4
1977-78	22,033	19·2
1978-79	26,381	19·7

	£'000	Percentage change
1979-80	24,397	−7·5
1980-81	25,490	4·5
1981-82	25,275	−0·9
1982-83	27,397	8·4
1983-84	27,198	−0·7
1984-85	28,204	3·7
1985-86	28,846	2·3
1986-87	28,040	−2·8
1987-88	29,103	3·9

The percentage change in the aggregate Government funding in real terms for the national museums and galleries from 1979-80 to 1987-88 is 19·4 per cent.

On 5 November last year I announced a cash increase of 15·9 per cent. in the provision for the national museums and galleries for the next three years.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Boston Compact

92. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information his Department has on the numbers of permanent jobs obtained in the private sector by inner-city school leavers via the Boston compact; and in what ways Her Majesty's Government are assisting local United Kingdom education authorities involved in similar local compacts to obtain private sector jobs for inner-city residents.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government do not collect such statistics but reports from Boston indicate that in 1987 some 1,007 eligible students obtained employment in the 375 firms which took part in the compact.

My Department is enthusiastic in supporting LEAs which come forward with plans for introducing the compact scheme and will actively encourage both local employers and LEAs to develop such initiatives.

Teacher Training (Equipment Purchases)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to assist students on initial teacher training courses in craft, design and technology with meeting the costs of purchasing equipment needed for their courses.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: As from September 1988 eligible bursary students on initial teacher training courses in craft, design and technology will receive an additional equipment allowance of £200 to help towards the cost of materials and tools needed for their course. This sum will be paid as a one-off grant to each student. I believe this will further improve the attraction of training in CDT.

Four-year-olds

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many four-year-old children in each local education authority in England attend reception classes in primary schools; what percentage of the estimated four-year-old population in each local education area this represents; and what is the average pupil-to-teacher ratio in each local education authority for these classes, for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dunn: Information on reception classes is not collected centrally.

Tertiary Colleges

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what criteria he uses in deciding whether to approve or reject local education authority proposals for the establishment of tertiary colleges; and if, in the light of proposals contained in the Education Reform Bill, he anticipates any changes in respect of those criteria.

Mr. Dunn: As explained in circular 3/87, my right hon. Friend considers any school reorganisation proposal involving the establishment of a tertiary college on its educational merits, and he will continue to do so.

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the local education authorities whose proposals to establish tertiary colleges since 1979 have been *(a)* approved, *(b)* rejected and *(c)* accepted subject to modification, and the numbers in each category, for the years 1985, 1986 and 1987 and the first two months of 1988.

Mr. Dunn: Information is available only from August 1980 when the Education Act 1980 came into force. The table shows those proposals under section 12 of that Act decided since that date which involve the establishment of one or more tertiary colleges, the LEAs concerned, and the decision made by my right hon. Friend or his predecessors. In 1985 one proposal involving the establishment of one or more tertiary colleges was approved and one was rejected; in 1986 five such proposals were approved and two were approved with modifications; and in 1987 two such proposals were approved, one was approved with modifications, four were rejected, and one was withdrawn by the LEA. No such proposals have yet been decided in 1988.

Date published	Local Education Authority	Proposal	Decision	Date of decision
Unknown but under 1944 Act	Cheshire	Crewe Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	17 November 1980
11 July 1980 (1944 Act)	Dudley	Halesowen Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Rejected	4 February 1981
21 November 1980	Durham	Peterlee Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1X Tertiary College	Approved	3 August 1981
10 August 1979	Dorset	Weymouth and Portland Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved with modifications	10 May 1982
5 June 1981	Croydon	Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Rejected	19 February 1982
28 August 1981	Hampshire	Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	22 February 1982

Date published	Local Education Authority	Proposal	Decision	Date of decision
11 September 1981	Dudley	Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	21 April 1982
5 March 1982	Durham	Consett Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Rejected	15 February 1983
18 March 1982	Essex	Harlow Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	24 January 1983
26 March 1982	Durham	Bishop Auckland/Newton Aycliffe Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Rejected	14 March 1983
26 March 1982	Wiltshire	Swindon Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	10 November 1982
30 April 1982	Humberside	Grimsby and Cleethorpes Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Rejected	22 December 1982
10 June 1982	Lancashire	Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	17 January 1983
8 July 1982	Cumbria	West Cumbria Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Rejected	10 May 1983
28 July 1982	Wolverhampton	Bilston Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved with modifications	7 April 1983
30 July 1982	Harrow	Establish 3 X Tertiary Colleges	Approved with modifications	20 September 1983
11 August 1982	North Yorkshire	Selby Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	6 April 1983
1 December 1982	Avon	Weston Super Mare Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Rejected	21 February 1984
3 December 1982	Hampshire	Brockenhurst Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Authority determined to implement	15 February 1983
10 December 1982	Gloucestershire	Forest of Dean Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved with modifications	3 April 1984
28 January 1983	Lancashire	Rossendale Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Rejected	10 August 1983
16 February 1983	Lancashire	Blackburn Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	8 March 1984
4 March 1983	Hampshire	Fareham Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	24 October 1983
4 March 1983	Knowsley	Prescot Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved with modifications	29 September 1983
22 April 1983	Calderdale	Halifax Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Rejected	14 November 1983
30 September 1983	Durham	Consett Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved with modifications	3 December 1984
3 November 1983	Lancashire	Skelmersdale Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	12 April 1984
13 July 1984	Staffordshire	Newcastle under Lyme Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	15 February 1985
20 September 1984	Kirklees	Dewsbury Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	28 October 1986
9 January 1985	Wolverhampton	Secondary Reorganisation Establish 2 X Tertiary Colleges	Rejected	25 November 1985
22 April 1985	Bury	Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	15 April 1986
31 May 1985	Manchester	Establish 2 X Tertiary Colleges	Approved	22 April 1986
6 September 1985	Oxon	Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	15 September 1986
30 September 1985	Sunderland	Secondary Reoganisation Establish 3 X Tertiary Colleges	Approved with modifications	3 November 1986
24 October 1985	Sheffield	Secondary Reorganisation Establish 8 X Tertiary Colleges	Approved with modifications	23 December 1986
14 October 1985	South Tyneside	Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	9 October 1986
30 January 1986	Gateshead	Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Withdrawn by LEA	15 May 1987
16 May 1986	Essex	West Essex Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	27 October 1987
30 May 1986	Avon	South Bristol Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Rejected	27 January 1987
23 October 1986	Dudley	Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Rejected	5 August 1987
14 November 1986	Durham	Bishop Auckland Secondary Reorganisation Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Rejected	10 August 1987
23 January 1987	Derbyshire	Secondary Reorganisation Establish 2 X Tertiary Colleges	Approved with modifications	30 November 1987
5 March 1987	Northamptonshire	Establish 1 X Tertiary College	Approved	3 December 1987
22 January 1987	ILEA	Hackney Establish 4 X Tertiary Colleges	Rejected	27 November 1987

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the local education authorities which have established tertiary colleges, the names of those colleges and the dates on which they opened.

Mr. Dunn: The information for tertiary colleges in England is as follows:

When opened and authority	College
1970	
Devon	Exeter
1971	
Devon	North Devon
1972	
Lancashire	Nelson and Colne
1973	
Somerset	Bridgwater
Somerset	Strode
1974	
Derbyshire	South East Derbyshire
Lancashire	W. R. Tuson
Hampshire	Cricklade
Somerset	Yeovil
1975	
Wigan	Leigh
1976	
Lancashire	Accrington and Rossendale
1977	
Richmond	Richmond
Wigan	Wigan
1978	
Shropshire	Oswestry
1981	
Wakefield	Wakefield
1982	
Chester	South Chester
Dudley	Halesowen
1983	
Hampshire	Alton
Lancashire	Runshaw
1984	
Durham	Peterlee
Essex	Harlow
Hampshire	Fareham
Hampshire	Brockenhurst
Knowsley	Huyton/Prescot
Lancashire	Blackburn
Lancashire	Skelmersdale
North Yorkshire	Selby
Wolverhampton	Bilston
1985	
Dorset	Weymouth
Gloucestershire	Forest of Dean
1986	
Durham	Consett
Staffordshire	Newcastle under Lyme
Manchester	North Manchester
Manchester	South Manchester
Cambridgeshire	Isle College
1987	
Harrow	Greenhill
Harrow	Weald
Harrow	Elm Park
Bury	Bury Metropolitan
Kirklees	Dewsbury
Oxfordshire	Henley

Education Reform

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are *(a)* the shortest, *(b)* the longest and *(c)* the average periods of time taken by his Department to reach a conclusion on proposals for reorganisation submitted by local education authorities during the last three years.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend's aim is to decide all proposals submitted to him under section 12 to 15 of the Education Act 1980 as quickly as possible after the elapse of the two months allowed for the receipt of objections and the further month for the LEA to comment on these. Some proposals are decided very soon thereafter; the average time taken for decisions on all proposals is currently about seven months.

Council for Educational Technology (Amalgamation)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the proposed amalgamation of the Council for Educational Technology and the Micro-Electronics Education Support Unit.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I wrote to the chairmen of these two bodies on 7 January 1988 proposing amalgamation [*Official Report*, 11 January 1988, column 55.] They have since written back indicating their agreement. I have accordingly notified them that the amalgamation will take effect from 1 April 1988.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Consumer Goods

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of video tape (898.31,32), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken up by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information in respect of recorded and unrecorded video tape is as follows:

Video tape	*1983 £ million*	*1984 £ million*
Output	55·9	60·7
Imports	131·3	113·3
Exports	73·2	79·3

The figures relate to establishments employing 50 or more people, and therefore figures for export and import ratios are not given as they are likely to overstate the true position.

No figures are available for other years as they would disclose information about individual firms.

Imported Furs

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any plans to introduce new labelling rules to discourage the trade in imported furs from animals caught in steel-jaw leg-hold traps.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department is currently consulting publicly on a proposed order under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 which would require the labelling of goods made from the fur of certain species to the effect that those

species are commonly caught by means of leg-hold traps. The purpose of this measure would be to ensure that the consumer has the information necessary to make an informed choice.

Cameras

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of photographic cameras (881.11), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The information is not available.

Photocopying Apparatus

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of photocopying apparatus (751.82,759.19), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information is shown in the table.

Photocopying Apparatus

	1982 £ million	*1983* £ million
Sales [1]	141	109
Imports (cif)	187	249
Exports (fob)	267	229

[1] Sales date relate primarily to units in the United Kingdom with a minimum employment of 75.

Calculating Instruments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of calculating instruments (874.21,29), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The information is not available.

Domestic Electric Heaters

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of domestic electric heaters (775.82,89), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information is as follows:

Domestic Electric Heaters

	[1]*Sales* £ million	*Imports (cif)* £ million	*Exports (fob)* £ million
1975	41	7	1
1976	40	11	2
1977	49	14	2
1978	54	14	3
1979	70	15	5
1980	67	20	5
1981	57	17	4
1982	74	17	7
1983	95	16	9
1984	97	13	10
1985	120	17	17
1986	147	16	27

[1] Sales data relate primarily to units in the United Kingdom with a minimum employment of 25 up to 1980 and of 100 thereafter.

Vacuum Cleaners

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of vacuum cleaners, domestic, (775.71), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information can be found in the fourth quarter issue of each year of *Business Monitors* PQ 3460, "Domestic electrical appliances" (previously PQ 368 "Electrical appliances primarily for domestic use"). These publications are available from the Library of the House.

Dishwashing Machines

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of dishwashing machines (745.22,23,7753), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The information is not available.

Video Cassette Players

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of video cassette players (763.81), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The information is not available.

Record Players

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of record players and decks (761.2,763.18), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information is shown in the table.

[1]*Record players and decks*

£ millions

	[2]*Sales*	*Export (fob)*	*Imports (cif)*
1975	46	42	7

[1] Not including coin operated mechanisms.
[2] Sales data relate primarily to units in the United Kingdom with a minimum employment of 25.

Gramophone Records

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of gramophone records (898.31,32), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information is as follows:

£ million

	Gramophone Records [1]*Sales*	*Imports (cif)*	*Exports (fob)*
1975	91	12	23
1976	90	12	33
1977	93	13	43

	Gramophone Records		
	[1]Sales	Imports (cif)	Exports (fob)
1978	93	22	44
1979	107	23	34
1980	94	26	30
1981	78	26	31
1982	69	22	34

[1] Sales data relate primarily to units in the United Kingdom with a minimum employment of 50.

Tape Recorders

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of tape recorders (778.86), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The information is not available.

Cassette Decks

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of cassette decks (763.88), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The information is not available.

Theatrical Producers

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster with which self-regulatory organisation theatrical producers are supposed to register; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: Theatrical producers will only need to be authorised if they are carrying on investment business as defined in the Act. Schemes for pooled investment in theatrical productions fall within the definition of collective investment schemes, and authorisation is required by persons operating or establishing them or winding them up. Any person may apply to any of the recognised self-regulating organisations whose scope rules cover the relevant investment activities or for direct authorisation by the Securities and Investments Board. If the main investment business is the management of investors' funds they may well find that the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation is the most appropriate organisation.

British Steel Corporation

Mr. Holt: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the increase in the productivity of the British Steel Corporation since 1979.

Mr. Atkins: The figures for BSC in respect of European Coal and Steel Community treaty activities are as follows:

Man hours per tonne liquid steel

Year	
1979-80	13·2
1980-81	14·5
1981-82	9·4
1982-83	9·3
1983-84	7·1
1984-85	7·0
1985-86	6·3
1986-87	6·2
1987-88	n/a

Source: British Steel Report and Accounts 1986-87.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on the future of British Steel's pension scheme.

Mr. Atkins: I have received a number of representations from individual pensioners and employees of BSC seeking clarification of the position after privatisation. Both the Government and the corporation are well aware of the concern of those affected by this issue and we hope it will be possible to clarify the position shortly. It has, of course, been the experience of previous privatisations that satisfactory arrangements have been made on this point.

Regional Offices

Mr. Franks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are his Department's plans for the network of regional offices.

Mr. Atkins: The White Paper "DTI—the department for Enterprise" (Cm. 278) announced that the Department's presence in the regions is being strengthened and extended. In addition to the seven main regional offices, we plan three major new sub-offices in the south-east and a network of over 20 other offices at which business men can make contact with the Department.

Cloth and Yarn (Dyeing)

Mr. Steel: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will take steps to end the provision whereby imported cloth and yarn dyed in Britain qualifies as originating in Britain.

Mr. Alan Clark: No. The European Community's non-preferential origin rules at present allow the dyeing and finishing of cloth as an origin-conferring process. Following consultation with the United Kingdom industry, my Department will not be objecting to the retention of the existing rule during current negotiations in Brussels.

Mr. Peter Luff

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what steps the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry took to satisfy himself before the appointment of Mr. Peter Luff as his special adviser that Mr. Luff had no interests or associations incompatible with his role as a special adviser; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will dismiss Mr. Peter Luff from his post as special adviser in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The Secretary of State sees no grounds for considering his dismissal. Under the terms of his appointment, he is, amongst other things, required to comply with the general principles of conduct of civil servants, the rules relating to outside activities and the use of official information or experience.

Animal Furs (Advertising)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will consider outlawing the advertising of animal furs.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have no plans to do so. My Department is, however, consulting publicly on a proposed order under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968, to require goods made from the fur of certain species to be labelled to the effect that the animals are commonly caught by means of the leg-hold trap. Under this proposal, advertisements would also be required to contain this information where the prospective purchaser could buy the fur without prior inspection.

Domestic Upholstered Furniture

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if, pursuant to the statement on 11 January by the Minister for Corporate ahd Consumer Affairs, he will now make a statement on the draft regulations for flammability of domestic upholstered furniture.

Mr. Butcher: The Draft Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations are being made available today. These, together with a consultation letter inviting comments on the detailed proposals, are being sent to a wide variety of interested organisations. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Libraries and the Vote Office.

Lloyd's

Mr. Page: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement of the manner in which the Council of Lloyd's proposes to implement recommendation 70 of the Neill committee of inquiry into regulatory arrangements at Lloyd's.

Mr. Maude: Yes. I have discussed this with the chairman of Lloyd's. It was the nominated members' proposal that the annual report on the progress of regulation should be adopted by the whole council. He has also assured me that should the nominated members wish to express any reservation that would also be recorded in the Lloyd's annual report and accounts.

Collective Investment

Mr. Page: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he proposes to transfer functions under the Financial Services Act 1986 in respect of collective investment schemes to the Securities and Investments Board.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry considered carefully the draft regulations and other material sent to him by the Securities and Investments Board in the light of the reports he has received from the Director General of Fair Trading and also of the other representations which have been made to him. He is satisfied that the various conditions laid down under the Financial Services Act for a transfer of functions to the board are fulfilled. I accordingly laid before the House on 24 February a draft order under section 114 of the Act transferring certain functions to the board. The functions in question include most of the transferable functions in relation to collective investment schemes in the Act.

Belgian Carpet and Polypropylene Yarn (Aid)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has yet received confirmation of the repayment of aid by a Belgian carpet and polypropylene yarn manufacturer ordered in 1987 by the European Commission.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* The recovery of this aid is the responsibility of the European Commission, which has assured us that the repayment will be made.

Inner Cities

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what meetings he has sought with representatives of local authorities prior to publishing his White Paper on the inner cities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* I have many meetings with representatives of local authorities and others to discuss the contribution which they can make to encouraging inner city regeneration.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the future role his Department envisages for local authorities in the regeneration of inner city areas.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* Local authorities can play an important role in creating the right conditions for business growth and individual enterprise. For further reading I commend the paper, "The Local Right—Enabling not Providing," by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, published on 29 February by the Centre for Policy Studies (Policy Study No. 92).

NORTHERN IRELAND

Rural Development

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his strategy for rural development in Northern Ireland; if he will establish a rural development agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Viggers: The social and economic problems of rural areas in Northern Ireland are fully considered in the annual public expenditure survey process. The continued operation of existing administrative and financial arrangements, including assistance available from the European Community, provides the appropriate means for dealing with rural development in Northern Ireland. I have no plans for the establishment of a rural development agency.

Tonsillectomy Operations

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the waiting time for tonsillectomy operations in each of the four health board areas in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: It is not possible to identify tonsillectomy as a separate treatment within waiting list information. Patients waiting for this operation are included in ENT waiting lists.

The table shows, for each health and social services board, the numbers of in-patients on ENT waiting lists by time spent on lists, at 30 September 1987. These figures are provisional.

In-patient waiting time for admission

Board	*0 to 3 Months*	*4 to 6 Months*	*7 to 12 Months*	*1 to 2 Years*	*2 to 3 Years*	*Over 3 years*	*Total*
Eastern	595	482	602	373	33	40	2,125
Northern	285	171	266	219	74	44	1,059
Southern	309	12	1	—	—	—	322
Western	290	125	109	73	8	—	605
Northern Ireland	1,479	790	978	665	115	84	4,111

Stalker Inquiry

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will place in the Library the original terms of reference for the Stalker inquiry into the Royal Ulster Constabulary and its alleged shoot-to-kill policy.

Mr. Tom King *[holding answer 25 February 1988]:* As is usual practice with police reports covering criminal investigations, neither the report by Mr. John Stalker nor the report by Mr. Colin Sampson will be published. Accordingly, I do not intend to place a copy of the terms of reference for the Stalker inquiry in the Library of the House.

Salmonid Waters

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the rivers and streams in Northern Ireland which have been designated as salmonid waters under European Community directive 78/659/EEC.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 26 February 1988]:* The table lists those waters which have been designated as salmonid waters under European Community directive 78/659/EEC.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has any knowledge of leakage from council dumps in Northern Ireland polluting salmonid waters in Northern Ireland in the last five years; and if he will give details of any such incidents.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 26 February 1988]:* The information requested is not collected centrally and could only be assembled at disproportionate cost. Information on the main polluting discharges is however being compiled and I will write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

The following non-tidal waters are designated within Northern Ireland under the terms of the (EEC) directive on the quality of freshwaters needing protection or improvement in order to support fish life (78/659/EEC)

Primary river basin	*River*	*Length of river classified (km) salmonoid waters*
Burn Dennet	Burn Dennet	29
Mourne	Mourne	20
Derg	Derg	33
Owenkillew	Owenkillew	33
Owenkillew	Glenelly	31
Strule	Strule	16
Fairy Water	Fairy Water	25
Camowen	Camowen	32
Drumragh	Quiggery Water	18
Drumragh	Owenreagh	18

Primary river basin	River	Length of river classified (km) salmonoid waters
Faughan	Faughan	40
Roe	Roe	47
Roe	Curly	10
Roe	Owenrigh	4
Main	Main	
	Source to River Clogh	12
	River Braid to Lough Neagh	18
Main	Kells Water with Glenwhirry	18
Main	Braid	
	Source to Ballymena	16
Main	Clogh	12
Six Mile Water	Six Mile Water	15
Crumlin	Crumlin	17
Upper Bann	Upper Bann	
	Source to Portadown	56
Upper Bann	Cusher	
	Source to Tandragee	17
Blackwater	Blackwater	
	Source to International Boundary	29
	International Boundary to Caledon	
Blackwater	Torrent	
	Source to Coalisland	27
	Coalisland to River Blackwater	
Blackwater	Callan	
	Source to Armagh	19
Blackwater	Oona Water	22
Ballinderry	Ballinderry	
	Source to Cookstown	18
Ballinderry	Killymoon	9
Moyola	Moyola	27
Lower Bann	Lower Bann	42
Lower Bann	Ballymoncy	7
Lower Bann	Agivey	21
Lower Bann	Clady	10
Bush	Bush	42
Lagan	Lagan	
	Source to Magheralin	33
Lagan	Ravernet	16
Quoile	Quoile with Annacloy and Ballynahinch	
	Source to Downpatrick	32
Newy	Newry with Clanrye	31
Newry	Bessbrook with Camlough	7
Lower Erne	River Lower Erne	
	Rosscor to International Boundary	5
Ballinamallard	Ballinamallard	21
Colebrooke	Colebrooke	45
Swanlinbar	Swanlinbar	12
Arney	Arney	15
Sillees	Sillees	35
Total		1,062

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he knows of any reason why the Ardilea river, County Down, should not be designated a salmonoid water under European Community directive 78/659/EEC.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 26 February 1988]:* I am not aware of any reason why the Ardilea river should not be designated as a salmonoid water under European Community directive 78/659/EEC.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has any proposal to designate the Ardilea river, County Down, as salmonid water under European Economic Community directive 78/759/EEC.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 26 February 1988]:* There are no proposals at present to designate the Ardilea river as a salmonid water under European Economic Community directive 78/659/EEC.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to complete the process of monitoring rivers and streams in Northern Ireland to decide whether they reach the standards set down for salmonid waters in European Community directive 78/659/EEC.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 26 February 1988]:* A total of 1,062 km of the main salmonid waters have already been designated and are monitored to ensure that the requirements of European Community directive 78/659/EEC are met. It is the Department's intention to extend designations as resources permit, but, with other priorities, I am unable to give firm dates for completion.

Water Quality

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether, when planning permission is sought for any development which might lead to the pollution of any lake, river, stream or reservoir in Northern Ireland, the quality of such water is assessed before the development takes place; whether the maintenance of water quality is taken into account in deciding whether planning permission is granted; and whether procedures differ in respect of water which does not before development meet the standards laid down in European directive 78/659/EEC and waters which do.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 26 February 1988]:* Any development from which a discharge to a waterway may contain polluting materials requires a consent under the Water Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 and the conditions attached to such consent are designed to ensure that the discharges will not cause pollution. The conditions attached to discharges to salmonid waters are designed to ensure that the standards of these waters, which are regularly monitored, will continue to comply with the standards laid down in European directive 78/659/EEC.

Ports

Mr. William Ross: to ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show *(a)* the imports and *(b)* the exports from each port in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 26 February 1988]:* Figures for Northern Ireland imports and exports are not

separately identified in United Kingdom trade statistics. However figures for the total traffic of goods through Northern Ireland ports which includes imports and exports are available. These are as follows:

Thousand tonnes

Year	*Belfast*	*Coleraine*	*Larne*	*Londonderry*	*Warrenpoint*	*Carrickfergus*	*Other ports*	*Totals*
(a) Inward Traffic								
1982	4,485	169	2,040	704	582	239	1,341	9,560
1983	5,014	168	1,932	745	647	294	1,309	10,109
1984	4,580	70	2,000	703	590	272	1,555	9,770
1985	5,227	144	2,061	724	684	295	1,631	10,766
1986	5,255	140	2,069	881	668	337	1,458	10,808
(b) Outward Traffic								
1982	526	13	1,125	93	79	—	170	2,006
1983	556	8	1,286	61	107	—	147	2,166
1984	667	4	1,399	51	146	—	133	2,399
1985	756	36	1,536	51	127	—	182	2,688
1986	876	54	1,585	31	101	1	284	2,932

Note:

(i) The tables give tonnages of goods through the ports and exclude weights of containers and weights of materials shipped for dumping at sea.

(ii) Inward Traffic refers to all goods taken into Northern Ireland from Great Britain and elsewhere through the Northern Ireland ports. Northern Ireland is not necessarily the ultimate destination for these goods. Similarly Outward Traffic covers all goods taken out through the Northern Ireland ports, destined for Great Britain or for foreign countries. The origin of the goods is not necessarily in Northern Ireland.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

12. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which travel-to-work areas had the highest level of unemployment in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland at the latest available date; and what was the percentage unemployed in each case.

Mr. Nicholls: The travel-to-work areas with the highest rates of unemployed claimants in England, Wales and Scotland at 14 January 1988 were Newquay, south Pembrokeshire and Cumnock and Sanquhar. The numbers of unemployed claimants in these travel-to-work areas expressed as a percentage of the number of employees in employment plus the employed were 26·7, 25·1 and 28·9 per cent. respectively.

16. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people leaving school at 16 years found jobs in 1983 and in the most recently available year.

Mr. Nicholls: Thirty per cent. of those young people aged 16 on 1 September 1984, who had left school between September 1984 and February 1986, went directly into full-time employment. A further 41 per cent. went into YTS, which has become the major route into work for school leavers and offers high-quality training. This information, drawn from England and Wales youth cohort study, is not available for earlier years.

29. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the latest figures for those people registered as unemployed in the constituency of Basildon and for the same period in each of the past four years.

Mr. Lee: The table shows the number of unemployed claimants in the parliamentary constituency of Basildon in January of each year since 1984. The comparison is affected by the change in the compilation of the unemployment statistics in March 1986.

January	
1984	6,834
1985	7,273
1986	6,793
1987	6,437
1988	4,726

38. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the percentage change in unemployment for the Sheffield travel-to-work area over the past 12 months, and what has been the comparable position for Yorkshire and Humberside as a whole.

Mr. Lee: On 14 January 1988, the number of unemployed claimants in the Sheffield travel-to-work area was 40,539, a fall of 14·6 per cent., since January 1987. The comparable figure for the Yorkshire and Humberside region as a whole was 266,031, a fall of 15·9 per cent.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the recent unemployment figures.

68. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the current level of unemployment.

Mr. Lee: The seasonally adjusted level of adult unemployment fell by 50,800 between December and January, to 2,563,100, the lowest figure on a consistent basis since April 1982. The figure has now fallen by 647,000 since July 1986, the largest sustained fall on record.

44. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the levels of unemployment and advertised jobs vacancies in Wyre Forest in 1986 and 1987; and what plans he has to improve training links between education institutions and industry in the area.

Mr. Lee: The table shows the annual average number of unemployed claimants in the Wyre Forest local authority area and the annual average number of unfilled vacancies (excluding community programme vacancies) at jobcentres[1] which cover an area most closely corresponding to the Wyre Forest local authority area for 1986 and 1987. Total numbers of advertised job vacancies are not available, but it is estimated that nationally about one third of vacancies are notified to jobcentres.

The Government support collaboration between education institutions and employers in developing training to meet local needs. The MSC is, for example, providing funding for such a local collaborative project in Kidderminster which is addressing the training implications of new technology in the carpet industry.

Wyre Forest local authority area

Annual Average	*Unemployed Claimants*	*Unfilled Vacancies*
1986	5,324	408
1987	4,469	403

[1] Kidderminster and Stourport jobcentres.

43. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of job vacancies registered with jobcentres in the north-west of England.

Mr. Lee: On 8 January 1988, the number of unfilled vacancies, excluding vacancies on the community programme, registered at jobcentres in the north-west region was 20,167. This represents an increase of 2 per cent. since January 1987.

47. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of job vacancies registered with jobcentres in Yorkshire.

Mr. Lee: On 8 January 1988 the number of unfilled vacancies, excluding vacancies on the community programme, registered at jobcentres in south Yorkshire, north Yorkshire and west Yorkshire was 12,185. This represents an increase of 12.5 per cent. since 1987.

52. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were out of work in the Staffordshire, Moorlands parliamentary constituency at the most recent count; and what the figure was two years ago.

Mr. Lee: On 14 January 1988 the number of unemployed claimants in the Staffordshire, Moorlands parliamentary constituency was 2,798. The corresponding figure for January 1986 was 3,768. The comparison is affected by the change in the compilation of the unemployment statistics in March 1986.

58. **Mrs. Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the numbers of job vacancies registered with jobcentres in the northern region of England.

Mr. Lee: On 8 January 1988, the number of unfilled vacancies, excluding vacancies in the community programme, registered at jobcentres in the northern region was 10,180. This represents a decrease of 1·2 per cent. since January 1987.

61. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were in full-time employment in Britain in May 1979; and how many people are in full-time employment today.

Mr. Lee: In June 1979 (there are no estimates for May) there were 19,950,000 full-time people in the employed labour force in Great Britain. In September 1978, the latest date for which figures are available the figure was 18,765,000. The employed labour force is the sum of employees in employment, the self-employed and HM forces.

66. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of people currently in full-time and part-time employment.

Mr. Lee: In September 1987, the latest date for which figures are available there were 18,765,000 full-time and 5,741,000 part-time people in the employed labour force in Great Britain. The employed labour force is the sum of employees in employment, the self-employed and HM forces.

71. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the figures for registered unemployed persons in all the Greater London travel-to-work areas for *(a)* the latest available date and *(b)* the end of December 1987, 1986 and 1985, in actual figures and as percentages.

Mr. Lee: The numbers of unemployed claimants in absolute terms and as a percentage of employees in employment plus the unemployed in the Greater London travel-to-work areas at the latest available date, 14 January 1988, and the closest date to the end of December of each of the years requested are as follows:

	London TTWA		*Heathrow TTWA*	
	Unemployed claimants	*Per cent.*	*Unemployed claimants*	*Per cent.*
14 January 1988	302,073	8·7	37,123	5·5
8 January 1987	369,066	10·6	49,463	7·3
9 January 1986	382,156	10·9	52,676	7·7

The comparison is affected by changes in the compilation of the unemployment statistics in March 1986.

74. **Mr. Sackville:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the fall in unemployment over the last 12 months.

Mr. Lee: On 14 January 1988, the number of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom, seasonally adjusted excluding school leavers, was 2,563,100, a fall of 549,100 over the last 12 months.

77. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of job vacancies registered with jobcentres in England and Wales.

Mr. Lee: On 8 January 1988, the number of unfilled vacancies, excluding vacancies on the community programme, registered at jobcentres in England and Wales was 206,360. This represents an increase of 20 per cent. since January 1987.

79. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of young people aged between 18 and 24 years currently in employment and in January 1987.

Mr. Lee: Estimates of the age composition of the employed labour force are available only for June of each year. In June 1987, the estimated number of those in the employed labour force aged 18 to 24 years inclusive in Great Britain was 4,455,000 compared with 4,299,000 in June 1986.

82. **Mr. Hayward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of job vacancies registered with jobcentres in the south-west of England.

Mr. Lee: On 8 January, the number of unfilled vacancies, excluding vacancies on the community programme, registered at jobcentres in the south-west region was 16,544. This represents an increase of 13·8 per cent. since January 1987.

87. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the changes in unemployment in the Yorkshire region since 1983.

Mr. Lee: The numbers of unemployed claimants, seasonally adjusted excluding school leavers, in the Yorkshire and Humberside region in January of each year since 1983 on a consistent basis were as follows:

	Number
January 1983	258,700
January 1984	267,500
January 1985	283,600
January 1986	298,200
January 1987	295,300
January 1988	248,700

88. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of job vacancies registered with jobcentres in East Anglia.

Mr. Lee: On 8 January 1988 the number of unfilled vacancies excluding vacancies on the community programme, registered at jobcentres in the East Anglia region was 7,813. This represents an increase of 32·1 per cent. since January 1987.

Mr. Lofthouse: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the percentage change in unemployment for the Castleford travel-to-work area over the last 12 months; and what has been the comparable change for Yorkshire and Humberside.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. On 14 January 1988, the number of unemployed claimants in the Castleford and Pontefract travel-to-work area was 8,071, a fall of 11·5 per cent., since January 1987. The comparable figure for the Yorkshire and Humberside region as a whole was 266,031, a fall of 15·9 per cent.

Mr. Lofthouse: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures for those people registered as unemployed in the constituency of Pontefract and Castleford and for the same date in each of the last four years.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. The table shows the number of unemployed claimants in the parliamentary constituency of Pontefract and Castleford in January of each year since 1984. The comparison is affected by the change in the compilation of the unemployment statistics in March 1986.

	Number
January 1984	5,487
January 1985	5,683
January 1986	6,236
January 1987	6,222
January 1988	5,508

"Training for Employment"

17. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from voluntary organisations concerning the White Paper "Training for Employment".

Mr. Chope: None.

Uniform Business Rate

18. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from small business organisations concerning the proposed uniform business rate.

Mr. Cope: I have received several representations from small firms organisations about the proposed national non-domestic rate. I have also received representations from small businesses about excessive rates burdens.

Job Seekers

19. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what new initiatives are planned to assist job seekers to obtain employment in areas of high housing costs.

Mr. Lee: My Department is co-operating closely with the Housing Corporation in its planned development of the job movers scheme which has recently been introduced under the auspices of the Department of the Environment.

Skill Shortages

20. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he will next meet the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress to discuss skill shortages in British industry.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State hopes to discuss issues including skills demand and supply with fellow members of the National Economic Development Council, including the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, at the next meeting in April.

59. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which measures the Training Commission is undertaking to clearly identify skill shortages in London and to ensure that the training programmes of the new adult training organisations address those areas of skill mismatch.

Mr. Cope: The Manpower Services Commission gathers information on skills demand and supply from a wide range of sources, including its computer-aided local labour market information system, in-depth studies of industries and occupations, surveys of vacancies at jobcentres and from other external sources.

The White Paper "Training for Employment" emphasises the importance of longer-term unemployed people acquiring skills in demand in local labour markets. The new training programme for unemployed adults will, therefore, be locally planned and delivered both in London and elsewhere and will take account of local labour market conditions including evidence of skill needs.

67. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on skill shortages in the engineering industry.

Mr. Cope: The strength of our economy means that some employers, including some engineering employers, are finding it more difficult to meet some of their skill needs through recruitment. But employers can influence the supply of skills they need by providing the proper incentives for individuals to acquire the right skills and experience and by making the necessary investment in training.

The Government have given a lead by more than doubling their own investment in vocational education and training since 1979. Especially through two-year YTS for school leavers and now, the new £1·4 billion training programme to provide unemployed adults with the skills which today's jobs demand. The Manpower Services Commission also has programmes to encourage employers to recognise and meet their own training needs. Under the engineering science and technology initiative more resources have also been made available to increase relevant higher education opportunities.

78. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on skill shortages in the electronics industry.

Mr. Cope: The strength of our economy means that some employers are finding it more difficult to meet some of their skill needs through recruitment. But employers can influence the supply of skills they need by providing the proper incentives for individuals to acquire the right skills and experience and by making the necessary investment in training.

The Government have given a lead by more than doubling its own investment in vocational education and training since 1979. Especially through two-year YTS for school leavers and now, the new £1·4 billion training programme to provide unemployed adults with the skills which today's jobs demand. The Manpower Services Commission also has programmes to encourage employers to recognise and meet their own training needs and make the necessary provision.

Under the engineering science and technology initiative, more resources have also been made available to increase relevant higher education opportunities.

Unemployment (Inner Cities)

21. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what his Department is doing to obtain permanent jobs in the private sector for inner city unemployed persons, particularly the long-term unemployed.

Mr. Cope: The Department of Employment and the Manpower Services Commission provide a wide range of national programmes which aim to equip individuals with the skills and motivation to compete for available jobs. The new training programme for unemployed adults which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 16 February is designed to help long-term unemployed people gain the skills they need to enter the labour market. This will be of particular help to unemployed inner city residents and is being established with inner city needs in mind.

Tourism (Inner Cities)

22. **Sir Marcus Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his Department's proposals to encourage tourism in the inner cities.

Mr. Lee: Inner city tourism will continue to benefit from the English tourist board's section 4 financial assistance, its tourism development action programmes, and other strategic development initiatives. The ETB is participating in the "Great English City Breaks" campaign to promote weekend breaks to the 14 cities currently involved. The British Tourist Authority is also involved in a number of joint marketing schemes to attract foreign tourism to inner cities.

Manufacturing (North-West Region)

23. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the change in manufacturing jobs in the north-west region from May 1979 to the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Lee: Figures for May 1979 are not available. Between June 1979 and December 1987, the number of employees in employment in manufacturing industry in the north-west region fell by 363,000. However, over the past four years the decline in manufacturing employment in that region has been more than offset by rises in employment in services and self-employment.

Industrial Training

24. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he will next meet the director general of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss training quality in British industry.

69. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he will next meet the director general of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss skill shortages in British industry.

Mr. Cope: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State often meets the director general of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss a wide range of issues connected with training, and will continue to do so.

YTS

25. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a further statement on the progress of YTS.

Mr. Nicholls: At the end of January 1988 some 413,000 young people were receiving high-quality training on YTS. Of those young people who left YTS schemes between April 1986 and 1987, 74 per cent. went into work or further education and training. This is welcome and shows that YTS is now firmly established as a standard method of recruitment and training for many employers.

81. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many 16 and 17-year-olds are currently undertaking training on the YTS; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: There were some 413,000 young people on YTS at the end of January 1988. Of these, 238,000 were 16-year-old school leavers in the first year of a two-year training programme, 151,000 were 16-year-old school leavers in the second year and 24,000 were 17-year-old school leavers on a one-year training programme. The large number of young people now well into their second year of training in the new two-year programme shows significant progress towards ensuring that all young people under 18 years of age obtain qualifications relevant to work.

83. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to raise standards of training at the YTS; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: From April, all YTS providers will have to meet the high standards required of approved training organisations. The Manpower Services Commission has published its priorities for quality development in YTS and is working with these approved organisations to raise standards still further. Meanwhile the Training Standards Advisory Service has begun its programme of carrying out full inspections of all YTS schemes on the ground. A further assurance of quality is the commitment to have vocational qualifications approved by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications in all YTS schemes.

Local Employer Networks

26. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of local employer networks.

Mr. Cope: The response from employers, employers organisations and others to this important initiative continues to be encouraging. Contracts have been exchanged for 85 networks and a further 40 are expected to be in place by the end of September.

Government Training Schemes

27. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people are on Government training schemes in Sunderland.

Mr. Cope: At 31 January 1988, there were 3,184 young people in training on YTS in Sunderland.

Tourist Grants

28. **Mr. Curry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the amount of money which will be made available for section 4 tourist grants in England in 1988-89.

Mr. Lee: The total which will be made available to the English tourist board for payments under the section 4 scheme in 1988-89 is £13.2 million. A rise of 10 per cent. over 1987-88.

Adult Training

30. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to meet the chairman of the Training Commission to discuss adult training.

Mr. Cope: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State often meets the chairman of the Manpower Services Commission to discuss training issues including adult training and will continue to do so.

Tourism (Employment)

31. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to encourage the tourism and hotel industries to promote career opportunities for young people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: I am constantly encouraging the tourism and hospitality industries to promote the excellent and varied career opportunities that they can offer to young people. I am particularly gratified to see the wide range of careers material now being produced by the industry itself.

46. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many new jobs have been created in the tourism sector in the Yorkshire and Humberside region during the past five years.

Mr. Lee: Estimates of the number of new jobs created are not available. However, there has been a net increase of 32,000 employees in employment in the hotel and catering industry in the Yorkshire and Humberside region over the period June 1982 to June 1987. This figure does not include the self-employed, for whom a comparable estimate is not available.

Hotels

32. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of new hotels currently under construction in England.

Mr. Lee: The latest English tourist board survey of investment in major tourist projects shows that in December 1987, a total of 37 new hotels were under construction in England.

Job Clubs

33. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed people have found work through job clubs in the north-east over the last 10 years.

Mr. Lee: Between November 1984, when the first job club opened, and December 1987, a total of 4,412 people had found work through job clubs in the north-east. A further 1,345 took up a place on the community programme, a training scheme or the enterprise allowance scheme.

37. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of job clubs in placing people in jobs.

Mr. Lee: The aim of the job club service is to help long-term unemployed people to help themselves find a job. From April 1987 to December 1987, the latest date for which figures are available, 74,653 people passed through job clubs of which 40,685—54 per cent.—found jobs. A further 10,249—14 per cent.—gained a place on the community programme, entered training or took up the enterprise allowance scheme.

Ministerial Visit (Sweden)

34. **Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his visit to Sweden.

Mr. Fowler: I visited Sweden from 22 to 24 November last year, at the invitation of the Swedish Government, in order to study employment and training policies and programmes in that country. During my visit I met representatives of the Swedish Government and industry with responsibilities in these areas. I was also able to see, at first hand, something of the operation of policy both at Government training and employment centres and within private industry.

Industrial Apprenticeships

35. **Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he has introduced to encourage the creation of apprenticeships in industry.

Mr. Cope: It is for employers in the first instance to ensure the apprenticeship training that their industry needs. The Government encourage them to adopt cost-effective practices such as training to standards instead of wasteful time-serving. They also make a substantial contribution to support apprenticeship training by way of YTS. Through the scheme, the Government have made available more money than ever before for the training of young people—£1,036 million in 1987-88.

The extension of YTS to a two-year scheme has increased opportunities for all 16 and 17-year-old school leavers to benefit from the structured programme of training and work experience previously available only to those undertaking the limited number of apprenticeships then available.

Self-employment

36. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of self-employed people in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Cope: There were 2·9 million self-employed people in the United Kingdom in June 1987. This represents an increase of 1 million on the number of self-employed in June 1979, with an increase of 234,000 between 1986 and 1987 alone.

Approximately one in nine of the employed labour force is now self-employed. This increase is indicative of the success of the measures we have introduced to encourage and support self-employment.

57. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent representations he has received about the effect of Government policies on the self-employed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: I receive many representations on this subject both from organisations and individuals. The rise in the number of self-employed from 1·9 million in June 1979 to 2·9 million in June 1987 is evidence that the measures we have introduced since 1979 have been effective in encouraging individuals to set up their own businesses and to contribute to the economic revival of the United Kingdom.

"Training for Employment"

39. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many representations his Department has received on the proposals contained in the White Paper "Training for Employment".

54. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received regarding his White Paper "Training for Employment".

Mr. Cope: The White Paper sets out the Government's plans for securing continuing reductions in unemployment and for sustaining jobs growth. It calls upon employers, individuals and trade unions to play their part, in particular to equip longer-term unemployed people for the jobs which the economy is generating. We believe that the soundness of the approach set out in the White Paper is widely recognised. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has as yet received no representations about the Government's plans.

Strikes

40. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many working days were lost through strikes in 1987 and 1978.

Mr. Nicholls: The number of working days lost through stoppages of work due to industrial disputes in 1987 is provisionally estimated as 3,476,000. This compares with 9,405,000 working days lost in 1978.

55. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the numbers of work days lost due to strikes in December 1987 and December 1978.

Mr. Nicholls: The number of working days lost through stoppages of work due to industrial disputes in December 1987 is provisionally estimated as 38,000. This compares with 542,000 working days lost in December 1978.

Training

42. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to reduce the number of young people entering work at 16 years without training.

Mr. Cope: The Government will continue to underline the value, to employers and young people alike, of quality training for young recruits. We have asked the Manpower Services Commission to ensure that YTS continues to develop both in quantity and quality so that it becomes the normal route for 16 and 17-year-old school leavers from school to employment. The national expansion of the technical and vocational educational initiative (TVEI) will increase the opportunities to gain vocational skills and qualifications for all those at school from the age of 14-18 years.

63. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the percentage of gross domestic product expended on training for the employed in 1979 and in the last available year.

Mr. Cope: I regret that this information is not available. Estimates of the costs of employers' training activities will be available in 1988 as part of the study of the funding of vocational education and training currently being undertaken by the Manpower Services Commission.

73. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce legislation to make it a duty on all employers to provide training for all employees between 16 and 18 years of age.

Mr. Cope: No. The objective of improving the quality and quantity of the training given to young people is more effectively pursued through practical, voluntary measures such as YTS, which offers young people a structured programme of quality training and work experience and is the main route into employment for the under-18 age group.

75. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to increase the numbers of employees receiving regular training and retraining.

Mr. Cope: The number of employees receiving training continues to increase according to the labour force survey. Preliminary estimates show that in spring 1987, a total of 2,381,000 employees of working age received training in the last four weeks compared with 1,806,000 in 1984—an increase of over 30 per cent.

The Manpower Services Commission will continue to develop its policies to encourage employers to train adequately to meet skill needs. These include the development of a framework for training qualifications; the encouragement of industrywide training arrangements where appropriate; support for local collaboration between firms and training providers; the provision of training information and advice; special support for small firms.

The Manpower Services Commission is also developing a strategy to build employer commitment to training by demonstrating the contribution of training to firms' performance.

91. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the gross domestic product was expended on training for the unemployed in 1979 and in the last available year.

Mr. Cope: The inforation is not available in the form requested because some training schemes are available to both employed and unemployed people. However, the total expenditure on training programmes through the Manpower Services in 1978-79 was £380 million and in 1986-87 was £1,400 million. This represents 0·22 per cent. and 0·36 per cent. of gross domestic product respectively.

84. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in Lothian secured full-time employment during 1987 as a result of Manpower Services Commission training schemes; and if he will express this number as a percentage of the total unemployment in Lothian.

Mr. Lang: I have been asked to reply.

Information is not available in the form requested. In Lothian and Borders regions for the period April 1986 to August 1987—the latest period for which information is available — 6,090 people left YTS. Of the 3,426 who responded to the survey of leavers, 1,884 were in full-time employment three months after leaving YTS. Of the 836 people who completed old job training scheme courses in the period September 1986 to August 1987, a total of 515 responded to the survey and of those 288 were in full or part-time employment three months after leaving old JTS. Figures are not available in respect of other training schemes. As trainees are not unemployed claimants, it would not be appropriate to express the result as a percentage of the total unemployed.

Tourism

45. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to meet the chairman of the English tourist board to discuss propdsals to increase overseas visitors to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: I hope to meet the chairman of the English tourist board in the near future to discuss various matters concerning the promotion of tourism in this country.

48. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received on the implications for the tourist industry of the Local Government Finance Bill.

Mr. Lee: I have received representations on this subject from a number of organisations representing firms in the industry, and also from individual operators.

50. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many section 4 tourist grants were made by the English tourist board in 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: In the financial year 1986-87, a total of 630 project applications were approved by the English tourist board. The total of section 4 assistance offered was £13·95 million. Between April 1987 and February 1988, a total of 561 project applications have been approved, with assistance offered totalling £14·12 million.

85. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many overseas tourists visited Britain in 1987; and what proportion visited areas of the country outside metropolitan London.

Mr. Lee: Figures for the number of overseas tourists are not yet available for the whole of 1987. However, in the first 11 months of 1987 there were 14·9 million visits to the United Kingdom by overseas residents, some 14 per cent. more than in the same period of 1986. It is not possible to say what proportion of these visited areas outside London but 57 per cent. of visits to the United Kingdom in 1986 included at least one night spent outside London.

Industrial Relations

49. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to meet the chairman of the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service to discuss industrial relations in England and Wales.

Mr. Nicholls: Ministers from this Department meet the chairman of ACAS from time to time to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Skill Shortages (Computer Services)

51. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on skill shortages in the computer services sector.

Mr. Cope: The strength of our economy means that some employers are finding it more difficult to meet some

of their skill needs through recruitment. But employers can influence the supply of skills they need by providing the proper incentives for individuals to acquire the right skills and experience and by making the necessary investment in training. The Government have given a lead by more than doubling their own investment in vocational education and training since 1979, especially through two-year YTS for school leavers and now, the new £1·4 billion training programme to provide unemployed adults with the skills that today's jobs demand. The Manpower Services Commission also has programmes to encourage employers to recognise and meet their own training needs. Under the engineering science and technology initiative, more resources have also been made available to increase relevant higher education opportunities.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

53. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many small businesses obtained loans with assistance from the loan guarantee scheme in 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: In the financial year May 1986 to April 1987, a total of 1,050 loans to a value of £40·37 million were made to small businesses under the loan guarantee scheme. In the period from April 1987 to the end of January 1988, a total of 938 loans had been issued to a value of £37·32 million. In January this year simplified administrative procedures for loans up to £15,000 were introduced and are expected to result in a further increase in the use of the scheme.

Injuries at Work

56. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest available number of injuries at work; and what figure was in 1979.

Mr. Nicholls: The available information is as follows:

Reported occupational injuries to employees and self-employed persons in Great Britain

	[1]*1979*	[2]*1986-7p*
number of reported deaths	615	405
number of reported non-fatal injuries leading to absence from work of over 3 days:		
employees	320,500	173,251
self-employed	..	1,693
of which major injuries to		
employees	..	19,549
self-employed	..	830

[1] numbers reported to enforcing authorities under various legislation requiring the reporting of accidents at work.
[2] numbers reported to enforcing authorities under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, 1985.
p—provisional data for the year commencing 1 April 1986.
..—not available.

Employment Bill

60. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to meet the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress to discuss the implementation of the proposals contained in the Employment Bill.

Mr. Cope: My hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have met representatives of the Trades Union Congress to discuss the proposals in the Employment Bill on several occasions. The most recent meeting was yesterday. We have no current plans to meet the general secretary to discuss implementation of the Bill.

New Businesses

62. **Mr. Richard Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of new businesses assisted by enterprise agencies in 1987.

Mr. Cope: Local enterprise agencies are independent organisations accountable to their own boards and sponsors. This Department does not have comprehensive information on the number of new businesses they assist. Business in the Community's most recent survey of agencies, undertaken in spring 1986, showed that 118 agencies responding to a question on business start-ups claimed to have helped create more than 10,000 new businesses.

Restart

64. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, pursuant to the reply of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *542*, he will explain why some 12 per cent. of people interviewed on the Government's restart programme were not offered positive help in finding a job; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The circumstances of some people interviewed under restart are such that an offer of help is inappropriate. They include those already on programmes such as job club as well as those who, for a variety of reasons, are about to cease claiming unemployment benefits.

76. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the latest number of people obtaining full-time work after participating in the Government's restart scheme.

Mr. Lee: The aim of the restart programme is to help unemployed people into employment by selecting the best way open to them from a wide range of employment, training and job search opportunities available. It is not possible to say how many of those people selected for interview under restart ultimately obtain full-time work, since we do not follow up every participant.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

65. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of the enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Cope: Since the enterprise allowance scheme began in 1982 more than 320,000 unemployed people have been helped to start their own business. A total of 102,500 places are available this year. Although this figure is likely to be exceeded, a total of 110,000 places will be available next year.

Enterprise Agencies

70. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what further plans he has for encouraging enterprise agencies.

Mr. Cope: The Government remain firmly committed to the encouragement of local enterprise agencies (LEAs). In the long term, the future of LEAs, which are essentially

autonomous private sector-led organisations, must rest primarily with their boards and private sector supporters. This Department, through its local enterprise agency grant scheme is continuing to encourage the development in England of a network of viable, private sector-led LEAs capable of surviving without specific Government funding beyond the scheme's five-year duration. The Government also support training for LEA staff and promote broader awareness of LEAs through its grant to Business in the Community.

Small Firms (Government Contracts)

72. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures are being introduced to assist and to encourage small firms in obtaining contracts from Government Departments.

Mr. Cope: We are making considerable efforts to assist and to encourage small firms to obtain Government contracts, primarily by improving the quality of information made available to them. We publish a booklet, "Tendering for Government Contracts", which gives guidance on what Government Departments seek to buy and the names and addresses of the relevant contacts. This information is also available on Prestel. Departments, including the Ministry of Defence and this Department, also publish booklets providing more specific information on the purchasing opportunities within their Departments.

Government tendering and approval procedures have been greatly simplified and contracts under £10,000 are now exempt from normal approval procedures. Government Departments are also under instruction to pay their invoices promptly.

Further assistance and information is available from the Department's small firms service which can be contacted by dialling the telephone operator and asking for Freefone Enterprise.

Blackfriars Consultants Ltd. (Employment Proposals)

80. **Mr. Bidwell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what study his Department has made of proposals by Blackfriars Consultants Ltd., to reduce unemployment; a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: My Department has received no specific proposals from Blackfriars Consultants Ltd.

Unions (Postal Ballots)

86. **Mr. Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about clause 13 of the Employment Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: In addition to comments on the proposals contained in chapter 5 of the Green Paper "Trade Unions and Their Members", my Department continues to receive letters and requests for meetings about the provision requiring postal voting for union election ballots and political fund ballots.

International Labour Statistics

89. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the most recent percentage unemployment figure for *(a)* the European Economic Community, *(b)* the European Free Trade Association group of nations, *(c)* the United States of America and *(d)* Japan.

Mr. Lee: The information requested is given in the table. The figures are not directly comparable because of national differences in definitions and methods of compiling the statistics. In particular, the figures for the USA and Japan are based on surveys rather than registrations at Government offices.

Percentage rates of unemployment, November 1987
National definitions, not seasonally adjusted

	Percentage
EEC	11·5
[1]EFTA	2·8
USA	5·6
Japan	2·5

[1] Excluding Liechtenstein

Workfare

90. **Mr. Ralph Howell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to set up a pilot workfare scheme.

Mr. Cope: We have no plans to set up a pilot workfare scheme.

Pay Slips

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce measures to require employers to issue pay slips and detailed information about taxation paid to the Inland Revenue to all employees promptly.

Mr. Nicholls: Under sections 8 to 11 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 most employees already have the right to receive from employers a detailed written pay statement containing this information at or before the time of payment.

Careers Services

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what extra assistance he plans to make available to local authorities to enable their careers services to provide extra help to young people arising from the proposed withdrawal of income support from young people under 18 years.

Mr. Cope: 1,063 posts are currently funded in local authority careers services under this Department's direct grant strengthening scheme. In 1988-89, as foreshadowed in the public expenditure White Paper, an extra 72 posts, directly funded by this Department will be targeted on those local authorities where our present level of support insufficiently recognises the difficulties faced by young people in the labour market.

Small Businesses

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what steps he has taken to ascertain the level of interference with the success of small businesses caused by paperwork and legal restrictions in providing employees with a note on disciplinary and grievance procedures;

(2) if he has any statistical evidence to support the Government's view that provision of a note on disciplinary and grievance procedures imposes a burden on small businesses.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* There is evidence from a number of surveys that some employers are reluctant to recruit additional staff because of the employment protection legislation.

WALES

Speech Therapy (Children)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to increase the availability of speech therapy provision for children in *(a)* Clwyd and *(b)* the other counties in the Principality; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The level of provision of speech therapy for children is a matter for the district health authorities to decide in the light of competing priorities. The number of speech therapists in Clwyd has almost doubled from 12 to 23 between 1979 and 1987 and the numbers in Wales increased similarly during the same period from 64 to 130. In addition, the Department has recently agreed to fund a further two speech therapist posts in Clwyd under the mental health development scheme.

Nursery Education

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many three and four-year-old children in each local education authority area in Wales are in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time nursery education in private nursery schools; and what percentage of the estimated three and four-year-old population in each local education authority area this represents for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This information is not collected centrally.

Morriston Hospital (Burns Unit)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the burns unit to be established at Morriston hospital.

Mr. Grist: Subject to satisfactory progress in planning by the managing health authority, West Glamorgan health authority, and subsequently in construction, I expect the unit to be completed in 1992.

Rural Areas (Assistance)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total amount of all central Government assistance to rural areas for the last financial year in Wales on a per capita basis.

Mr. Peter Walker: I regret that the information is not available in the form requested.

Give-as-you-earn

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what information he has as to how many employers in Wales are registered with the give-as-you-earn payroll deduction scheme;

(2) what information he has as to which charities in Wales have benefited from the give-as-you-earn payroll deduction scheme since its inception; and in each case what has been the actual benefit to the charity concerned.

Mr. Peter Walker: I do not have this information.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action has been taken by his Department to make employees in Wales aware of the give-as-you-earn payroll deduction scheme for registered charities.

Mr. Peter Walker: That is a matter for the Wales Council for Voluntary Action.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what information he has as to how many adult speech therapists are employed per 1,000 of the population by each of the social services departments of local authorities in Wales;

(2) what information he has as to how many adult speech therapists able to carry out their work through the medium of Welsh are employed per 1,000 of the Welsh-speaking population in each of the social services departments of local authorities in Wales;

(3) what information he has as to how many adult speech therapists able to carry out their work through the medium of Welsh are employed per 1,000 of the Welsh-speaking population in each of the social services departments of local authorities in Wales:

(4) how many adult speech therapists in each local authority area in Wales are able to carry out their work through the medium of Welsh;

(5) what is the ratio of child speech therapists able to carry out their work through the medium of Welsh to Welsh-speaking pupils in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* each local education authority in Wales;

(6) what is the ratio of child speech therapists to school children in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* each local education authority area in Wales;

(7) how many child speech therapists able to carry out their work through the medium of Welsh there are in each local education authority area in Wales; and what proportion they represent of the total numbers of speech therapists in each authority area.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is not available centrally. However the table shows the number of speech therapists employed by district health authorities in Wales, whose work includes speech therapy in schools.

Health Authority	*as at 30 September 1987* *Number*	*Whole-time equivalent*
Clwyd	26	23·3
East Dyfed	14	13·3
Pembrokeshire	6	6·0
Gwent	17	14·9
Gwynedd	11	10·0
Mid Glamorgan	17	17·0
Powys	6	3·8
South Glamorgan	30	27·6
West Glamorgan	15	14·2
WALES	142	130·1

Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what cases of non-fulfilment of obligations under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 by social service departments in Wales have been brought to his attention during each year since 1979.

Mr. Grist: Cases have been brought to my attention but the detail asked for could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the increase in applications and references to local authorities in Wales for the provision of aids, adaptations and modifications in the homes of disabled people under the requirements of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Information about the numbers of applications and references to local authorities is not held centrally, but details of the provision of such services are published annually by the Welsh Office in "Activities of Social Services Departments".

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has regarding delays in the implementation of provision of services for disabled people by local authorities in Wales under the requirements of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Representations alleging delays are received from time to time and these are fully investigated by the Department.

Disabled People

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will seek to secure for his departmental library a copy of "The Difficulties of Local Authorities in Maintaining Services to People with Disabilities" by W. F. R. Stewart, published by the Disabilities Study Unit, Wildhanger, Amberley, West Sussex.

Mr. Grist: Yes.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning delays in the publication of statutory instruments laid by him in the present Session.

Mr. Peter Walker: I am not aware of any delays.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fisheries Ministers (Meeting)

Mr. Harris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Council of Fisheries Ministers' meeting on 29 February in Brussels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Together with my noble Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office, I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Council of Fisheries Ministers in Brussels on 29 February and 1 March.

The Council agreed a series of fish tariff quotas which will enable the processing industry in the United Kingdom and other member states to obtain specified quantities of some species of fish at reduced rates of tariff from third countries. Last year the Council did not manage to settle this issue until June: reaching an agreement so much earlier this year will help our processing industry to make full use of these quotas.

The Council also agreed in prinicple a new Community fisheries agreement with Morocco, subject to the opinion of the European Parliament and the completion of national parliamentary scrutiny procedures. This is a very important agreement which ensures that the Spanish and Portuguese fleets can resume fishing in Moroccan waters from which they were excluded at the beginning of this year. The additional cost of this agreement will be met by transfers from within the 1988 budget.

The Commission's proposed amendments to the basic marketing regulation, which would change the tuna market support regime and introduce regimes for additional species, were again discussed but no conclusion was reached.

Research and Development

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if the report on agricultural research and development in the United Kingdom will be published;

(2) what steps he intends to take to enable hon. and right hon. Members, the agricultural industry, consumer groups and other concerned organisations to comment on the report on agricultural research and development in the United Kingdom before decisions based on the report's findings are taken;

(3) when the report on agricultural research and development in the United Kingdom will be completed.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* The current examination of Agricultural Departments' research and development programmes (including work on fisheries and food) is an internal exercise which it would not be appropriate to publish. It is part of the normal process within Government of reviewing policy. I expect to receive a report in a few weeks' time but cannot yet say what consultations might be appropriate in the light of this advice or when any subsequent decisions might be taken. I will, however, keep the House informed of developments.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimated cost of producing the report on agricultural research and development in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* The current internal review of Agricultural Departments' research and development programmes is expected to cost around £40,000.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the definition of the term "near market research" that is being used in the report on agricultural research and development in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* Near market research is not a term of art and there is no formal definition of it. It is, however, a convenient way of referring to the sort of work of direct commercial

benefit which Government believe industry should fund more of. Part of the purpose of the review is to seek to identify what should be classified under this heading.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Meningitis

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if the collection of data on the incidence of meningitis in the Wirral health authority covers all those with Wirral addresses who have been moved to a hospital outside the health authority area.

Mrs. Currie: Under the Public Health Acts and Infectious Disease Regulations, the doctor in attendance is responsible for notifying cases of specified infectious diseases, including acute meningitis, to the proper officer in the local government district concerned.

If patients are admitted to hospital outside the district in which they become ill, the hospital doctor will notify the proper officer of the district in which the hospital is situated. That proper officer will, in turn, send a copy of the notification to the proper officer of the district in which the patient became ill, and the notification will be included in the latter district's return to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

The statistics of notifications, therefore, relate to the area where the disease is first suspected or diagnosed, which is not necessarily the area of usual residence of the patient.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of meningitis have been reported in the Wirral health authority area in December 1987 and January of the current year.

Mrs. Currie: Information is not available for the exact area requested. Infectious diseases are notified on a local, rather than health, authority basis, and Wirral district health authority covers the whole of Wirral county district and part of Ellesmere Port and Neston county district.

During the period 28 November 1987 to 1 January 1988 there were two notifications of acute meningitis received from Wirral county district, of which one was meningococcal meningitis. During the period 2 January to 29 January 1988 the figures were six and three respectively.

During these same periods no notifications of meningitis were received from Ellesmere Port and Neston county district.

The data should be regarded as provisional; corrected notifications are often received from doctors. Corrected notification figures for December should be available during April 1988 and for January figures during July 1988.

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many deaths attributable to meningitis have been recorded in each of the last five years *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in Cleveland.

Mrs. Currie: Meningitis can be caused by a number of different organisms. I assume my hon. Friend is interested in meningococcal meningitis, deaths from which are shown in the table. The latest year's data available are those for 1986.

Number of deaths with meningococcal meningitis (ICD 036.0) assigned as underlying cause. 1982-86. England and Wales, usual residents of Cleveland county

Year	England and Wales	Cleveland
1982	20	0
1983	20	0
1984	26	0
1985	36	0
1986[1]	52	0

[1] Provisional.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish for *(a)* the Northern regional health authority and *(b)* Sunderland district health authority lists depicting the average daily number of beds available in 1979 to the latest available date for all specialties and for acute specialties.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested is given in the table. The number of in-patient cases treated per available bed by Northern regional health authority has increased from 14·6 to 19, between 1979 and 1986. In Sunderland district health authority the increase has been from 18 to 21·5, over the same period.

Average daily number of available beds, Northern regional health authority and Sunderland district health authority, 1979-86

Year	All specialties	Acute specialties
Northern Region		
1979	25,305·3	10,509·1
1980	25,283·2	10,638·2
1981	24,192·0	10,388·6
1982	24,679·2	10,243·3
1983	24,727·9	10,281·2
1984	24,331·7	10,107·9
1985	23,772·5	9,698·0
1986	23,239·6	9,499·6
Sunderland District		
1979	2,426·3	1,155·9
1980	2,379·3	1,134·0
1981	2,355·9	1,114·8
1982	2,338·0	1,091·4
1983	2,351·1	1,103·4
1984	2,349·1	1,092·1
1985	2,312·1	1,068·0
1986	2,273·1	1,050·8

Community Care

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money he intends to allocate in 1988-89 for the provision of care in the community, and how much is to be allocated to each *(a)* region and *(b)* district.

Mr. Newton: In the main the Department does not identify funds for specific purposes such as provision of care in the community within its overall allocations to regions or in its indicative figures for local authority social services expenditure. The allocation of resources to district health authorities is a matter for regions, and it is for regions and districts to determine, within a national framework of health care priorities, and in the light of local needs and circumstances, how all their resources can

best be used. So far as local authorities are concerned, it is for them to determine the level and balance of their expenditure on the provision of social services.

Fraud (Prosecution)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many prosecutions were brought in the Durham constabulary area for social security fraud offences in each of the last five years.

Mr. Portillo: The information, in the form requested, is not available. Seven local offices have catchment areas either in full or in part within the Durham constabulary area. The total number of cases authorised for prosecution in respect of social security benefit fraud, including unemployment benefit, for the seven catchment areas in each of the past five years is as follows:

1983-84	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
140	121	89	142	141

War Widows

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what recent representations he has received concerning the plight of pre-1973 war widows;

(2) whether he has received any representations from overseas concerning the plight of British pre-1973 war widows.

Mr. Portillo: Numerous representations have been received recently about the position of pre-1973 war widows, following the circulation of letters by the Royal British Legion and War Widows Association of Great Britain to Members of Parliament and to peers. One person from overseas made representations in 1986.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he will review his decision to cancel the provisionally arranged meeting with Mrs. Iris Strange of the British War Widows and Associates and representatives of the All-Party Group for pre-1973 War Widows;

(2) whether, since cancelling the provisionally arranged meeting with Mrs. Iris Strange of the British War Widows and Associates, he has had meetings with representatives of other organisations representing war widows; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Although my noble Friend, who has special responsibility for war pensions, said in July 1987 that he did not think a meeting with Mrs. Strange would be helpful, he has told my hon. Friend he would be glad to see him to discuss this. Since July 1987 he has not had a formal meeting to discuss war widows pensions with any organisation specifically representing war widows, although he has met representatives of a number of organisations concerned with the interests of war widows and war disablement pensioners.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what information he has concerning the current ages of pre-1973 war widows;

(2) what estimates he can make of the numbers of pre-1973 war widows who are currently dying each year;

(3) whether he has any information concerning the numbers of second world war widows who are still alive;

(4) whether he has any information concerning the numbers of pre-1973 war widows who are still alive and who lost their husbands in service other than during the two world wars.

Mr. Portillo: The standard rate of war widows' pension under the war pensions scheme administered by DHSS is the same regardless of when the husband served or died. Records only distinguish between those whose husbands served between 1914 and 1921 and those whose husbands served from 1939 onwards. They do not distinguish pre and post-1973 widows, second world war widows or widows who lost their husbands in service other than during the two world wars. Definitive information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Estimates of the numbers of post-1973 war widows and assumptions about their ages suggest, however, that at December 1987 in the region of 56,000 war widows were pre-1973 widows, of whom about 51,000 were aged 65 or over, and that the number of pre-1973 war widows is currently falling by about 2,000 a year due to death or re-marriage.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any information concerning the numbers of first world war widows who are still alive.

Mr. Portillo: At December 1987, 5,100 first world war widows were in receipt of a war widows pension.

Sex Change Operations

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many individuals underwent sex change treatment in the last year for which figures are available; and how many of these individuals received that treatment under the National Health Service;

(2) what is the total number of patients who have so far received either sex change hormonal treatment or surgery under the National Health Service;

(3) how many courses of sex change treatment were commenced in the latest year for which figures are available by (i) men, (ii) women and (iii) other categories; if he will indicate how many of these commenced courses of treatment which ended up in *(a)* males remaining male, *(b)* males becoming female, *(c)* females remaining female, *(d)* females becoming male and *(e)* other outcomes; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that this information is not held centrally.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will give a breakdown by region of the numbers of sex change operations performed annually;

(2) if he will estimate the total cost to the National Health Service of sex change treatment and operations.

Mrs. Currie: The numbers involved are so small that no reliable estimate of the operations carried out can be made from normal statistical returns. It is, however, unlikely that the number of operations carried out in England exceed 100 a year.

A detailed breakdown of costs is not available, but, based on information from the gender reassignment service at Charing Cross hospital, it appears that the cost of the operations involved and associated treatment is

likely to be about £2,500. It is not possible to identify separately the costs for those patients receiving treatment who do not also have an operation.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what steps are taken by his Department to regulate sex change treatments;

(2) whether there is any restriction on the age of individuals who may undergo sex change treatments *(a)* under the National Health Service and *(b)* privately.

Mrs. Currie: Transexualism is a clinically recognised condition, for which in certain cases gender reassignment is the most appropriate form of treatment. It is for health authorities to decide the scale of resources allocated for this service and for doctors to decide on criteria for the acceptance of patients and on the treatment procedures in each individual case. The international Gender Dysphoria Association criteria recommend that, in the selection for operation, patients should be over 21 years and under 65 years of age.

Abortion

Mr. Lofthouse: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the total number of abortions, under the terms of the Abortion Act 1967, in the Pontefract district health authority area for each year from 1983 up to the latest year for which figures are available; how many of these abortions were performed in emergency to savy the life of the pregnant woman; and what is the latter figure expressed as a percentage of the former.

Mr. Newton: The information is shown in the table.

Number of notifications of abortions performed on usual residents of Pontefract District Health Authority, and number of mentions of ground 5[1] 1983-86

Year	Number of Abortions	Mention of Ground 5
1983	346	0
1984	339	0
1985	355	0
1986	408	0

[1] Ground 5 of the 1967 Abortion Act permits abortions to be performed "In emergency to save the life of the mother".

Epilepsy

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) when he hopes to be able to announce the location of the two epilepsy units suggested by the report of the working party on services for people with epilepsy;

(2) when he hopes to be able to respond to the report of the working party on services for people with epilepsy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I am unable to add to my reply to the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) on 18 December 1987 at column 924.

Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he hopes to be able to announce arrangements for the implementation of those parts of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 which have not yet been implemented.

Mr. Scott: The Government have always made it clear that implementation of the Act would be phased and dependent upon discussions with the local authority associations to identify resource implications. These discussions are continuing.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claimants of supplementary benefit at the Bathgate local office of his Department will *(a)* have their benefit frozen at its current level under the transitional arrangements for the introduction of income support and *(b)* have their benefits increased at the time of the introduction of income support.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that this information is not available.

Long-stay Patients

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will make a statement on the social security position of patients discharged from long-stay mental hospitals after 31st March;

(2) what representations he has received on the treatment in the Income Support Regulations of long-stay mental patients discharged after 31 March;

(3) how much extra income support patients discharged from long-stay mental hospitals after 31 March will receive, if they are deemed to be receiving higher level supplementary benefit prior to the new regulations coming into force.

Mr. Scott: Until 11 April discharged patients will be able to claim supplementary benefit or an increase in it. Where appropriate they may also qualify for an increase in severe disablement allowance or invalidity benefit, or claim attendance allowance. If they have received supplementary benefit, severe disablement allowance or invalidity benefit for 52 weeks or more prior to their discharge, supplementary benefit will be calculated at the long-term rate.

From 11 April supplementary benefit will be replaced by income support. Claimants under 60 who have been incapable of work for 28 weeks or more, who receive invalidity benefit, severe disablement allowance, attendance allowance or mobility allowance or who are blind will qualify for the disability premium. Claimants aged 60 or more will receive the pensioner premium or, if they qualify for it, the higher pensioner premium. In addition, people living alone who are in receipt of attendance allowance and where no one is receiving invalid care allowance in respect of their care will qualify for the severe disability premium.

We have received a number of representations about the income support position of people living in institutions on 11 April who are discharged into the community after that date. Information about the extra amount of income support which would be required by patients discharged from long-stay mental hospitals before or after 11 April to maintain an actual or deemed supplementary benefit level is not available.

Income Support

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what representations he has received on the treatment in the Income Support Regulations of those recovering from mental illness and seeking work;

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect the disregard provisions of the Income Support Regulations will have on the ability of industrial therapy units to secure employment for their attenders; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will make a statement on the effect of the disregard provisions of the Income Support Regulations on people recovering from mental illness seeking work.

Mr. Scott: Evidence was received from many organisations representing the mentally and physically handicapped during the consultation period for the reform of the income-related benefits, including the British Institute of Industrial Therapy and MIND. Most organisations welcomed the new levels of disregards. People who are returning to part-time work after a mental illness or who attend an industrial therapy unit are able to earn £5 or £15 a week without it affecting their benefit. The higher disregard is available to those people who are receiving the disability premium, lone parents or members of couples who have been in receipt of benefit continuously for two years. We have undertaken to monitor these changes and to review their effect as necessary.

Disability Premium

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what will be the financial effect of the loss of disability premium and the reduction in disregard on people recovering from mental illness seeking work.

Mr. Scott: People who qualify for the disability premium solely on grounds of their incapacity for work will lose the premium, and they may lose the higher earnings disregard when they become capable of work again. The disability premium will be £13·05 for a single person or lone parent and £18·60 for a member of a couple. The higher earnings disregard will be £15; the normal earnings disregard will be £5.

Industrial Therapy Units

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each industrial therapy unit *(a)* the total number of attenders in the year for which figures are most recently available and *(b)* the number of those helped to find employment by the units.

Mrs. Currie: I regret this information is not held centrally.

Charities

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total amount to be distributed to charities as a result of the error in the retail prices index, by what criteria the charities will be selected; and how much will be paid to charities for the benefit of one-parent families, people with disabilities and unemployed people respectively.

Mr. Scott: We estimate that the total amount to be distributed to charities in England, Scotland and Wales will be about £7 million. This sum will be paid to charities whose work broadly benefits those who have lost out as a result of the error. We have been discussing with the voluntary sector the way we can best meet this objective and how funds should be distributed and we shall make a further announcement as soon as possible.

Income Support (General) Regulations 1987

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services why the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987 do not include provisions analogous to regulations 4(6) to (8) of the Supplementary Benefit (Resources) Regulations 1981; and whether this involves any change in the treatment of trust funds in the assessment of entitlement to means-tested benefit.

Mr. Scott: As the provisions in regulations 4(6) to (8) of the Supplementary Benefit (Resources) Regulations 1981 to assume a notional resource according to the discretion available under a trust are not present in either housing benefit or family income supplement, we concluded that it would be a simplification not to carry them forward into the new regulations. This is a change which will assist claimants. From April, any resources held in trust to which a person is absolutely entitled will be taken into account from the outset in the income-related benefits. An exception is made where the trust fund is derived from a payment due to a personal injury. Resources held under a discretionary trust, including those arising from personal injury, will be taken into account when the payments are actually made.

National Quality Assessment Package

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will place in the Library the full results of the 1987 national quality assessment package for local social security offices, of which a summary is given in table 15.28 of the public expenditure White Paper, Cm. 288-II.

Mr. Portillo: Yes. This will be done at the end of March 1988.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the annual average real rise in private rents eligible for housing benefit in *(a)* 1988-89, *(b)* 1989-90, and *(c)* 1990-91.

Mr. Portillo: The expenditure plans published in Cm. 288 are based on the assumption that, leaving aside the effects of the Government's proposals to decontrol new private lettings, rents paid by private tenants receiving housing benefits will increase in real terms by 3 per cent. in each of the three years 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Health Authorities (Repossession of Appliances)

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on how much money is lost to the National Health Service each year as a result of health authorities not repossessing physical support appliances such as crutches, hearing aids and wheelchairs.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 26 February 1988]*: Arrangements for the return of items they provide are the responsibility of individual health authorities. No information is available on the revenue which might be lost as a result of non-return of disability equipment. It is known that many health authorities take steps to recover unused items but studies have shown that it is not always cost effective to retrieve and recondition equipment for reasons of expense, safety and hygiene.

National Health Service Staff (Injuries)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many Health Service staff have received payments under the National Health Service injury benefits scheme in the last two years, indicating the range of payments and the average payment;

(2) what action he is prepared to take to improve job opportunities for nurses injured either mentally or physically in the course of their work;

(3) what statistics and other information are kept by his Department on National Health Service staff injured at work; and whether that information is recorded according to type of injury;

(4) whether he will set up a working party to consider the introduction of a no-fault compensation scheme for nurses and other National Health Service staff injured at work;

(5) what advice is given to health authorities on the amount of training which should be given to nurses and other National Health Service staff on the lifting and movement of patients;

(6) whether he will introduce guidelines for health authorities on the resettling in work of nurses injured as a result of their duties, and on whether such a settlement would be of equivalent income, status and job satisfaction.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 29 February 1988]*: While we recognise the physical stresses which may be experienced by nurses and believe that much can be done to prevent injuries through training in lifting techniques, careful selection of staff and an ergonomic approach to working methods and environment, the instruction and training of NHS staff is the responsibility of the health authorities themselves and of the various training bodies.

The curriculum for nurse learners includes training in the lifting and handling of patients as does the pre-registration training of certain of the professions allied to medicine, such as physiotherapists and occupational therapists.

All NHS staff, including nurses, who are injured or contract a disease in the course of their employment are covered by the NHS injury benefits scheme. This is a no-fault scheme which compensates those injured at work for loss of earnings and which can provide a pension of up to 85 per cent. of NHS earnings where there is a permanent reduction in a person's earning ability. If an employee is absent from work temporarily on reduced or no pay a temporary allowance is payable.

The number of new claims for NHS injury benefits during the last two years were:

1986—821
1987—896

Benefits range from a once only lump sum payment of 12 per cent. of annual salary to the pension mentioned above plus a once only lump sum of 50 per cent. of annual salary. No figures on average payments or on NHS staff injured at work are held centrally.

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act health authorities are responsible for the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees. Current guidance is that staff returning to work after prolonged or repeated sickness may need help and assessment to determine whether changes in working methods, alternative work or rehabilitation are necessary. Appropriate local action is decided in the light of individual circumstances.

We have no plans to issue new guidelines.

Chlamydia

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he has for creating greater public awareness of the incidence of the sexually transmitted disease, chlamydia.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 29 February 1988]*: The symptons caused by chlamydia are common to many other infections and consequently diagnosis of it is usually possible only after the analysis of samples taken. This is usually done when a patient attends at a clinic. However, the Health Education Authority's leaflet "Guide to a healthy sex life", which has been made widely available to the public, contains a section on the causes, symptoms and treatment of non-specific genital infections, including chlamydia.

ENVIRONMENT

LDDC (Labour Statistics)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has concerning the gross and net losses and gains in employment within the statutory area of the London Docklands development corporation.

Mr. Trippier: The LDDC estimates that between 1981 and 1986 10,700 jobs were attracted to docklands, and 7,413 jobs were lost, resulting in a net gain of 3,287 jobs.

A new survey of employment in docklands was carried out by the LDDC in 1987. Its findings will be published shortly. From what can be seen in docklands, a further growth of employment is likely to be confirmed.

Vacant Land (Thamesdown)

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the unused sites owned by public bodies within the borough of Thamesdown, together with their owners and sizes in hectares, as detailed in the Land Register.

Mr. Trippier: Information about all the sites, grouped by owner, is listed in the table.

Site name	*Size in Hectares*
Thamesdown Borough Council	
Land at Groundwell Farm, Cricklade Road, Swindon.	70·82
Land on West Side of Swindon to Highworth Road.	44·52
Land South West of Akers Way/South East of Purton Road, Swindon.	41·68
Land at Sparcells, Roughmoor and Lower Shaw Farm, Shaw, Swindon	41·58

Site name	Size in Hectares
Land at Home Farm, Highworth.	33·19
Land at Wick Farm, Lydiard and Upper Shaw Farm, Shaw, Swindon.	12·91
Land at Broome Farm, Swindon.	11·74
Land on North East Side of Kite Hill, Wanborough.	4·86
Land on South West side of Kite Hill, Wanborough.	2·05
Land at Elm Grove, Shaw, Swindon.	1·52
Wiltshire County Council	
Former Moredon Railway Line.	15·38
Land at Kingshill, Swindon (Rushey Platt).	
Land at Hughes Street, Swindon.	9·51
Land at Dorcan School, Swindon.	8·22
Land South of Church Street, Stratton St. Margaret.	7·49
Land at Haydon Wick.	2·21
Land at the Rear of Beatrice Street, Swindon.	1·86
Land at Belmont Farm, Codrington, Near Wroughton.	1·82
Land at Ruskin Junior School Annexe, Stratton St., Margaret.	1·62
Land at Kingsdown High School, Stratton St., Margaret.	1·62
Land at Meadway/Stonehill Green, Westlea Down, Swindon.	1·60
Land at Baker's Field, Lower Wanborough.	1·47
Land adjoining Attlee Crescent, Stratton St., Margaret.	1·38
Park Farm, Moredon, Swindon.	1·32
Land at Scarborough Road, Swindon.	0·66
Former Queenstown Infant's School/6-10 Turl Street./15-17 Oriel Street, Swindon.	0·43
Swindon Health Authority	
Land at Cricklade Road, Gorse Hill, Swindon.	2·16
Department of Transport	
Land at Stratton St., Margaret, Swindon.	5·16
British Rail	
Land rear of Dean Street, Swindon.	5·46
CEGB	
Swindon Power Station, Moredon, Swindon.	6·88

Portable Discount Schemes

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment pursuant to the reply of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *464*, to the hon. Member for Gloucester, when he expects to have completed his study into portable discount schemes.

Mr. Waldegrave: Very soon.

Crown Suppliers

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has now received applications from employees of the Crown Suppliers to purchase that organisation.

Mr. Chope: No, but I am aware that some members of the staff of the Crown Suppliers are assembling a management buy-out team following my announcement on 3 February of the Government's intention to offer the business for sale.

Rating Reform

Mr. Lofthouse: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate for the community charge for district council areas in Yorkshire and Humberside.

Mr. Howard: Illustrative community charge figures based on 1987-88 local authority spending levels were placed in the Library on 29 June 1987. No revisions have been made to these estimates.

Victoria Park Underpass

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has issued a certificate in relation to the Victoria Park Underpass Side Roads Order, the Victoria Park to Crossflatts Section First Supplementary Compulsory Purchase Order and the Second Supplementary Compulsory Purchase Order, under section 19 of the Acquisition of Land Act 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Certificates under section 19 of the Acquisition of Land Act 1981 in connection with the first and second compulsory purchase orders were issued on 6 November 1987. Any question relating to the compulsory purchase orders should be addressed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Flytipping

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to make the registered owner of a truck stopped when flytipping liable for prosecution.

Mr. Moynihan: We are considering the responses to the consultation document on waste disposal law amendments issued in September 1986. Those proposals included measures — a duty of care on waste producers and registration of waste carriers — which would help to combat flytipping. We have no plans at present to extend these proposals on the lines suggested, but we shall consider this possibility.

Homelessness

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department commissioned the text of a leaflet explaining homeless people's rights, as part of its series advising the public on aspects of housing; when this was circulated to interested agencies for comments; and when he expects the text of the leaflet will be finalised, published and distributed.

Mrs. Roe: April 1986, April 1987 and later in 1988 respectively.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the results are yet available of his Department's 1986 survey of local authority practice and procedure in the operation of the homelessness legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Roe: The analysis has been completed and the report is being finalised.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), *Official*

Report, 20 January, columns *749-52*, how many of these additional units local authorities estimate will become available for occupation *(a)* before 1 April, and *(b)* after 1 April (i) for England as a whole, and (ii) for each local authority scheme; which will provide additional accommodation for homeless households; and which has been approved for extra housing investment resources during 1987-88.

Mrs. Roe: The additional allocations relate to capital expenditure in the current financial year. No systematic information is available on the number of additional dwellings or hostel places that will be ready for occupation by the end of that year.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), *Official Report*, 20 January, columns *749-52*, how many of these additional units local authorities expect to let to homeless households (i) under licence, as temporary accommodation and (ii) under secure tenancies, as permanent accommodation.

Mrs. Roe: The information requested is not available. It is for local authorities to decide the terms on which they offer accommodation to homeless households.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), *Official Report*, 20 January, columns *749-52*, how many of the additional 2,800 units will be *(a)* ordinary housing accommodation provided by local authorities by refurbishing their empty dwellings, *(b)* hostel accommodation, provided by local authorities by buying and converting empty private dwellings, *(c)* hostel accommodation, provided by housing associations by buying and converting empty private dwellings and *(d)* other kinds of accommodation.

Mrs. Roe: 1,745, 616, 12 and 387 respectively.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the firms of architects, builders and surveyors that the Property Services Agency has removed from its approved list for *(a)* fraud or *(b)* poor performance, giving the name of each firm, details of each case of fraud including the amounts of money involved and the number of employees or the instances of poor performance, and the work which the firm previously undertook.

Mr. Chope: Any firm convicted of an offence involving fraud against the agency is removed from PSA's approved lists. Any such conviction is a matter of public record. The remaining information requested is commercially confidential.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will enumerate cases where fraud has been alleged against firms of architects, builders and surveyors under contract to the Property Services Agency where the police were not asked to investigate; and if he will summarise the principal reasons for such decisions, over the past five years.

Mr. Chope: Any significant allegation of fraud which stands up to initial scrutiny will be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions or to the police. No central record is maintained of allegations which initial investigation suggests are either without foundation or incapable of substantiation.

Houses (Land Slippage)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to how many homes have been affected by land slippage as a result of the exceptionally wet January weather.

Mrs. Roe: Having made inquiries of South Wight borough council the Department is aware of 11 homes affected by a land slip at Luccombe. No other authorities have reported homes affected by land slips.

Rating Reform

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will extract from the data used in constructing figures 9 to 11 of his Department's note on the relationship between local taxes and income and the distributional impact of the community charge in England (1) the number of households expected to receive community charge bills, (2) the total number of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary tax units in these households, (3) the total value of the gross bills for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary tax units in these households, (4) the number of households where one or more members is expected to receive a rebate, (5) the toal value of the net bills for the households receiving such rebates, (6) the total number of *(a)* primary tax units receiving rebates and *(b)* secondary tax units receiving rebates in these households, (7) the total value of the rebates for these *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary tax units, and (8) the total value of the net bills for those *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary tax units, the figures to be provided *(a)*) for all households in England and *(b)* separately for (i) one adult (non-retired), (ii) one adult (retired), (iii) pensioner couples, (iv) other two adult households, with or without children, (v) three adults, with or without children and (vi) four or more adults, with or without children.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* It is not possible to provide the information in the precise form requested. The tables set out the estimates in the form which is available. Community charge bills and rebates will apply to individuals and not to households. Details of the community charge rebate system have not yet been decided. For the purposes of the exemplifications published on 13 January the arrangements due to come into force on 1 April have been carried forward. The figures are consistent with those exemplifications, but should be treated as indicative only. The estimated value of rebates does not include the benefit of the uprating of income support rates in respect of the 20 per cent. minimum contribution to rates in 1988-89. The net cost of community charges to tax unit types is not, therefore, the difference between gross community charges and the value of rebates.

Millions[1]

Household type	
Single pensioner	1·5
Other single adult	0·7

Household type	
Two adults	2·5
Three + adults	1·1
All	5·8

[1] Number of households where individuals are expected to be entitled to a community charge rebate

Primary tax units

Tax unit type	Number paying charge (millions)	Total gross community charge bills (£ million)	Number entitled to community charge rebate (millions)	Total value of rebates (£ million)
Single pensioner	3·0	611	1·8	251
One parent family	0·7	147	0·3	56
Other single adult	2·4	514	0·5	74
Couple—no children	6·5	2,592	1·4	309
Couple—1 child	2·2	863	0·3	76
Couple—2 children	2·6	1,008	0·3	81
Couple—3 or more children	1·0	404	0·2	65
All	18·4	6,140	4·8	912

Note: Numbers may not add due to rounding.

Secondary tax units

Tax unit type	Number paying charge (millions)	Total gross community charge bills (£ million)	Number entitled to community charge rebate (millions)	Total value of rebates (£ million)
Single pensioner	0·4	85	0·3	39
One parent family	0·1	18	0·1	9
Other single adult	3·8	772	0·9	139
Couple—no children	0·1	35	0·0	6
Couple—1 child	0·0	15	0·0	3
Couple—2 children	0·0	9	0·0	3
Couple—3 or more children	0·0	5	0·0	1
All	4·4	939	1·3	199

Note: Numbers may not add due to rounding.

TRANSPORT

M1 (Accidents)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, *Official Report*, 23 February, columns *150-52*, what were the principal reasons for the accidents involving cars on the stretch of the M1 referred to.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The principal reasons appear to have been (i) excessive speed, (ii) vehicles travelling too close to each other, (iii) driver fatigue and (iv) bad driving in poor weather conditions such as fog, ice or snow.

M1-M6 Junction (Lighting)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to light the junction of the M1 and the M6.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A recent assessment has indicated that the extension of lighting on the M1 from junction 17 at Watford Gap to, and including, the M1-M6 interchange at Catthorpe (junction 19) is justified. The timing of its installation has still to be determined.

M1 (Traffic)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by how much he anticipates traffic to grow on the M1 from its junction with the M6 to junction 1 on the M1 over the next five years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: South of the M25/M1 intersection, traffic on the M1 is anticipated to grow by between 2 per cent. and 5 per cent. over the next five years. North of the M25, up to the M6 junction, the growth of traffic on the M1 is anticipated to be offset by the relief brought about by the completion of the M40 extension, with projected growth between nought and 6 per cent. over the same period.

Deputy Secretaries

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the responsibilities of each of the deputy secretaries in his Department and the number and ranks of staff reporting to each.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department has four deputy secretaries. Their main responsibilities and numbers of staff will be as follows from 14 March, after a reorganisation:

i. Road Safety and Licensing and Principal Finance Officer. 10,267 staff: including four grade 3s, one grade 4 and 14 grade 5s.

ii. Highways and Traffic. 1,770 staff: including four grade 3s, seven grade 4s and 28 grade 5s.

iii Aviation, Shipping and International Transport. 1,256 staff including five grade 3s, four grade 4s and 19 grade 5s.

iv Public Transport and Research. 747 staff including three grade 3s, two grade 4s and 13 grade 5s.

The numbers of staff shown are based on staff in post at 1 February 1988. Other grades of staff would not normally report direct to a deputy secretary.

Singapore Airlines

Sir Marcus Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evidence he has of Singapore Airlines receiving subsidies from the Singapore Government to promote Singapore Airlines' activities in competition with British carriers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: None.

Air Traffic Control

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department has carried out a study into the possible incorporation of conflict alert equipment into the British air traffic control system, as installed at Eurocontrol Maastricht.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This is a matter for the national air traffic service and the Civil Aviation Authority. I will draw my hon. Friend's question to the attention of the authority's chairman.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when flow control will be introduced into British air space; and for how long it will be a feature of the United Kingdom's air traffic control system.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Air traffic flow management in the United Kingdom is a matter for the national air traffic service and the Civil Aviation Authority. I will draw my hon. Friend's question to the attention of the authority's chairman.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) which European countries will introduce flow control procedures into their air traffic control systems in the current year;

(2) what plans are being made for co-ordinating management by European countries of air traffic flow management flow control, when it is introduced in the summer.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I understand from the Civil Aviation Authority that 12 air traffic flow management units co-ordinate on behalf of the International Civil Aviation Organisation air traffic flows at peak periods over the following European countries:

Austria
Belgium
Bulgaria
Czechoslovakia
Denmark
Finland
France
Federal Republic of Germany
German Democratic Republic
Greece
Hungary
Italy
Luxembourg
Netherlands
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Turkey
United Kingdom
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Yugoslavia

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what annual capital investment in air traffic control equipment is planned by the Civil Aviation Authority for the next five years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The CAA's planned annual capital investment in air traffic control equipment and associated buildings for this financial year and for the next four years is as follows:

Capital investment outturn prices

Financal year	*£ million*
1987-88	24
1988-89	34
1989-90	38
1990-91	47
1991-92	52

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the annual capital investment in air traffic control equipment by the Civil Aviation Authority over the last 10 years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Civil Aviation Authority's annual capital investment in air traffic control equipment and associated buildings over the last 10 years was as follows:

Financial year	*Capital investment £ million*
1977-78	13
1978-79	8
1979-80	7
1980-81	24
1981-82	27
1982-83	30
1983-84	26
1984-85	20
1985-86	21
1986-87	24

Aerodromes

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the discussions which have been held with the Airfields Environment Federation and the Aerodrome Owners Association concerning guidelines for aerodrome consultative committees.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: New and improved guidelines for aerodrome consultative committees have been agreed with the Aerodrome Owners Association and the Airfields Environment Federation. A copy has been placed in the Library. The guidelines are not mandatory, but are a voluntary code which has been drawn up with the aim of encouraging useful consultations between aerodrome management and users, on the one hand, and local authorities (where they do not have the management of the aerodrome) and organisations representing local interests, on the other. The guidelines are intended to provide a

framework to help those setting up consultative facilities. They may also be of use to existing consultative committees whether or not the aerodromes are designated for consultative purposes under section 35 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982.

Rural Bus Services

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what will be the rate of grant for rural bus services in 1988-89.

Mr. David Mitchell: Rural bus grant will be paid at the rate of 3·25p per eligible bus mile.

Driving Tests

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what he ascribes the pass rate of under 50 per cent. for the driving test recorded in the test organisation's report for 1986-87.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Too many candidates take the test too soon. If candidates took more tuition, gained more driving experience, and took heed of an honest assessment of their readiness for test from an approved driving instructor the test pass rate would rise and the queues for driving tests would shorten.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure that the driver testing organisation is giving value for money to its customers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The recent review of the driver testing organisation and its own measures over the past year have both been directed to providing a more efficient service to customers. Since the beginning of the current financial year, it has been required to work within unit cost targets designed to improve performance. A major computerisation programme is in hand which will help contain costs and handle the high level of demand for tests. In 1986-87 the unit cost for the L-test rose by only 2·8 per cent. while the retail price index rose by 3·2 per cent. The unit cost of HGV/PSV test fell by 7 per cent. as a result of a rationalisation of the two formerly separate tests into one.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the annual report and accounts for the driver testing and training organisation for the last financial year are available.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A copy of the driver testing and training organisation's report and accounts for the financial year 1986-87 has today been placed in the Library of both Houses.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 2 March 1988

HOME DEPARTMENT

Electronic Surveillance

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken to regulate the purchase and use of devices for electronic surveillance; and what plans he has to introduce further regulations governing this area.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We do not believe that such controls would be an effective way to deal with these issues.

Government Data Network

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a decision as to whether the Government data network is suitable for use by the police national computer; and if he will inform right hon. and hon. Members when his decision is made.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We shall be able to decide whether to use the Government data network for the police national computer when we are satisfied that the Government data network, if implemented, would meet the police national computer's requirements and that the terms and conditions for the supply of the service would be acceptable. We will inform the House at the proper time.

Summer Time

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the options being considered for the United Kingdom by his Department as a part of the proposals for the harmonisation of summer time in the European Commission.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We hope shortly to announce proposals to enable us to assess support for any changes to summer time arrangements both in respect of harmonisation with other member states and in respect of those who seek extended daylight hours.

Ms. Inna Badanova

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to ensure that Ms. Inna Badanova of London NW6 will be readmitted to the United Kingdom following her visit to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Renton: I have replied today to the hon. Member's letter of 12 February giving full details of the steps which Ms. Badanova should take to ensure her readmission to this country.

Independent Television

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what provisions he plans to make to safeguard the position of drama and live music under any reorganisation of Independent Television;

(2) if he will make a statement on the future of Independent Television.

Mr. Renton: We have been giving careful thought to the recommendations of the Peacock committee on the future of broadcasting and shall announce our conclusions in due course. There will continue to be proper safeguards for the range and quality of programming.

Press Council (Adjudications)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the light of the recent adjudication by the Press Council in favour of Professor Colin Blakemore against the *Sunday Mirror* and the lack of prominence given by that newspaper to the council's findings, he has any proposals to seek to establish a system whereby such adjudications are printed on the same page and in the same format as the original story complained of to the Press Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: No. These are matters for the Press Council and the newspaper in question.

Professor Colin Blakemore

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he has given to representations from Professor Colin Blakemore, Wayneflete Professor of Physiology in Oxford, about harassment of scientists engaged in medical and ophthalmic research; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are aware of the campaign of harassment and intimidation against Professor Blakemore and his family. My right hon. Friend has made clear to Professor Blakemore that we believe all such activities to be disgraceful.

Immigration

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what categories of applicant for settlement in the United Kingdom will be exempt or subject to reduced fees under clause 8 of the Immigration Bill.

Mr. Renton: No firm decision has yet been taken on how the powers in clause 8 of the Immigration Bill might be implemented. Regulations under clause 8 may prescribe different fees for different categories of applicant, including the possibility of exemptions from the fee. At first sight, we think that there may be a case for reductions in the case of refugees and those, such as spouses and fiancé(e)s, who are admitted on conditions specifically with a view to settlement. Final decisions will be taken when we come to draw up regulations under clause 8.

Local Government Act 1966

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications are pending for funding for section 11 posts under the Local Government Act 1966.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 1 March 1988]*: At 31 January 1988, the latest date for which information is readily available, there were 162 applications for some 1,040 new posts under consideration. In addition, there were five outstanding applications, covering 1,025 posts for replacement of social services posts previously funded under an outdated system relating grant to the size of the local ethnic minority population and seven applications for continued funding of some 1,900 mainly teaching posts arising from reviews of existing section 11 provision.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long on average it takes to respond to local authority applications for funding under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 1 March 1988]*: Between 1 October 1986, when the current arrangements for the administration of the grant were introduced, and 31 January 1988, the latest date for which information is readily available, the average time taken to complete consideration of an application for grant has been between three and four months. At the latter date, of the 162 outstanding applications for new posts, 58 had been with the Home Office for less than three months; 50 for more than three but less than six months; 48 for more than six but less than 12 months; and six for more than 12 months. These periods include varying times spent waiting for responses from local authorities whose initial applications provided insufficient information for decision making.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long on average it takes to deal with more detailed applications sent in response to an initial refusal of funding under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 1 March 1988]*: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

SCOTLAND

Fire Retardant Furnishings (Prisons)

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is his policy on the issue of fire retardant furnishings, in particular bedding and mattresses, to inmates in Scottish prisons;

(2) how many prisoners in Scottish prisons have been issued with fire retardant furnishings, in particular mattresses and bedding, and what proportion this represents of the Scottish prison population.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is not available in the form requested. Two establishments are furnished with highly fire resistant mattresses for all inmates, and 12 other establishments have such mattresses for prisoners regarded as at risk. Fire-retardant sheets, pillowslips and mattress covers are being phased in. Appropriate steps are taken to minimise the opportunity of fire raising. Suitable accommodation is provided and precautions taken for known fire raisers.

Travelling People

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many sites have been established for travelling people in Scotland in the last five years; and what are their locations.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Seven permanent sites and one temporary site. These are located as follows:

Local authority District	*Site*
Permanent Sites	
Argyll and Bute	Dunchologan, Lochgilphead
Clackmannan	Westhaugh, Alva
Edinburgh	Duddingston, Edinburgh
Falkirk	Redding, Falkirk
Glasgow	Carmyle, Glasgow
Hamilton	Swinhill, Larkhall
Inverness	Longman, Inverness
Temporary Site	
Stirling	Craigforth, Stirling

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the amount of Government expenditure on sites for travelling people in Scotland in each of the last five years; which local authorities were in receipt of Government funds for that purpose; and how much they each received.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the tables:

Expenditure on sites for travelling people 1982-83 to 1986-87

	£
1982-83	Nil
1983-84	538,350
1984-85	487,583
1985-86	523,351
1986-87	108,299
TOTAL	1,657,583

Local authorities in receipt of grant 1982-83 to 1986-87

Local authority	*Amount received £*
Grampian Region	256,870
Perth and Kinross District	287,900
Strathclyde Region	13,440
Kirkcaldy District	7,956
Lothian Region	466,187
Central Region	255,707
Falkirk District	261,224
Cunninghame District	108,299
TOTAL	1,657,583

Aberdeen Maternity Hospital

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the estimated costs to his Department of the establishment of 28 additional beds at Aberdeen maternity hospital.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The 28-bed development at Aberdeen maternity hospital is a minor capital scheme which Grampian Health board is carrying out. I understand that the provisional estimate for the work is in the region of £267,000.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the costs to his Department's health budget of the 56-bed additional unit at Aberdeen maternity hospital.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The estimated cost of the proposed 56-bed unit at Aberdeen maternity hospital is £1·6 million.

Maternity Consultant Units

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the total costs to the health budget, including the employment of consultants and ancillary staff, of the maternity consultant units in Perth, Melrose and Forfar; and if he will list the total number of births per annum in each of these units, giving an average cost per birth per unit.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In 1985 (the latest year for which figures are available) the total number of births in the consultant unit at Perth royal infirmary was 1,159 and in the GP unit at the Fyfe Jamieson maternity home, Forfar, was 133. Data for the consultant unit at Melrose are not available because the hospital has not yet been commissioned. I regret that the other information requested is not held centrally.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Newsprint

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what complaints the Office of Fair Trading has received about alleged price fixing in the supply of newsprint; and what action is being taken.

Mr. Butcher: The Office of Fair Trading received a complaint from the Newspaper Publishers' Association about apparent collusion in the level and timing of price increases for newsprint. The office investigated this complaint and received assurances from United Kingdom manufacturers and importers that they were not involved in any such agreement. However, the office is keeping the matter under review.

Photographic Film

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of photographic film (882.22,25), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: I regret that this information is not available.

Radio and Television Cabinets

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total domestic output of radio and television cabinets (764.93), the percentage exported and the share of the domestic market taken by imports in each year since 1975.

Mr. Atkins: The available information for radio and television cabinets is as follows:

	United Kingdom manufacturers' sales £ *million*	*Exports* £ *million*	*Imports* £ *million*
1975	33·7	6·7	1·1
1976	36·3	5·8	0·9
1977	45·2	2·1	1·4
1978	46·2	2·2	2·2
1979	56·2	1·9	2·6
1980	48·4	1·2	2·9
1981	43·5	2·8	3·9
1982	35·7	2·9	3·8
1983	40·7	3·2	5·5
1984	40·7	3·7	6·6
1985	41·9	2·7	9·1
1986	41·3	1·9	12·9

United Kingdom manufacturers' sales up to and including 1980 are for firms employing 25 or more people for both wooden and plastic cabinets. From 1981 onwards the figures relate to firms employing 50 or more for plastic cabinets and 35 or more for wooden cabinets. Therefore, figures for export and import ratios are not given as they are likely to overstate the true position.

Sources:

Business Monitors PQ472 and PQ496 (up to and including 1980). PQ4671 and PQ4836 (from 1981 onwards)

Definitions:

United Kingdom manufacturers' sales cover wooden cabinets for radio, TV and gramophone (including combination cabinets); plastic cabinets and lids for radio, TV, gramophone, tape recorder cabinets and lids.

Exports and imports: The tariff codes used are:

	1975-77	*1978-84*	*1985-86*
Cabinets of wood	8515-6271 8515-6182	8515-4100	8515-7700
Cabinets of materials	8515-6271 8515-6588	8515-4900	8515-7900

Fixed Investment

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries spend a greater proportion of their gross domestic product on fixed investment than the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maude: Comparisons for most OECD countries are readily available only for 1985. In that year the following OECD countries spent a greater proportion of their GDP on gross fixed capital formation than the United Kingdom:

Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United States. The United Kingdom spent 17 per cent. gross domestic product on fixed investment, compared with an OECD average of 20 per cent., an EEC average of 19 per cent., and 19 per cent. in the United States of America.

Source: OECD National Accounts.

Consumer Safety

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to introduce legislation further to extend consumer safety.

Mr. Butcher: The safety of consumers has been greatly improved by the implementation of the Consumer Protection Act 1987. From 1 October 1987, under the general safety requirement, it became a criminal offence to supply any consumer product that is not reasonably safe.

The Act also implements the European Community directive on product liability and means that from 1 March 1988 it will be much easier for people damaged by defective products to obtain redress through the courts.

In addition to the general safety requirement, the safety of a range of products is covered by specific regulations. New regulations are to be introduced covering the flammability of upholstered furniture and bedding; and it is the intention to introduce further regulations to implement a number of EC directives, including those covering the safety of toys and certain electrical products.

Eukaryotic Genetic Engineering

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which firms are involved in his Department's newly launched Link collaborative research programme on eukaryotic genetic engineering.

Mr. Butcher: Four companies are committed already to collaborative research under the newly launched Link programme, eukaryotic genetic engineering. Glaxo and British Biotechnology are collaborating with the University of Oxford in pharmaceutical application. Dalgetty and Whitbread are collaborating with the University of Leicester in food applications. Six further companies are in discussion of collaboration with institutes of the Agriculture and Food Research Council.

Business Advertisements

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will introduce a further order to amend the Business Advertisements (Disclosure) Order 1977 so as to require the words "trade sale" to be used in advertisements whenever a sale is conducted in the course of a trade or business; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: No. the Business Advertisements (Disclosure) Order 1977 already makes it illegal to place advertisements unless it is made reasonably clear that the goods advertised are to be sold in the course of a business.

Motor Car Sales

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any proposals to introduce an obligatory code of practice in connection with all motor car sales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: No. I have no such proposals.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any proposals for the introduction of a scheme whereby motor traders would be required to provide to purchasers of used motor vehicles essential information concerning history and condition; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: No. A pre-sales inspection report for each used car offered for sale is already a requirement of the code of practice for the motor industry which is operated by member of the Motor Agents Association, the Scottish Motor Trade Association and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. I have no plans to make this a statutory requirement.

East Anglia

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about his Department's facilities serving East Anglian businesses.

Mr. Atkins: All the Department's national services are of course available to business in East Anglia. The Department's south-east regional office is responsible for maintaining day-to-day contact with East Anglian business, and in particular for ensuring that the region's industry and commerce are able to take full advantage of the enterprise initiative.

To ensure close contact with its East Anglia customers, the Department will in the spring be opening a new area office at Cambridge. This office, supported by recently appointed local representatives in Norwich and Chelmsford, will play a leading role in promoting and ensuring the effective application within East Anglia of the policies set out in Cm. 278.

Consultants

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will give the cost to his Department of employing management or computer consultants for each year from 1983 to 1987.

Mr. Butcher *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* My Department's expenditure from 1983 on computer consultants in support of central management services are as follows:

	£000
1983-84	1,686
1984-85	3,309
1985-86	5,488
1986-87	5,520
[1]1987-88	5,280

[1] Estimated.

Expenditure on management consultants is not recorded separately from other consultancy spend.

ENERGY

Petroleum Production

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the Government's latest forecasts of levels of United Kingdom petroleum production.

Mr. Parkinson: The latest forecasts for United Kingdom petroleum production in the years 1988 to 1992 are as follows:

	Million tonnes
1988	105 - 125
1989	100 - 120
1990	90 - 120
1991	80 - 110
1992	70 - 105

As in previous years, the forecasts are presented in the form of a range of outcomes for each year. These ranges take into account the many uncertainties involved. The figures cover forecast production of stabilised crude oil, natural gas liquids (NGLs) and condensates. NGL and condensate production accounts for some 6 million to 9 million tonnes of the annual totals.

WALES

Perinatal Mortality

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library the replies his Department received from each health authority in Wales requesting information on their needs following the perinatal mortality initiative report.

Mr. Grist: There was no requirement on the Department as a consequence of the perinatal mortality initiative report to collect information on maternity service needs. However, health authorities have been invited to submit bids for central funding for essential equipment for special care baby units and have been consulted on proposals for the creation of a regional neo-natal intensive care service. If the hon. Gentleman has a specific query, I would be happy to try to answer.

Regional Government

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether, since 1979, his Department has instigated any studies into regional government, and regional departments of central Government, in other European Community member states, with a view to formulating proposals for improvements in the structure and administration of the work of his Department; whether he has any plans to instigate any such studies in the near future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: No such studies have been instigated by my Department and none are proposed.

Leptospirosis

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on measures being undertaken by his Department to control the incidence of leptospirosis in cattle in Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: The Agricultural Development and Advisory Service (ADAS) offers a leptospirosis control programme as part of its cattle health scheme, the aim of which is to provide a pool of cattle herds of recognised health status for domestic and export trade. Farmers may seek either elite herd status, where all cattle are serologically negative for leptospirosis, or controlled herd status, in which infected cattle can become clear of infection by a planned programme of antibiotic treatment and vaccination.

Any farmer suspecting or concerned about leptospirosis in cattle should consult his local veterinary surgeon.

Farms (Plant and Machinery)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, for the last year for which full figures are available, what was the level of investment in plant and machinery in farms in Wales; and what are the corresponding figures both at outturn and real prices for each year since 1979.

Mr. Peter Walker: Based on the aggregate income calculation for Welsh agriculture, investment in plant and machinery in 1986 amounted to £31 million. For the period since 1979, the corresponding figures in current money terms and at constant 1980 prices were as follows:

Year	*Current prices £ million*	*Constant 1980 prices £ million*
1979	29·0	32·4
1980	23·0	23·0
1981	17·0	16·4
1982	29·0	26·6
1983	30·0	26·3
1984	27·0	23·1
1985	30·0	24·2
1986	31·0	24·7

Radiation (Compensation)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress is being made towards resolving cases of farmers in Wales affected by the Chernobyl disaster, who have still not been granted compensation; and when he hopes to come to a decision on these cases.

Mr. Peter Walker: These cases are being given careful and detailed consideration and I hope to reach a decision soon.

Milk

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will seek to ensure for Welsh milk producers an increase in the amount of milk they may produce without paying the super levy on excess output similar to those increases secured recently for producers in Belgium, France and West Germany; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: In order to accommodate changes in the pattern of marketing, EC legislation allows member states to seek approval from the Commission under management committee procedure for the transfer of specified quantities of quota between their direct sale and wholesale allocations. This is what was recently approved for France, Germany and Belgium and similar approvals have been given to other member states, including the United Kingdom, in the past. These transfers do not increase the total amount of quota allocated to any member state. I do not believe that such a transfer would be justified in the United Kingdom under present circumstances.

Health Authorities

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give for each district health authority (*a*) the outturn figures for 1986-87, and (*b*) the estimated outturn for 1987-88.

Mr. Grist: The income and expenditure outturn figures for district health authorities in Wales for 1986-87 are as follows:

District Health Authority	Revenue Expenditure (£ Thousands)	Capital Expenditure (£ Thousands)	Total Expenditure (£ Thousands)
Clwyd	82,818	5,966	88,784
East Dyfed	52,641	2,561	55,202
Gwent	100,119	6,970	107,089
Gwynedd	51,389	1,248	52,637
Mid Glamorgan	119,412	5,198	124,610
Pembrokeshire	17,550	2,386	19,936
Powys	23,152	1,186	24,337
South Glamorgan	134,843	6,441	141,284
West Glamorgan	83,091	10,835	93,926
WALES	665,013	42,791	707,804

Note:
Figures may not add due to rounding.
Source: Health Authorities' Annual Accounts.

Income and expenditure data are not collected on a formal or a routine basis in-year since Departmental monitoring of health authorities' expenditure relates to their statutory duty to contain cash spending within notified cash limits. The latest estimates of cash outturn for 1987-88 are as follows:

District Health Authority	Revenue (£ Thousands)	Capital (£ Thousands)	Total (£ Thousands)
Clwyd	90,754	5,702	96,456
East Dyfed	57,501	2,203	59,704
Gwent	111,064	6,457	117,521
Gwynedd	56,229	3,041	59,270
Mid Glamorgan	130,417	5,673	136,090
Pembrokeshire	19,897	2,582	22,479
Powys	26,099	1,101	27,200
South Glamorgan	150,878	5,057	155,935
West Glamorgan	91,586	10,781	102,367
WALES	734,425	42,597	777,022

Source: February Financial Information System Returns.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Southern Africa (Aid)

84. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial aid the United Kingdom now gives to the front-line states in southern Africa.

Mr. Chris Patten: In 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, the United Kingdom provided gross bilateral aid totalling over £80 million to the front-line states (Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe).

THE ARTS

Arts Council

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister for the Arts what information he has on the number of Arts Council employees in (*a*) 1978 and (*b*) the current year.

Mr. Luce: The Arts Council had 382 employees in 1978. The current figure of 531 includes 175 staff of the South Bank board (excluding the art department), considerably fewer than the staff previously employed by the Greater London council to perform the same functions.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Sherry

Mr. Whitney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much extra excise duty would be gained in a fiscal year if British sherry were taxed on the same basis as sherry.

Mr. Lilley: British and Spanish sherries are taxed on the same basis, according to alcoholic strength. British sherry may incur less duty either because of a lower alcohol content or through blending after payment of duty.

Cash Limits

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether there are any changes in the cash limits set for 1987-88 on his Department's Votes.

Mr. Lilley: The Vote for 1987-88 for Customs and Excise (class XIX, vote 2), of £441,125,000 is to be reduced by £243,000 to £440,882,000. This is due to a corresponding overspend on the Department's Vote for 1986-87. It is standard practice for such an overspend to be deducted from the following year's cash limit. The small overspend arose mainly as a result of difficulties with a new computerised accounting system.

Developing Countries (Financial Flows)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the net financial flows from

developing countries to developed countries recorded by the World Bank have flowed to the United Kingdom in each of the last four years.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 29 February 1988]*. The information is not available.

ENVIRONMENT

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of any letter written to the London Docklands development corporation by Messrs Robson Rhodes concerning the annual accounts of the corporation, together with any respective responses which have been made.

Mr. Trippier: No. The Department is shortly to discuss with Messrs Robson Rhodes and the LDDC issues arising from the corporation's 1985-86 external audit. I shall then consider what further statement should be made to the House.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of the 1986-87 performance review of the London Docklands development corporation which was considered by its board in May 1987.

Mr. Trippier: No. The document was produced for internal management purposes only. Details of LDDC's performance are published in the corporation's annual reports and accounts, and in its corporate plan.

Cement and Concrete

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish in the *Official Report* tables setting out United Kingdom imports and exports of *(a)* cement and *(b)* precast concrete products over the past five years.

Mr. Trippier: The information is as follows.

Cement

	[1]*Imports*		[2]*Exports*	
	Tonnes 000	*Value £000*	*Tonnes 000*	*Value £000*
1983	430·0	15,329	393·1	16,434
1984	500·5	17,726	127·2	11,285
1985	618·9	23,668	113·5	12,059
1986	650·2	29,331	107·5	12,288
1987	978·3	37,013	96·0	11,841

Articles of Cement, Concrete and Artifical Stone

	[1]*Imports*		[2]*Exports*	
	Tonnes 000	*Value £000*	*Tonnes 000*	*Value £000*
1983	28·2	5,033	97·3	8,086
1984	77·0	8,863	93·3	8,090
1985	35·0	6,353	72·6	8,655
1986	48·3	8,694	69·9	5,746
1987	61·8	11,095	81·4	6,928

[1] Imports C.I.F.
[2] Exports F.O.B.

Source

Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom
Standard International Trade Codes 661·2 and 663·32

Construction Firms

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department has any information on the numbers employed by construction firms which are subsidiaries of foreign companies.

Mr. Trippier: While the Department is aware that some construction companies are subsidiaries of foreign companies, it is not our practice to collect such information in a formal way.

London Docklands (Compulsory Purchase)

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the reasons for the postponement of his decision on the London Docklands (East Docklands) Compulsory Purchase Order 1985; and when he now expects to announce his decision.

Mr. Trippier: The London Docklands (East Docklands) Compulsory Purchase Order is an unusually large order covering 745 acres of urban land and embracing 337 separate plots. A large number of inter-related issues have required resolution. My right hon. Friend expects to announce the decision within the next few days.

GLC (Country Homes)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the current position in respect of the disposal of former Greater London council seaside and country homes, and in particular the position in respect of the ownership of the former Greater London council estate at The Parks, Minehead, Somerset.

Mr. Ridley: The London Residuary Body expects to complete arrangements for the disposal of the whole of the seaside and country homes portfolio, including The Parks, Minehead, Somerset, to North British Housing Association by the end of March. Necessary consents required in connection with the disposal were issued by my Department on 29 February.

Council House Sales

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will update the table giving information on sales of dwellings by each local authority in England, referred to in the answer given to the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) on 11 December 1987, *Official Report*, column 275.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have today placed in the Library the latest version of table 2 giving information reported by each local authority in England on the progress of council house sales up to the end of September 1987.

Southern Water Authority

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received second responses from the Southern water authority and the six water companies concerned to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report on water supply in the Southern water authority area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: I have received the responses. I can confirm that Southern water and the six water companies,

namely, Eastbourne, Folkestone, Mid Kent, Mid-Sussex, Portsmouth and West Kent have made real progress in taking forward the recommendations made by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The MMC report stated that Southern were on the whole effectively managed and compared satisfactorily with other public sector bodies. The second response from Southern is thorough and detailed. It has also been positive and constructive and has illustrated well its continuing commitment to improving management and efficiency. The response is most encouraging following Southern's record of achieving recent performance aims.

Good progress has been made on the setting of regional standards of service, including water supply, sewerage and water quality, culminating in the issue of a standards of service booklet, while survey work on establishing shortfalls continues. The costs involved in rectifying these should be fully assessed by the summer of 1988.

Southern water's overall record on cost reduction is good, and demanding future performance aims have been set. It has also taken forward the MMC'c recommendations on the management of capital projects, and has reviewed and amended its capital projects procedures.

The six water companies have generally continued to make progress, particularly with corporate planning, with the exchange of information on levels of service and the setting of medium term quantified targets for meeting service standards, and for cost control.

Although the companies have shown good progress in their work on corporate planning, it is important that they ensure that current levels of service are identified and clear objectives set for the future.

I have placed a copy of the second responses in the Library. I shall also draw the attention of other water authorities to the second response from Southern water and invite them to consider the extent to which these responses might be appropriate to their own operations.

The final response from Southern water and the six companies will be required in April 1989. It will be a final progress report on the recommendations as a whole recording what has been done and setting out the improvements achieved in accordance with the commission's recommendations.

Water Companies (Privatisation)

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has put proposals to the water industry for modifying the areas of appointed water utility companies after privatisation.

Mr. Moynihan: Earlier this year the Department sent a discussion document on water utility company functions and areas to the Water Authorities Association and the Water Companies Association. That document is now under consideration between the Department and the industry, and does not represent policy settled in all its details. I am, however, placing a copy of the document in the Library of the House.

Maintenance Work

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the level of outstanding maintenance work from 1979 to the latest date for which data are available.

Mr. Chope: Estimates of the cost of outstanding high priority maintenance work on Government Department's civil accommodation have been made only since 1984. For work within the responsibility of the Property Services Agency, the figures are:

	£ million
1985	96
1986	103
1987	103

All estimates are at September 1987 prices. The 1987 assessment of £103 million reflects the transfer of some delegated works responsibilities from PSA to Departments under the property repayment services system.

Substantial additional provision for civil maintenance was announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in last year's Autumn Statement, and by the Secretary of State for the Environment in the *Official Report*, at columns 664-66, on 3 November 1987. The provision for maintenance has been increased to £105 million in 1988-89 and £120 million in the following two years.

Maintenance programmes on the Defence estate are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Lead-free petrol

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the bodies with which his Department has discussed the conversion of vehicles to operate on lead-free petrol.

Mr. Moynihan: All aspects of the introduction of unleaded petrol, including the conversion of vehicles to operate on unleaded petrol, are regularly discussed at meetings under my chairmanship with the following bodies:

Automobile Association
Association of Car Fleet Operators
Association of UK Oil Independents
British Tourist Authority
British Motorcycle Federation
British Vehicle Renting and Leasing Association
Campaign for Lead-Free Air (CLEAR)
Consumers' Association
European Year of the Environment (EYE)
Federation of Petroleum Suppliers
Highlands and Islands Development Board
Mid-Wales Development Board
Motor Agents Association/Petrol Retailers Association
Motor Cycle Association
Royal Automobile Club
Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders
UK Petroleum Industry Association

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how his Department assesses the cost of each job created in enterprise zones; what that national figure is currently assessed to be; and what the assessed figure is in each existing enterprise zone.

Mr. Trippier: The costs to the Exchequer of the enterprise zones comprise payments to local authorities for rate revenue forgone in the zones; tax revenue forgone as a consequence of allowances claimed for expenditure on industrial and commercial buildings there; and public investment in infrastructure and construction that would not otherwise have been made had the zones not been designated.

The number of jobs in the zones at the time of designation is deducted from the number present at the time of the assessment to give the number of net additional jobs on the zones.

The Department commissioned consultants to evaluate the experiment. They estimated that, at the end of 1986, the public cost of each net additional job within the enterprise zones in Great Britain was £8,500. Separate assessments have not been made for individual enterprise zones.

The consultants report ("An evaluation of the Enterprise Zone Experiment" Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1987) also includes a more refined method of assessing the cost per job, which takes account of the effects of the zones on employment in the areas around them. Copies of this report were placed in the Library on 22 December 1987.

Rating Reform

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated cost of administering the proposed community charge in inner London.

Mr. Howard: The estimates given in the financial memorandum to the Local Government Finance Bill, apportioned in a similar way to the costs of rate collection, would produce a range of between £30 million and £35 million.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to collect the community charge from tramps and vagrants.

Mr. Howard: With limited exceptions, every adult will be subject to the personal community charge in the area where he has his sole or main residence. In deciding the scale of resources to devote to registration for and collection of the community charge, local authorities will be entitled to have regard to what can reasonably be achieved.

Rural Areas (Assistance)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total amount of all central Government assistance to rural areas in England on a per capita basis for the last financial year.

Mr. Moynihan: Information is not available in the form requested.

Housing Co-operatives

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 17 February, *Official Report*, column 966, what proposals for the funding of housing co-operatives were discussed when he met the Housing Corporation.

Mr. Waldegrave: The matters discussed were the Housing Corporation's financial support for AXLE Co-operative Housing Services Limited, and the funding of housing associations which provide agency services for primary co-operatives.

Departmental Buildings

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the location and status of all buildings within his Department located in London and the annual cost of rents, rates and maintenance of each.

Mr. Chope: The Department of the Environment, including the PSA, occupies accommodation in 93 buildings in the Greater London area, ranging from its main HQ building at 2 Marsham Street, down to small stores attached to the PSA's district works offices. Civil accommodation for all Government Departments is held in the name of the Secretary of State for the Environment and managed by PSA. Some properties are held freehold; the rents of leasehold buildings are determined on a strictly commercial, and therefore confidential basis. The total annual rent paid by the PSA to landlords for civil accommodation held in London in 1986-87, the last complete year for which figures are available, was £133 million. Comparable figures for contributions in lieu of rates, and for PSA expenditure on the maintenance of buildings on the civil estate are £116 million and £38 million respectively.

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the location and status of all buildings within his Department located in London and the annual cost of rents, rates and maintenance of each.

Mr. Chope: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him today. In the case of the Department of Energy, the Department occupies accommodation at Thames House South, Millbank SW1.

Water Supplies

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing the price of water from each water authority from 1978-79 until the latest date available taking the 1978-79 price as a base of 100.

Mr. Moynihan *[pursuant to his reply, 9 February 1988, c. 128]:* A number of the figures which formed part of the answer were incorrect. The table gives the correct figures.

Water Authority	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Water Supply										
North West	100·00	109·50	139·92	155·07	164·47	164·47	167·37	190·55	210·14	224·39
Northumbrian	100·00	105·32	127·50	158·63	185·46	209·68	225·24	240·97	251·61	260·84
Severn Trent	100·00	114·72	138·40	164·25	182·87	187·20	194·19	209·28	225·54	241·93
Yorkshire	100·00	110·17	136·34	151·26	167·05	174·18	184·50	206·30	227·52	245·45
Anglian	100·00	117·23	153·88	176·76	190·43	192·55	201·76	223·03	250·32	266·01
Thames	100·00	113·78	142·80	156·81	171·26	189·30	204·26	224·82	231·54	244·20
Southern	100·00	105·26	136·84	153·16	171·58	178·79	187·37	207·95	226·11	238·21
Wessex	100·00	123·23	141·68	155·56	163·27	167·37	169·70	184·85	202·58	213·33
South West	100·00	114·06	131·40	149·23	162·05	171·17	177·10	184·65	196·64	204·40
English averages	100·00	112·42	140·15	158·24	172·38	181·32	189·04	210·21	225·80	239·29

Water Authority	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Welsh	100·00	112·83	135·63	163·36	200·88	209·84	209·84	231·59	242·57	267·84
National average	100·00	112·43	139·76	158·56	174·72	183·52	190·55	186·97	227·49	241·28

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sessional Index

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will seek the reintroduction in the Library of a sessional running index using the strip index system of written and oral answers in departmental date order of reply.

Mr. Wakeham: No. An index by subjects and Members' names of written and oral answers is already provided on POLIS, the Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System. The reintroduction of the strip-index system referred to, which was discontinued on 1 June 1981 in accordance with the Resolution of the House of 26 January 1978, would have additional staffing implications, and would serve only to duplicate the information already available on the Library's computer-based system.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

2. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when next he plans to meet the secretary general of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to discuss foreign policy issues confronting the Alliance.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend is today attending with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister the NATO summit meeting in Brussels, at which these issues are being discussed.

Persian Gulf

13. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will initiate discussions at the United Nations with a view to establishing an international peace-keeping force in the Persian Gulf.

Mr. Mellor: No. Discussions in New York are rightly concentrating on finding ways to implement Security Council resolution 598. This may well require the imposition of an arms embargo. Until there is a peace to keep, discussion of a peace-keeping force is entirely premature.

16. **Mr. Sackville:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement about the situation in the Gulf.

Mr. Mellor: The situation in the Gulf remains tense. Although there is currently a lull in the Gulf itself, though not of course in the land war, this year so far there have already been a large number of successful attacks on shipping by both Iran and Iraq. We continue to urge both sides to end these attacks through the implementation of Security Council resolution 598.

Arms Control

14. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement about British arms control policy with particular reference to achieving a verifiable worldwide ban on chemical weapons.

Mr. Mellor: We continue to play an active role at the negotiations at the conference on disarmament in Geneva for a comprehensive, verifiable and global ban on all chemical weapons. Some progress was made last year. However, complex issues remain to be resolved in order to construct a resilient international security agreement.

Hong Kong

15. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to visit Hong Kong to discuss the future of the colony.

Mr. Eggar: At present my right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to visit Hong Kong. We are in close touch with the Governor of Hong Kong over all aspects of the territory's future. My right hon. and learned Friend will be seeing him in three weeks' time during one of his regular visits to London.

32. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the people of Hong Kong on the proposed timetable for direct elections.

Mr. Eggar: On 10 February the Hong Kong Government published their White Paper announcing the decision to introduce 10 directly elected seats into the Legislative Council in 1991. We have since received no representations from the people of Hong Kong concerning this timetable.

68. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will bring forward proposals for human rights legislation in Hong Kong, together with proposals to make it justiciable in the courts of Hong Kong.

Mr. Eggar: It is for the Hong Kong Government to introduce legislation in Hong Kong. We are not aware that the Hong Kong Government at present have any intention to introduce such legislation.

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the question of timing of direct elections in Hong Kong since the publication of the White Paper on 10 February.

Mr. Eggar: None.

Kampuchea

17. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Kampuchea.

Mr. Eggar: We are in touch with various Governments and individuals about our policy towards Cambodia. This policy is clear. We seek the withdrawal of all Vietnamese forces from Cambodia and a settlement which would allow the Cambodian people to determine their own future, free from outside interference, through free and fair elections.

20. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new steps the United Kingdom Government have taken to encourage the peace process in Kampuchea.

Mr. Eggar: Our policy remains as set out in my speech during the Adjournment debate on Cambodia on 21 January.

Austria

18. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent communications his Department has had with the Austrian Government about Anglo-Austrian relations.

Mrs. Chalker: My Department maintains necessary contacts with the Austrian Government appropriate to maintaining relations between our two states.

83. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a further statement on the current state of relations between the United Kingdom and Austria.

Mrs. Chalker: Relations between the United Kingdom and Austria are good and reflect the common interests of our Governments and peoples.

Falkland Islands

19. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from other Governments concerning the forthcoming training exercise in the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Eggar: A number of Governments in the region have expressed concern about the exercise; we have made absolutely clear that it is a routine exercise, and an integral part of our policy to maintain minimal troop levels in the Falklands as a contribution to reducing tension in the South Atlantic region.

22. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to visit Port Stanley, to discuss political developments in the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no current plans to visit Port Stanley.

37. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the governor of the Falkland Islands; and what was discussed.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend saw the governor of the Falkland Islands in London on 28 January 1988. They reviewed recent political and economic developments in the islands and the outlook for the future.

South Africa

21. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have recently made concerning the trial in South Africa of Moses Mayekiso and others; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We made representations on Mr. Mayekiso's behalf in July and December 1986, while he was detained without charge. Now that charges have been laid and the trial has begun, it would not be right for us to make further representations at present. We are following the proceedings closely.

27. **Mr. John Carlisle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will consider withdrawing any existing sanctions made against South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: As I told my hon. Friend on 21 January 1987, at column 595, the restrictive measures we have adopted are designed to bring home to the South African Government the urgent need for fundamental, peaceful change. Regrettably they is no sign at present that they are prepared to take the steps needed to bring about such change.

31. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of South Africa regarding the death sentences on the Sharpeville Six.

Mrs. Chalker: After their appeals had been dismissed in December 1987, the German ambassador made an appeal for clemency on behalf of the European Community. We also supported a statement issued on behalf of the United Nations Security Council urging the South African Government to commute the death sentences on the six. We have since reiterated our serious concern direct to the South African Government.

57. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of the Republic of South Africa regarding the Sharpeville Six.

Mrs. Chalker: After their appeals had been dismissed in December 1987, the German ambassador made an appeal for clemency on behalf of the European Community. We also supported a statement issued on behalf of the United Nations Security Council urging the South African Government to commute the death sentences on the Six. The British ambassador has since reiterated our serious concern direct to the South African Government.

European Council

23. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the European Council meeting in Brussels on 11 to 13 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Neither my right hon. and learned Friend nor I have received representations about the European Council in Brussels on 11-13 February other than questions raised by hon. Members in the House. The

results of the Brussels Council confirmed by the Foreign Affairs Council on 22 February represent a very sound outcome for the United Kingdom.

CND (Representations)

24. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament since the Washington summit of December 1987.

Mr. Mellor: We have received no direct representations from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament since the Washington summit of December 1987.

Disarmament Negotiations (Geneva)

25. **Mr. Ashby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to visit Geneva in connection with arms negotiations being conducted there.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend has no present plans to visit Geneva in connection with arms control talks. We, along with our NATO partners, receive regular briefings from the United States on the progress in the US/Soviet nuclear arms negotiations. The United Kingdom delegation at the conference on disarmament is playing an active role in the negotiations to ban chemical weapons.

Ethiopia

26. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on current relations with Ethiopia.

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development visited Ethiopia from 7 to 10 January, when he announced the allocation of an additional 40,000 tonnes of food aid. With this allocation our contribution to the current famine relief effort, including our share of the European Community relief programme, now totals over £36 million.

My hon. Friend also used his visit to underline to Ethiopian Ministers the importance we attach to changes in their agricultural policies, and to our great concern about the continuing detention of political prisoners. We, together with our European partners, will continue to urge progress towards a peaceful solution of the internal conflicts in Ethiopia, which are causing great hardship and impeding the international relief effort.

Israel (PLO Assassinations)

28. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Israeli Government about the assassinations in Cyprus of three members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: None.

Nicaragua

29. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement about the United Kingdom's relations with Nicaragua.

Mr. Eggar: I have nothing to add to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) on 4 November, at column 726. The United Kingdom has normal diplomatic relations with Nicaragua.

41. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to pay an official visit to Nicaragua.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no present plans to visit Nicaragua.

66. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any further plans to expand United Kingdom diplomatic representations in Nicaragua.

Mr. Eggar: A third United Kingdom-based diplomatic service officer was posted to Managua in February, to act as pro consul. We have no plans to expand our mission further at this time.

UNCHR (Special Rapporteurs)

30. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many countries currently have a special rapporteur appointed by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Mr. Eggar: The 43rd session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights decided in March 1987 to renew the mandates, for a further year in each case, of its special rapporteurs on Afghanistan and Chile and its special representatives on El Salvador and Iran. The 44th session now in progress (1 February to 11 March) will decide whether or not to extend these mandates again.

33. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the reappointment of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights' special rapporteurs on Chile and El Salvador.

Mr. Eggar: We shall be supporting the renewal of the mandate of the special rapporteur on Chile. In the case of El Salvador, we shall consider our policy carefully with our European Community partners once a draft resolution has appeared.

54. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government supported the appointment of a United Nations rapporteur on human rights in El Salvador.

Mr. Eggar: We voted in favour of the establishment of the mandate of the United Nations special representative on El Salvador at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 1981. We shall consider how to vote in this year's commission once we have discussed the resolution with our European Community partners.

Disarmament, Security and Confidence Building Conferences

34. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will report on recent progress at current disarmament, security and confidence building conferences.

Mr. Mellor: Progress in negotiations on a final document at the CSCE Vienna meeting remains slow. But

we remain determined to secure a substantial and balanced outcome on all issues, including confidence and security building measures.

Reasonable progress is being made in the conventional stability discussions in Vienna. We hope that early agreement on a mandate can be reached and that substantive negotiations can begin later this year.

Negotiations on chemical weapons at the conference on disarmament at Geneva have made progress. But many complex issues remain. The bilateral talks between the United States and Soviet Union at the Geneva nuclear and space talks are continuing. United States and Russian negotiators are also meeting to discuss nuclear testing; steady progress has been made during the first phase of negotiations aimed at ratifying the threshold test ban and peaceful nuclear explosions treaties.

Jordan

35. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Anglo-Jordanian relations.

Mr. Mellor: Relations between the United Kingdom and Jordan are excellent. We maintain a close dialogue with King Hussein and his Government on a wide range of issues of mutual interest.

Turks and Caicos Islands

36. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the elections in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Mr. Eggar: Elections are due to take place in the Turks and Caicos Islands tomorrow, 3 March.

USSR (Ministerial Visit)

38. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, during his recent discussions in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, he raised the subject of telecommunications and interference with international radio broadcasts.

Mr. Mellor: No. Jamming of the BBC vernacular services to the Soviet Union has ceased. We hope that the Soviet Union will take steps to end all jamming and will continue to make our views known in appropriate fora. My right hon. and learned Friend took the opportunity of his visit to press the need for greater access by Western media to the Soviet public, for example through free circulation of newspapers.

78. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent trip to the Soviet Union.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend had full and wide-ranging talks with Mr. Gorbachev, Mr. Shevardnadze and others covering bilateral matters including trade, arms control, human rights and regional issues. He also met human rights activists and was able to put our views directly to the Soviet public in their press and on television. The visit was a further contribution to our active dialogue wth the Soviet leadership and to the improving atmosphere of East-West relations.

Mozambique

39. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of South Africa concerning the situation in Mozambique.

Mrs. Chalker: We repeatedly urge the South African Government to exercise restraint and respect the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of neighbouring countries. I made these points to the South African Deputy Foreign Minister during a stop-over on the way to Mozambique in November. We have since reiterated our concerns.

El Salvador

40. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to visit El Salvador, to discuss human rights.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no present plans to visit El Salvador. Her Majesty's embassy in San Salvador monitors the human rights situation closely.

42. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the position of British volunteers working at the Calle Real camp in El Salvador.

Mr. Eggar: Her Majesty's chargé d'affaires in San Salvador has visited the British volunteers at Calle Real and reports that they are well.

61. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to pay an official visit to El Salvador.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no current plans to visit El Salvador.

European Political Co-operation

43. **Mr. John M. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the outcome of the meeting he recently attended on European political co-operation.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend has met his colleagues from the Twelve to discuss European political co-operation matters on 8 February. The Twelve issued a statement expressing concern about the situation in the Occupied Territories, reaffirming support for an international conference, and welcoming recent efforts to inject new impetus into the search for a negotiated settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. They had a separate meeting on this subject with His Majesty King Hussein of Jordan.

The Twelve also exchanged views on East-West relations, Central America and Southern Africa. They approved the seventh synthesis report on the application of the code of conduct by Community companies with subsidiaries in South Africa, which has been forwarded to the European Parliament. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Central America

44. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards a settlement of the outstanding conflicts in Central America.

Mr. Eggar: We urge all the Central Americans to fulfil all their outstanding obligations under the Guatemala accord immediately, especially those relating to democratisation.

51. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to visit Nicaragua to discuss the political situation in Central America.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no current plans to visit Nicaragua. Her Majesty's embassies in Central America monitor the political situation in the region closely. I discussed the situation in Central America with EC/Central America/Contadora representatives at the meeting in Hamburg 29 February-1 March (San Jose IV).

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards Arias' peace proposals for Central America in the light of the recent initiatives taken by the Nicaraguan Government.

Mr. Eggar: We fully support the Guatemala agreement which aims to achieve a peaceful, negotiated solution to the problems of Central America. We urge the Nicaraguan Government to fulfil without delay the commitments made at the Central American Presidents' summit on 15 January, and to comply with the obligation in the Guatemala accord to introduce full democratic freedoms.

Third World Debt

45. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with other Foreign Ministers regarding Third world debt; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend and I regularly meet our counterparts from other countries. Debt is often discussed, particularly with the Foreign Ministers of debtor nations and of major creditor nations.

Cambodia

46. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's current policy with regard to the participation of the Khmer Rouge in any future Cambodian Government.

Mr. Eggar: We withdrew recognition from the Pol Pot regime in December 1979 and have no intention of contributing to its re-establishment. We believe that free and fair elections based on United Nations principles offer the best guarantee that the Khmer Rouge does not dominate any future Cambodian Government.

Hungary

47. **Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when next he plans to seek to meet the Prime Minister of Hungary to discuss Anglo-Hungarian relations.

Mr. Mellor: The Prime Minister of Hungary has been invited to visit Britain. We expect the visit to take place in the first half of this year. We look forward to a thorough discussion of bilateral relations, as well as of international topics.

NATO/Warsaw Pact

48. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the conventional arms imbalance between North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Warsaw pact.

Mr. Mellor: According to our estimates, Warsaw pact conventional forces in Europe outnumber those of the Alliance in all major areas of combat capability: they have over three times as many tanks and artillery pieces; and almost twice as many combat aircraft.

UNESCO

49. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further representations he has received regarding British membership of UNESCO.

Mr. Eggar: We have received no formal representations.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

50. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he expects further signatories to the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We do all we can to persuade non-signatories to adhere to the treaty.

Turkey

52. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has had any recent discussions with the Turkish Government regarding the withdrawal of its troops from Cyprus.

Mrs. Chalker: During his official visit to Britain last July my right hon. and learned Friend and I made clear to the then Turkish Foreign Minister, Mr. Halefoglu, our view that his Government should reduce the number of their troops in Cyprus. we continue to press this view on the Turkish Government at every opportunity.

53. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to discuss Turkey's accession to the European Economic Community with his counterparts in the Community.

Mrs. Chalker: Turkey's application to join the European Community has been referred to the EC Commission, which is preparing its opinion. The European Community Council of Ministers will consider Turkey's application once that opinion is available and it has had the opportunity to study it.

82. **Mr. Stokes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to support Turkey's application for membership of the European Economic Community.

Mrs. Chalker: Turkey's application to join the European Community has been referred to the European Commission, which is preparing its opinion. It would not be appropriate to express a view on the application until that opinion is available.

South-east Asia

55. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to visit the countries of south-east Asia.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend expects to visit the region again in due course. Announcements will be made as and when appropriate.

Foreign Affairs Council

56. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress was made at the Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 22 and 23 February towards finalising the package of stabilisers foreseen in the European Community communiqué from Brussels.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) on 24 February, at column *209*.

Cyprus

58. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he or his colleagues have to meet the new President of Cyprus.

Mrs. Chalker: Neither my right hon. and learned Friend nor I have any immediate plans to meet Mr. Vassiliou, who was elected on 21 February and assumed office on 28 February.

70. **Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest events in Cyprus.

Mrs. Chalker: Following the election of Mr. Vassiliou on 21 February, we hope the United Nations Secretary-General's new permanent special representative will be able to make early progress towards the just and lasting settlement which we all wish to see.

Middle East

59. **Mr. Walters:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will report on further initiatives aimed at making progress for a middle east peace settlement.

75. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards an international conference on the middle east.

Mr. Mellor: We welcome recent efforts to give new impetus to the search for a negotiated settlement of the Arab/Israel conflict. We and our European partners strongly support an international conference as the suitable framework for negotiations between the parties directly concerned.

81. **Mr. Cunliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assistance he has given to the proposal for a peace conference initiated by Mr. Shimon Peres and King Hussein.

Mr. Mellor: We are in close contact with both King Hussein and with Mr. Peres. We believe that an international conference can provide a suitable framework for negotiations between the parties directly concerned.

USSR (Human Rights)

60. **Mr. Gale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what success the Government have had in persuading the Soviet Union to alter its policy on human rights and emigration.

Mr. Mellor: We have established human rights as an important element in our bilateral dialogue with the Soviet authority and their agreement to regular official consultations on the subject will take this process further. We have been encouraged by increases in emigration figures and the release of some political prisoners during the past year but will continue to press for further progress, including the repeal of repressive legislation.

USSR (Conventional Forces)

62. **Mr. Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, during his discussions with Soviet leaders in Moscow in February, any representations were made as to the need for a reduction in Soviet conventional forces in Eastern Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: In his talks with Soviet leaders, my right hon. and learned Friend underlined the urgent need for a reduction in Soviet conventional forces in Europe, leading to a stable and secure balance at a lower level of forces. He also stressed the need to eliminate massive Soviet conventional superiority in a speech published in the Soviet press.

Acid Rain (Norway)

63. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Norwegian Government regarding the problem of acid rain.

Mr. Eggar: We maintain close contact at all levels with the Norwegian Government on a range of environmental issues including acid rain.

Israel

64. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Israeli Government about the activities of their armed forces in the occupied territories.

Mr. Mellor: We have made clear to the Israeli authorities—both in bilateral contacts and in demarches with our European partners — our view that Israel should refrain from repressive measures which violate international law and human rights standards.

United Kingdom-Soviet Trade

65. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he held on current levels of United Kingdom-Soviet trade during his recent visit to the USSR.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend had a very constructive meeting with Mr. Kamentsev, Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the State Foreign Economic Commission, and also touched on this question in his meeting with Mr. Gorbachev. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to achieving the goal of a 40 per cent. increase in trade by 1990 and my right hon. and learned Friend was able to draw attention to a number of major contracts for which British companies are bidding.

NATO (Naval Arms Control)

67. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his counterparts in NATO countries about naval arms control proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend has regular discussions on all aspects of arms control with his NATO colleagues.

Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction Talks

69. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent progress at the mutual and balanced force reduction talks.

Mr. Mellor: I have nothing to add to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on 21 October last year, at column 766.

West Bank

72. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest situation on the West Bank.

Mr. Mellor: The situation remains tense. We advise those proposing to travel to the occupied territories to postpone their journey if possible. We deeply deplore the repressive measures taken by Israel and call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint, in order to reduce the dangerous level of tension.

EC (Foreign Policy)

73. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next proposes to have discussions with his European Community partners concerning the development of common European foreign policies.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend will be meeting our colleagues from the Twelve to discuss European political co-operation matters at an informal weekend meeting on 5-6 March.

Arab-Israeli Dispute

74. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to support American efforts aimed at breaking the impasse in the Arab/Israeli dispute.

Mr. Mellor: We welcome United States efforts to give new impetus to the search for peace and keep in close touch with the United States Administration on this issue. The Prime Minister discussed this with Mr. Shultz yesterday.

Semyon Skalych

76. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise with the Soviet Government the continued imprisonment of Semyon Skalych, a Ukranian sentenced to 15 years imprisonment for writing anti-Soviet poetry.

Mr. Mellor: We regularly make representations to the Soviet authorities on behalf of Soviet prisoners of conscience such a Semyon Skalych. My right hon. and learned Friend drew attention to their plight most recently during talks with the Soviet Foreign Minister in Moscow on 15 February.

United Nations Commission on Human Rights

77. **Mr. Burt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when last he visited the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Mr. Eggar: I addressed the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on 18 February. Copies of my speech have been placed in the Library. This was my second annual visit to the commission.

Fiji

79. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the status of the United Kingdom's diplomatic representation in Fiji.

Mr. Eggar: With effect from yesterday, we have been represented in the Republic of Fiji by Her Majesty's ambassador. Until that date, his title was high commissioner, the customary title for heads of mission in Commonwealth countries. The change of title does not affect diplomatic status.

Angola

80. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his recent discussions in Moscow covered possible moves to secure a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend discussed Southern Africa briefly with Mr. Shevardnardze in Moscow.

Iran-Iraq War

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent contact he has had with the Government of Iran with regard to the Iran and Iraq conflict; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We have intermittent contact at official level with representatives of the Iranian Government in London and at the United Nations in New York. The Iran/Iraq conflict is naturally one of the issues discussed.

Baltic Peoples

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what instructions have been

given to the United Kingdom representative to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on its response to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's resolution 872 (1987) on the situation of the Baltic peoples; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We were pleased to note that the resolution generally accorded with our policy. We have not recognised de jure the incorporation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into the Soviet Union, because of the way in which it was carried out.

Manchester Airport

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the United States Government's proposal on United States carrier access to Manchester airport was received by the British embassy in Washington; and when it was sent by the embassy to the Department of Transport in London.

Mr. Eggar: The United States Government's proposal was received by the British embassy at 10 am local time (15:00 GMT) on Friday 19 February and transmitted to the Department of Transport at 11.40 am local time (16:40 GMT) the same day.

TRANSPORT

Isle of Wight (Medical Evacuation)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the tender for search and rescue helicopters for the sea area Wight will include provision for supplying medical evacuation from the Isle of Wight at the request of the district health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: Arrangements for medical evacuation are the responsibility of the district health authority, which can let contracts for the supply of air ambulances or other means of fast transport. The Department's contract helicopter is being provided to meet the needs of maritime and aviation search and rescue arising in a wide area in the central English Channel. It will be possible for it to be made available, at the discretion of Her Majesty's Coastguard, to meet very urgent evacuation needs.

Bus Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide statistics on the number of shire counties providing increased support for bus services since deregulation and the total cost thereof.

Mr. David Mitchell: Twenty shire counties have budgeted to spend on bus revenue support a total of about £5 million more (in cash terms) in 1987-88 than they did in 1985-86.

The other counties have budgeted to spend in total £12·6 million less.

Channel Tunnel

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to ensure that regions north of London are able to benefit fully from the opening of the Channel tunnel.

Mr. David Mitchell: The opening of the Channel tunnel will make it possible for British Rail to provide through passenger and freight services between regional destinations and the continent. Section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act requires BR to publish a plan by the end of 1989 setting out its proposals for international rail services through the tunnel. It will be consulting widely with interested parties in the regions in the preparation of this plan.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on any proposals by British Rail for the provision of through services to the north and north-west using the Channel tunnel.

Mr. David Mitchell: None as yet. British Rail will be setting out its proposals for Channel tunnel through services to the regions in the plan it is required to publish by the end of 1989 under section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act. BR will be consulting widely with interested parties in the regions over the preparation of this plan.

EMPLOYMENT

"Training for Employment"

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received concerning his recent White Paper "Training for Employment", and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what responses have so far been received to the White Paper on "Training for Employment"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: The White Paper sets out the Government's plans for securing continuing reductions in unemployment and for sustaining jobs growth. It calls upon employers, individuals and trade unions to play their part, in particular to equip longer-term unemployed people for the jobs which the economy is generating.

We believe that the soundness of the approach set out in the White Paper is widely recognised. The Secretary of State has as yet received no specific representations about the Government's plans following the White Paper.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what would be the gross and net annual costs of doubling the premiums over benefit on the proposed new training for employment programme.

Mr. Cope: The Government have accepted the recommendations of the Manpower Services Commission about the level of training allowances which will apply from the time the new programme comes into operation in September 1988. If in all cases the lead over benefit were to be double that recommended by the commission, the additional gross costs in a full year would be about £180 million.

The training allowance as recommended by the Manpower Services Commission will not be subject to income tax or national insurance contributions. The net cost of increasing it would depend on the tax and national insurance arrangements.

Skill Shortages (Construction Industry)

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on skill shortages in the construction industry.

Mr. Cope: The strength of our economy means that some employers are finding it more difficult to meet some of their skill needs through recruitment. But employers can influence the supply of skills they need by providing the proper incentives for individuals to acquire the right skills and experience and by making the necessary investment in training.

The Government have given a lead by more than doubling their investment in vocational education and training since 1979, especially through two-year YTS for school leavers and now, the new £1·4 billion training programme to provide unemployed adults with the skills which today's jobs demand. Last year the Construction Industry Training Board provided an action plan to increase CITB managed YTS places by 2,000, other YTS places by 1,000 and to provide an extra 1,000 places for adult trainees. The Manpower Services Commission also has programmes to encourage employers to recognise and meet their own training needs and make the necessary provision. Under the engineering science and technology initiative programme more resources have also been made available to increase relevant higher education opportunities in those fields.

Small Businesses

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about his Department's commitment to the future development of small business and the enterprise culture.

Mr. Cope: This Department has specific responsibility for the Government's policies towards small firms. It is our aim to ensure that the strong growth of enterprise and the small firms sector continues, with the assistance of the small firms service, the enterprise allowance scheme and other support from this Department.

VAT Registrations

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of new value added tax registrations in 1987 and the consequences for his policy on small firms.

Mr. Cope: During 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, the number of businesses registered for VAT in the United Kingdom increased by 29,000. The number of registrations was 193,000 and of deregistrations 164,000. Overall, since 1979 the number of registered businesses has increased on average by 500 a week. This is a remarkable record and a clear demonstration of the resurgence of the small firms sector in the United Kingdom.

Labour Statistics

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest adjusted and unadjusted figures and percentages for unemployment in Waveney; and if he will give the equivalent figures for a year ago on the most nearly comparable basis.

Mr. Lee: Following is the available information, which is also in the Library. On the 14 January 1988 the number of unemployed claimants in the Waveney local authority area was 5,164. The corresponding figure for January 1987 was 6,507.

Seasonally adjusted unemployment figures are not available below regional level. Also unemployment rates are not calculated for areas smaller than travel-to-work areas.

Ventilation

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what policy initiations he proposes to take in the area of health and safety at work, in the light of the report by Air Conditioning and Ventilation Analysis, a copy of which has been to sent him, about the incidence of poorly ventilated workplaces and contaminated air conditioning systems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: I have not received a copy of the report referred to, but should be happy to do so and to consider the advice of the Health and Safety Executive in due course.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Isle of Wight (Electorate)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the 1988 electorate for the Isle of Wight constituency; and what is the 1988 quota for England.

Mrs. Currie: Figures relating to electoral registers which came into effect on 16 February 1988 will not be available centrally until April.

Colonoscopy Examination

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many colonoscopy examinations are carried out within the National Health Service each year; what proportion of these examinations reveal no disease; and what is the average cost to the National Health Service of these examinations.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that this information is not held centrally.

Leicestershire District Health Authority

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list the names and occupations of the members of the Leicestershire district health authority; and how many live in Leicestershire;

(2) if he will list the names and occupations of members of Trent regional health authority, showing how many live in Leicestershire.

Mrs. Currie: Information about members of the Leicestershire district health authority is not held centrally. They are appointed by Trent regional health authority and the appropriate local authorities. The hon. Member may therefore wish to seek this information from the chairman of Trent regional health authority.

The information requested about members of the regional health authority, two of whom live in Leicestershire, is as follows, with the exception of details about occupation which we do not systematically update:

Trent Regional Health Authority

Members
Mrs. J. Dady
Dr. R. A. A. R. Lawrence
Dr. P. F. J. Sewell
Dr. J. A. Birch
Mr. D. Brown
Professor R. E. Coupland
Professor R. Kilpatrick
Professor D. S. Monro
Mr. J. F. Pattison
Mrs. N. M. Collett
Councillor P. Gaul
Councillor A O'Brien
Mr. M. Varcoe
Mrs. J. Radford
Mr. M. F. Spungin
Mr. J. Thierry

At present there are three vacancies.

NHS Land Sales

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the proceeds from land sales by the National Health Service for each year from 1978-79.

Mrs. Currie: Proceeds from land sales by health authorities in England from 1978-79 have been as follows:

Year	*Sale receipts £ million (to nearest £0·1 million)*
1978-79	7·5
1979-80	10·0
1980-81	15·4
1981-82	19·4
1982-83	18·2
1983-84	31·5
1984-85	48·9
1985-86	82·9
1986-87	146·0
1987-88	[1]246·0

[1] Estimate.

Durham City Constituency (Electoral Roll)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the percentage turnover in the electoral roll for the Durham city constituency between 1983 and the last year for which figures were available.

Mrs. Currie: Details of the numbers leaving or joining the register of electors in any year are not known centrally, except for the number of attainers[1]. The percentage change in the number of parliamentary electors and the total number of attainers joining the register for the city of Durham between 1983 and 1987, the latest available year, were as follows:

1983 register	*1987 register*	*Percentage change 1983-87*	*Total number of attainers[1] 1983-87*
67,770	67,363	−0·6	5,804

[1] A person who attains age 18 during the currency of the register.

Alcohol Abuse

Mr. Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what sum of money he plans to make available in 1988-89 to educate young people about the consequences of alcohol abuse.

Mrs. Currie: The Health Education Authority plans to commit approximately £400,000 of its central funds to alcohol education in 1988-89. This includes a grant to the Teachers Advisory Council on alcohol and drug education and expenditure on a number of activities particularly designed for young people.

Alcohol Concern, the national voluntary agency which has been awarded grant-aid of £500,000 for 1988-89, plans to undertake a number of alcohol education activities including initiatives for young people in collaboration with national youth organisations.

Pensionable Retirement

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any proposals to establish complete equality in age of pensionable retirement for men and women; and what is his latest estimate of the cost of such a proposal.

Mr. Scott: We are still considering all the options for change in pension age, including the question of equalisation. The cost of equal pension ages for men and women would depend on the age at which equalisation took place. Equalisation at 60 would cost over £3,000 million at 1985 benefit rates; at 63 about £800 million; and at 65 there would be a saving of about £500 million. All figures are net of effects on tax and other benefits, but exclude costs to employers who would be obliged under EC directive 86/378 to equalise pension ages in occupational schemes also.

Pensions

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will list the measures taken since 1979 to more closely approximate the state pension treatment of men and women.

Mr. Scott: Men and women who have paid full contributions throughout their working lives have had equal treatment since 1948. From 6 April 1979, the married women's half-test was abolished for women reaching age 60 on or after that date; the half-test was an additional contribution condition requiring married women to have paid full national insurance contributions in at least half the years between the date of their marriage and their retirement in order to receive a pension. The effect of the half-test for women reaching pension age before 6 April 1979 was abolished in the Social Security Act 1983 with effect from 22 December 1984. The Social Security Act 1985 also equalised the rate of pension payable to men, single women and married women entitled to a non-contributory category D pension.

Benefits

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many applications he has received in each of the years 1983 to 1988 for the treatment of a claim for supplementary benefit as a claim for *(a)* attendance

allowance and *(b)* invalid care allowance in the Leeds metropolitan district council area; and how many such applications were successful in each of those years.

Mr. Scott: I regret that the requested information is not available. The information which is available is set out in the table.

Number of applications for supplementary benefit claims or other documents to be treated as claims for attendance allowance or invalid care allowance under the Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1979 in Great Britain 1983-88.

Period	Applications made		Applications successful	
	Attendance allowance	Invalid care allowance	Attendance allowance	Invalid care allowance
June 1983-December 1984[1]	590	59	190	52
1985	411	98	110	85
1986	164	80	29	76
1987	167	125	31	54
1988[2]	15	0	1	0

[1] Records were not kept before June 1983. This figure cannot be apportioned between the 1983 and 1984 calendar years.
[2] Up to 25 February.

Pocket Money

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services in what situations his Department's regulations require children's pocket money to be taken into account when assessing a claimant's entitlement to benefit.

Mr. Scott: Any payment which an absent parent makes to a child whom he is liable to maintain is normally treated as income and taken into account in full in the assessment of supplementary benefit; such payments will similarly be taken into account under the rules for income support. However, the first £100 of any gift for an occasion, like a birthday, is ignored for supplementary benefit purposes. Under income support any payments made by way of gifts will be treated as capital except that any amount which exceeds in aggregate £250 in 52 weeks will be treated as income and taken into account in full.

Pocket money paid regularly to a child by a person who is not liable to maintain him or her is treated as a voluntary payment. Under supplementary benefit the first £4 a week is disregarded. From 11 April the disregard will increase to £5 a week under income support. Occasional payments of pocket money are normally treated as capital in supplementary benefit. In income support, the first £250 in any period of 52 weeks will be regarded as capital and any excess treated as income averaged over the number of weeks remaining in that year.

Family Income Supplement

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many of his Department's staff are eligible for family income supplement.

Mr. Scott: Fewer than 300 staff in the Department are currently receiving family income supplement.

Widowed Fathers (Allowance)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to introduce a widowed father's allowance in line with that of the widowed mother's allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to introduce a widowed father's allowance. Benefit is paid to widowed mothers because they have frequently been financially dependent on the deceased husband and would find difficulty in maintaining themselves and their children on widowhood. The same difficulties are not normally present for widowed fathers. The cost of introducing such an allowance would be about £35 million if based on the deceased wife's contributions; most of this would go to men already in full-time work. However, from 1989 a guaranteed minimum pension will be payable to widowed fathers whose wives were in contracted-out occupational pension schemes.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his latest estimate of the number of losers as a result of changed housing benefit regulations to come into effect in April.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 18 December 1987 at columns *916-18*.

Dental Estimates Board

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total cost of the Dental Estimates Board in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The total cost of the Dental Estimates Board for England and Wales, in cash terms, in each of the last five years, together with the total gross fees authorised for payment to dentists by family practitioner committees, is given in the table; the total cost of the board as a percentage of the gross fees authorised is also shown.

Year	Cost of board £ million	Gross fees authorised £ million	Cost/gross fees per cent.
1982-83	10·788	549·741	1·962
1983-84	11·013	594·406	1·853
1984-85	11·751	649·785	1·808
1985-86	[1]14·686	671·600	2·189
1986-87	[2]14·530	753·096	1·929

Notes:
[1] Includes £2·519 million for replacement of the board's computer and early stages of computer redevelopment.
[2] Includes £1·999 million for computer redevelopment.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the unit cost of the Dental Estimates Board annual report for 1986-87, and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The 1986-87 annual report of the Dental Estimates Board for England and Wales was, for the first time, in two parts.

The first part contains the board's report to the Secretaries of State and key statistics about the board's work and the general dental service. The unit cost was 99·6p. The cost of publication was met from efficiency savings at the board.

The detailed "Digest of Statistics for 1986-87", the second part of the board's report, is published as a separate document at a cost of £15 per copy.

Chiropodists

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any plans to review the position of unqualified practising chiropodists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: In the absence of general agreement between the professional associations concerned we have no plans for reviewing present statutory provisions governing the practice of chiropody.

Contraceptives

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will make a statement outlining the failure rates of condoms revealed by the different world studies referred to in the October 1987 edition of the "Prescribers Journal", published by his Department;

(2) what assessment he has made as to whether the background information on the failure rates of condoms used to establish a range of 2 to 15 per 100 women years in the "Prescribers Journal" of October 1987 can be used to establish an average failure rate for such contraceptive devices in the developed world;

(3) whether he will list, by order of frequency of failure, the failure rates of different contraceptive techniques referred to in the "Prescribers Journal" of October 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The following table, ranking different contraceptive techniques by range of user failure rate, appeared in the "Prescriber's Journal" (Volume 27, Number 5, October 1987):

Table 1
User-failure rates for different methods of contraception/100 woman-years

	Range in the world literature[1]
Sterilisation	
Male	0-0·2
Female	0-0·5
Injectable (DMPA)	0-1
Combined pills	0-1
50 µg oestrogen	0·1-1
< 50 µg oestrogen	0·2-1
IUD	
Lippesdoop C	0·3-4
Copper 7	0·3-4
Progestogen-only "pill"	0·3-5
Diaphragm	2-15
Condom	2-15
Coitus interruptus	8-17
Spermicides alone	4-25
Natural family planning	
Pre-plus post-ovulation	15-30
Post-ovulation alone	1-6
Contraceptive sponge	9-25
No method, young women	80-90
No method at age 40	40-50
No method at age 45	c10-20
No method at age 50	c0-5

[1] Excludes atypical studies giving particularly poor results, and all extended-use studies.

Notes
1. Ranking of efficacy, but overlap of ranges.
2. Influence of age: better results are obtained, for any given degree of compliance, in older women.

The user failure rate for condoms quoted in the table is based on a number of studies over the years in this country and abroad. It is thought to be a reasonable estimate of the position in the United Kingdom, bearing in mind that incorrect use is a significant factor. Because of this, and other variables such as age, experience or motivation of user, it would be misleading to present figures in terms of an average failure rate.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he will review his policy on the promotion of the use of condoms as part of his safe sex campaign, in the light of the statement in *The Lancet* of 7 February, a copy of which has been sent to him, that in contraceptive use condoms have a failure rate of 13 to 15 per cent.;

(2) whether he will commission research into the statistical relationship between the failure rate of condoms in preventing the general exchange of body fluids and their failure rate when used as a contraceptive device; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to commission such research. A significant cause of failure in condoms is thought to be incorrect use. This was quoted as contributing to the failure rate range mentioned in the letter published in *The Lancet* on 7 February 1987. While it is important to ensure that condoms are of high quality and that there are clear instructions for use, the Government have stressed in their AIDS public education campaign that condoms only reduce the risk of disease transmission; they do not remove it.

Rabies

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people in the United Kingdom have been immunised against rabies for each year since 1980.

Mrs. Currie: This information is not available in the form requested. The number of doses of rabies vaccine supplied through the Department for distribution in England and Wales was as follows:

Year	*Number*
1980	2,280
1981	9,000
1982	8,000
1983	5,000
1984	5,000
1985	6,500
1986	6,000
1987	8,000

These supplies will have included initial and booster doses for those groups considered to be at special risk, for example, veterinary and technical staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and employees of animal quarantine premises, as well as to travellers returning to this country who might have been in contact with rabid animals.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of rabies or suspected rabies were recorded in the United Kingdom for each year since 1980.

Mrs. Currie: The available information is given in the table.

Number of notifications of rabies United Kingdom 1980-87

Year	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
England and Wales	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	1
Scotland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[1]—
Northern Ireland	—	—	—	—	—	—	[1]—	[1]—

[1]— Not available.

Mr. J. H. Foster

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if the chief adjudication officer has yet completed consideraton of the social security commissioner's decision of 20 February 1987 in respect of Mr. Joseph Hugh Foster of Birmingham.

Mr. Portillo: The chief adjudication officer has considered the commissioner's decision and concluded that no amendment to existing guidance is necessary.

Health Authorities

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give for each district authority and special health authority *(a)* the outturn for 1986-87 and *(b)* the estimated outturn for 1987-88.

Mr. Newton: For outturn expenditure information by district for 1986-87 I refer the hon Member to appendix D of the Department's annual booklet "Health Authorities' Annual Accounts — National Summary (England)" — copies of which are held in the Library. Equivalent information for 1987-88 will not be available until the autumn.

The Department has not until recently routinely collected informaton on an income and expenditure basis in-year. The first routine monitoring of health authorities' spending on an income and expenditure basis will cover the period from 1 April to 30 June 1988 although this information is to be collected by region rather than by individual district health authorities.

Rating Reform

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether it is his intention that community charge payers entitled to a rebate will receive full reimbursement of the amount of the community charge in all local authority areas through income support or by some other form of relief; and what arrangements will be made in respect of claimants in households with variable incomes.

Mr. Scott: Rebates will be available in each local authority up to a maximum of 80 per cent. of community charge liability. Claimants whose incomes are equal to or below their income support levels will be entitled to the maximum rebate, and the entitlement of claimants with incomes above these levels will be calculated by the application of a taper. Income support rates will include an amount to help meet the 20 per cent. minimum community charge contribution, reflecting average community charge levels in Great Britain as a whole. Rebate entitlement will be assessed on the basis of the liablity, needs and resources of each individual or couple and will be reassessed when a claimant's circumstances change; it will not be assessed on the basis of the liabilities, needs and resources of households.

Ambulance Service (Privatisation)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will identify and provide details of what discussions and considerations are currently being undertaken within his Department with regard to its privatisation of the ambulance service or elements of it.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* We published a scrutiny report on the non-emergency sector of the ambulance service in April 1984 when we said that it was open to district health authorities to buy in part of the ambulance service from the private sector if that is more cost effective and provided the quality of service was maintained. Many NHS ambulance authorities already use private contractors, the hospital care service and voluntary aid societies to transport appropriate NHS patients. This has been the case for many years and helps to ensure that skilled ambulance crews, and specialist vehicles are used for those who need the special care and attention which they can provide.

The Government have no plans centrally for altering the future management or operational arrangements for NHS emergency or non-emergency ambulance services.

Eli Lilly

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the medicinal products made by Eli Lilly and its subsidiaries which currently have product licences from his Department; and if he will indicate which can be purchased without prescription.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 23 February 1988]:* The medicinal products requested are recorded in the following list, which does not indicate whether the products are currently available since marketing decisions are for the licence holder. Humulin and Nu-Seals aspirin are licensed for pharmacy sale without a prescription. All the other products listed are available only on prescription. It

should be noted that a number of the products have varying strengths and dosage forms which each have separate product licences.

V-Cil-K
Penicillin
Dolasan
Vancocin
Fenopron
Nebcin
Doloxene
Kefadol
Distaclor
Cinobac
Dubutrex
Eldisine
Progesic
Sodium Amytal
Moxalactam
Cesamet
Elplat
Oncovin
Distalgesic
Allegron
Capastat
Ilosone
Napalgesic
Cologel
Aventyl
Amytal
Seconal
Velbe
Ilotycin
Glugacon
Haelan Tape
Keflex
Distamine
Distaquaine V-K
Folic Acid
Cycloserine
Keflin
Axid
Dimelor
Tuinal
Haelan
Brietal Sodium
Kefzol
Humulin (P)
Nu-Seals Aspirin (P)

Invasive Carcinoma

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women are suffering from invasive carcinoma in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* I regret that this information is not available in the form requested. The numbers of new cases of malignant cancer in women recorded in England and Wales and in Scotland, in each of the last three years for which information is available, are given in the table.

Numbers of registrations of newly diagnosed cases of malignant neoplasms in women in Great Britain for selected cancers

	England and Wales	*Scotland*
	Year 1982	
Breast (ICD Code 174)	21,618	2,513
Trachae, bronchus and lung (ICD Code 162)	9,392	1,368
Ovary and other uterine adnexa (ICD Code 183)	4,433	498
Cervix (ICD Code 180)	3,909	408
Remainder[2]	57,711	7,994
Total	97,063	12,781
	Year 1983	
Breast	21,297	2,531
Trachae, bronchus and lung	9,475	1,330
Ovary etc.	4,521	515
Cervix	3,875	430
Remainder[2]	58,436	8,215
Total	97,604	13,021
	[1] *Year 1984*	
Breast	21,363	2,525
Trachea, bronchus and lung	9,840	1,448
Ovary etc.	4,539	532
Cervix	4,043	444
Remainder[2]	59,394	9,095
Total	99,179	14,044

[1] Provisional.
[2] Of which the commonest are stomach, colon, rectum etc. and skin.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications were received, and what proportion were successful, for grants under European Economic Community regulation 4028/86 for fishing vessel construction and modernisation in local regions.

Mr. Gummer: The following is the information requested:

Reg. No. 4028/86—1st Round

Region	*Applications Received*			*Successful*	
	Constructions	*Modernisations*	*Total*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Scotland	94	62	156	39	25
Northern Ireland	21	33	54	5	9
Wales	7	8	15	3	20
South West England	3	3	6	1	17
South East England	7	1	8	4	50
Eastern England	1	—	1	—	Nil
Humberside/Yorks.	11	10	21	5	24
North East England	3	2	5	1	20
Western England	7	4	11	2	18
North West England	1	3	4	1	25
Total	155	126	281	61	22

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications were received from each port in the United Kingdom for grants under EEC regulation 4028/86 for fishing vessel construction and modernisation.

Mr. Gummer: The following is the information requested:

EC Regulation 4028/86—First round—Applications received

	Number
England	
Grimsby	6
Hull	5
North Shields	2
Sunderland	1
Blyth	1
Holy Island	1
Whitby	2
Scarborough	3
Bridlington	5
Lowestoft	1
Folkestone	3
Portsmouth	2
Lymington	2
Eastbourne	1
Weymouth	1
Brixham	3
Salcombe	2
Newlyn	9
Padstow	1
Looe	1
Fleetwood	3
Maryport	1
	56
Scotland	
Stornoway	4
Grimsay	1
Whalsay	1
Lerwick	8
Hamnavoe	1
Scalloway	3
Kirkwall	2
Skerries	1
Westray	1
Benbecula	1
Mallaig	3
Sheildaig	1
Lochinver	5
Portmahomack	1
Scalpay	1
Kinlochbervie	3
Wick	3
Helmsdale	1
Broadford	1
Brora	1
Balintore	1
Fraserburgh	16
Buckie	12
Banff	1
Peterhead	20
Aberdeen	11
Macduff	8
Thurso	1
Gourdon	1
Whitehills	2
Lossiemouth	1
Eyemouth	8
Leith	1
Arbroath	1
Girvan	1
Ayr	10
Campbeltown	4
Carradale	3
Tayvallich	1
Kirkcudbright	6
Tobermory	2
Anstruther	1
Pittenweem	1
	156
Northern Ireland	
Kilkeel	27
Portavogie	18
Ardglass	3
Coleraine	1
Donaghadee	1
Groomsport	1
Ballycastle	1
Islandmagee	1
Cushendall	1
	54
Wales	
Holyhead	3
Milford Haven	9
Port Talbot	1
Swansea	2
	15

Broadleaved Trees

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance he is offering for set-aside schemes to involve the planting of broadleaf trees.

Mr. Gummer: The Community set-aside scheme agreed by the European Council on 15 February includes provision for land taken out of arable crop production to be used for woodland. As suggested in the consultation document issued earlier, this woodland option might in the United Kingdom be linked to the new farm woodland scheme which, if approved by Parliament, would offer special encouragement for broadleaved trees. I and my colleagues will be considering the point further in the light of the views that have been expressed and the detailed legislative texts on set-aside still to be agreed in Brussels.

Goats

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he hopes to respond to the Farm Animal Welfare Council's draft welfare code for goats; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: We have asked interested organisations for their comments on the proposed code and will take these into account in preparing a final version. This should be laid before the House later this year.

New Zealand Butter

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made on European Commission Council of Agriculture Ministers discussions on post-1989 arrangements for New Zealand butter quotas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Commission has not yet made a proposal on the arrangements for the import of New Zealand butter from 1 January 1989.

Dairy Premises (Examinations)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether he will consider changing the system charges for examining dairy premises under the Milk and Dairies Hygiene Regulations from a fixed charge to one based on litres produced; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what steps he has taken to ascertain whether an alternative to the present regime might offer a more cost-effective service for examining dairy premises under the Milk and Dairies Hygiene Regulations; and if he will make a statement;

(3) whether he has considered offering for competitive tender the examination of dairy premises under the Milk and Dairies Hygiene Regulations.

Mr. Donald Thompson: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) on 26 January, at column 175, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I have arranged for a formal efficiency scrutiny to be carried out with the view to identifying possible economies in the way this work is done. The examining officer has wide terms of reference and he is therefore free to address the options suggested by the hon. Member: he is consulting interested organisations, including the Farmers Union of Wales. His report is due in May and his recommendations will then be carefully considered.

Milk

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether he will seek to secure for milk producers increases in the amount of milk they can produce without paying the super-levy on excess output similar to those increases recently agreed for producers in Belgium, France and West Germany; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the decision of the recent European Community summit in Brussels to ease rules governing milk quotas for producers in France, Germany and Belgium in order that they may produce extra milk without paying the super-levy on excess output.

Mr. Donald Thompson: In order to accommodate changes in the pattern of marketing EC legislation allows member states to seek approval from the Commission under management committee procedure for the transfer of specified quantities of quota between their direct sale and wholesale allocations. This is what was recently approved for France, Germany and Belgium and similar approvals have been given to other member states, including the United Kingdom, in the past. These transfers do not increase the total amount of quota allocated to any member state. I do not believe that such a transfer would be justified in the United Kingdom under present circumstances.

Farm Incomes

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the number of farmers in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* the United Kingdom whose earnings from agriculture in 1987 were (i) less than £4,000, (ii) between £4,000 and £5,000, (iii) between £5,000 and £6,000, (iv) between £6,000 and £7,000, (v) between £7,000 and £8,000, (vi) between £8,000 and £9,000, (vii) between £9,000 and £10,000, (viii) between £10,000 and £15,000 and (ix) over £15,000.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 1 March 1988]:* I regret that this information is not available in the form requested, nor for 1987. The farm business survey does, however, allow estimates to be made of the proportional breakdown of farm businesses according to broad income band and information relating to the 1986-87 accounting year, ending on average in February 1987, is set out in the table.

Percentage Distribution of Farm Businesses according to net Farm Income, 1986-87. All types of Farm

	Net Farm Income			
	Less than zero	*0 to £10,000*	*£10,000 to £20,000*	*£20,000 and above*
England	21	38	21	20
Wales	23	39	23	15
Scotland	32	41	18	9
United Kingdom	24	39	21	17

Source: Farm Business Surveys

Notes:

(a) Figures are derived from data collected in farm business surveys by universities and agricultural colleges in Great Britain and by the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland. They relate to full-time farm businesses.

(b) Net farm income represents the return to the farmer and spouse for their manual and managerial labour and on tenant-type capital in livestock, crops, machinery, and so on, but excluding land and buildings. It is calculated before the deduction of interest on any farming loans. All farms are treated as rented in the derivation of net farm income and an imputed rental value for owner-occupied land is charged as an expense in the accounts.

Environmental Research

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he is currently carrying out into environmental topics.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 1 March 1988]:* Information on work in these areas is contained in the "Register of Government-Funded Agriculture/Environment R and D in the United Kingdom" produced by my Department, copies of which I am placing in the Library of the House.

New Forest (Keepers)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will seek a meeting with the Forestry Commission to discuss the rent strike by keepers of the New Forest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* The rent strike is a management problem which falls to be dealt with internally by the Forestry Commission.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on the average rent payable by and wage paid to keepers of the New Forest at the latest available date.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* The average rent payable is £24·75 per week. The average gross weekly earnings of keepers are £177·31.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on the level of rent presently being sought by the Forestry Commission from the keepers of the New Forest.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* The commission is seeking an average "fair rent" of £24·75 per week from the keepers.

DEFENCE

Sovereign Bases (Cyprus)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots are employed at each of the two sovereign bases in the islands of Cyprus; and what lengths of the Dhekelia base boundary are common with *(a)* Turkish northern Cyprus and *(b)* Greek southern Cyprus.

Mr. Sainsbury: Some 857 Greek Cypriots are currently employed at the eastern sovereign base area (Dhekelia) and some 1,934 at the western sovereign base area (Akrotiri). 322 Turkish Cypriots are employed at Dhekelia.

The Dhekelia base boundary borders the UN buffer zone for about 3 miles, the Republic of Cyprus south of the buffer zone for about 23 miles, and the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus for about 27 miles.

3 Brigade

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost involved in rearranging the command structures within Northern Ireland and creating an operational area for 3 Brigade.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The extra costs associated with the formation of 3 Brigade are estimated to be about £17 million in 1988-89 and about £2 million to £3 million per annum thereafter.

Barron Report

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the conclusions and recommendations of the Barron report on defence land needs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The so-called "Barron Report" was a technical assessment carried out within the headquarters of the United Kingdom land forces of the Army's present and future training needs, taking into account the increase in the TA and reserve forces and the considerable increase in weapon danger areas. Much of the detailed information in the study is classified and it cannot therefore be published. Since there appears to be a number of popular misapprehensions about the nature of this document, I am, however, prepared to give an outline of its general conclusions.

On the basis of the number of company weeks required to train each organisation and unit of the field army, the study concluded that there was currently a shortfall of between 580 and 900 company weeks of dry training each year, depending on the extent to which live firing areas were able to be used for some dry training. In order to meet this shortfall in full, the report estimated that approximately 50,000 additional acres of dry training land might be required overall, although much would depend on the topography of any additional land and the uses to which it could be put.

The report is not a statement of MOD policy and was not concerned with the ways in which additional land might be acquired, but, in the light of the clear evidence it provides of a significant shortfall in Army land for dry training, MOD will continue with its policy of seeking to acquire suitable land which may become available, particularly where this will allow us to extend an existing training area. Normal planning procedures will be followed in every case.

Foxhunter

Sir Antony Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will outline the concept situation relative to negotiations with Marconi Defence Systems with respect to the Foxhunter radar system.

Mr. Sainsbury: We have now finalised our negotiations with Marconi Defence Systems on a programme of work to bring the radar up to the required standard. We have negotiated taut technical criteria, linked these to strict arrangements for relating payment to achievement, and agreed a firm price to cover the work. Formal contract signature will now proceed.

Departmental Houses

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's houses in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland have been declared surplus in each year since 1979.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* I regret that the information requested is not available broken down by country. The total number of properities declared surplus in each year is as follows:

	Number
(a) Married Quarters [1,2]	
15 January 1979 to 14 January 1980	1,618
15 January 1980 to 14 January 1981	2,161
15 January 1981 to 14 January 1982	1,189
15 January 1982 to 14 January 1983	1,000
15 January 1983 to 14 January 1984	506
15 January 1984 to 14 January 1985	686
15 January 1985 to 31 March 1986	1,595
1 April 1986 to 31 March 1987	1,523
1 April 1987 to 30 November 1987 [3]	1,220
Total	11,498

	Number
(b) MOD Civilian Houses[4]	
1 April 1979 to 31 March 1980	5
1 April 1980 to 31 March 1981	11
1 April 1981 to 31 March 1982	329
1 April 1982 to 31 March 1983	526
1 April 1983 to 31 March 1984	82
1 April 1984 to 31 March 1985	599
1 April 1985 to 31 March 1986	305
1 April 1986 to 31 March 1987	149
1 April 1987 to 19 February 1988[3]	167
Total	2,173

[1] Including flats.

[2]These figures do not include surplus properties transferred to the Territorial Army, the United States forces in the United Kingdom or which may have been demolished.

[3] Latest recorded figures.

[4] Including demolitions and transfers.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Fair Employment

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to respond to the report of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights on fair employment in Northern Ireland (Cm. 237).

Mr. Tom King: I have today written to the chairman of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights giving the Government's response to the commission's report on fair employment and outlining our plans for new legislation in this field.

The Government are committed to ensuring that all employers in Northern Ireland positively practise equality of opportunity in employment. It is in the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland that there should be, and be seen to be, fair treatment for all.

I have today published an outline of the Government's proposals for legislation which have been drawn up after wide consultation with interested parties including employers' organisations and trade unions. Copies of the brochure, and of my letter to the chairman of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, have been placed in the Library and are available in the Vote Office. I welcome this opportunity to acknowledge the contribution which the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights report has made.

The main features of our proposals are as follows. All employers in Northern Ireland will be required to practice equality of opportunity. All public sector employers, and all private sector employers with more than 10 employees, will be required to monitor the religious composition of their work force. Failure to do so will be a criminal offence. For a transitional period, the threshold in the private sector will be 25 employees. Employers who fail to meet their obligations will not normally be eligible for Government grants and contracts.

Employers will be enabled to undertake affirmative action programmes designed to give under-represented groups better access to employment and training opportunities. The Fair Employment Agency will be strengthened and restructured with its educational, promotional and investigative functions concentrated in a new Fair Employment Commission which will inherit the agency's assets, staff and experience. The commission will audit the monitoring returns compiled by employers registered with the commission, and it will investigate employment practice and patterns.

Individual complaints of alleged religious discrimination will be dealt with by a separate tribunal using the same sort of procedures as are already successfully used for employment matters in the existing industrial tribunal structure. In pattern and practice cases, the commission will be able to apply to the tribunal for an order of compliance if its directions are not obeyed.

We intend to publish a White Paper in the late spring, and new legislation will be introduced at the earliest opportunity.

Civil Service (Article)

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on why Mr. Robert Cooper, chairman of the Fair Employment Agency for Northern Ireland, has attempted to block publication of an article in the *Journal of Social Policy*, written by one of the agency's former consultants, that details how the original report of the agency's investigation of the Northern Irish Civil Service came to be altered by the Civil Service itself.

Mr. Stanley: This is a matter for the Fair Employment Agency, which is an autonomous body operating within the terms of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976 and independent of the Government.

Civil Service (Investigation)

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the investigation of the Northern Irish Civil Service carried out by the Fair Employment Agency, as to why civil servants assisted in the investigations as specialists and why the original recommendations and conclusions of the report were altered; and if he will place copies of the reports of the original consultants in the Library.

Mr. Stanley: Matters connected with the preparation of reports arising from investigations under section 12 of the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1976 are the responsibility of the agency, subject to the provisions of that Act. Under Schedule 5 to the Act, the agency must afford those being investigated an opportunity to comment on the matters being investigated and to furnish oral or other evidence respecting them. The Civil Service, as it was fully entitled to do, responded to the opportunity which was thus afforded it.

International Fund for Ireland

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) for what precise purpose the International Fund for Ireland investment company was established, with particular reference to the provision of venture capital for higher risk projects not likely to attract conventional sources of capital; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many projects in Northern Ireland have been allocated financial assistance from the International Fund for Ireland investment company and have *(a)* received direct grants and *(b)* received venture capital;

(3) what proportion of venture capital assigned to the International Fund for Ireland investment company has been set aside to assist new start-up projects; and how much to date has been allocated to new business projects;

(4) what evidence he has that projects appraised, approved, and supported by the Industrial Development Board are likely to attract support from the International Fund for Ireland investment company; and whether the International Fund for Ireland investment company has an in-house capability to assess projects.

Mr. Stanley: Under the terms of article 9 of the agreement between the Governments of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland, concerning the International Fund for Ireland, the board of the fund was enjoined to establish two investment companies, one in each part of Ireland, to identify the risk capital needs of existing or new industrial and commercial enterprises and to provide, on sound commercial criteria, equity capital or loans. The board of the fund has accordingly incorporated two subsidiary investment companies — IFI (Northern) Investments Ltd. and IFI (Southern) Investment Ltd. Although the board of the fund was appointed by the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, it is independent of them. Accordingly, questions relating to the administration of the fund, including investment policy, are matters for the board of the fund and should be addressed to the chairman.

Housing Executive

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many architects are presently employed by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and how many new housing starts are planned by the executive for 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. I am advised by the chief executive that the total number of architectural staff employed at 31 December 1987 was 160. This figure is made up of 133 architects (including architectural technicians) 16 architect-planners and 16 landscape architects.

The information on new starts requested is not available for calendar years. However, the Housing Executive plans to let contracts for 1,500 new dwellings in the financial year 1988-89 and on the basis of the provisional allocations for housing in the public expenditure White Paper (Cm. 288), to sustain this level of new starts in each of the two following financial years.

National Parks

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to introduce national parks legislation for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: There are no plans to introduce national parks legislation in Northern Ireland as there is already provision in article 12 of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 for the designation of national parks.

Conservation

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on conservation and utility management plans for *(a)* Strangford lough area in south Down and *(b)* Mournes area.

Mr. Needham: It is intended to declare the whole of the shores and parts of the islands in Strangford lough as areas of special scientific interest (ASSIs). The first ASSI has just been declared and declaration of the remainder will follow. The Department is in discussion with the Department of Agriculture with a view to bringing forward a proposal to designate a marine nature reserve in Strangford lough. The production of a comprehensive plan is seen as an integral part of the process of designation and subsequent management. The preparation of such a plan requires a research programme extending over at least a year to gather essential basic information.

The Department is currently engaged in consultations with all other Government Departments whose functions may affect the landscape and wildlife of the Mournes. This process will produce proposals which will be discussed with district councils and will lead to a co-ordinated statement of policies for the Mournes area of outstanding natural beauty. The overall objectives will be to conserve the natural beauty of the area, to promote its enjoyment by the public and to safeguard the interests of its residents.

Museums

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to publish a policy statement for museums in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Irish Museums Association in Ireland about the role of museums in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to provide funding for museums in Northern Ireland other than the Ulster museum.

Dr. Mawhinney: In addition to the Ulster museum, the Government provides funding for the Ulster folk and transport museum and the Ulster American folk park. To date it has not been possible to make available resources to other museums.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the budgetary allocation to museums in Northern Ireland in each of the financial years from 1982-83 to 1986-87 inclusive.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

	Recurrent £	*Capital* £	*Purchase grant* £
Ulster Museum			
1982-83	1,745,000	74,000	—
1983-84	1,800,000	181,000	—
1984-85	1,897,000	167,000	30,000
1985-86	2,027,000	115,000	45,000
1986-87	2,108,000	280,000	135,000
Ulster Folk and Transport Museum			
1982-83	1,379,000	76,000	—
1983-84	1,390,000	107,000	—
1984-85	1,399,000	85,000	20,000
1985-86	1,527,000	182,000	25,000
1986-87	1,585,000	239,000	55,000

	Recurrent	Capital	Purchase grant
	£	£	£
Ulster American Folk Park			
1982-83	229,000	9,000	—
1983-84	242,000	7,000	—
1984-85	261,000	59,000	5,000
1985-86	267,000	113,000	5,000
1986-87	303,000	59,000	5,000

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action is being taken to identify victims of myalgic encephalomyelitis in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The diagnosis of this condition is a matter for the medical profession.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what financial assistance has been made available to myalgic encephalomyelitis support groups in Northern Ireland to date; and if he plans to fund a professional regional worker in the forthcoming financial year.

Mr. Needham: An application from an myalgic encephalomyelitis support group for funding of a development officer is at present being considered along with other competing applications for grants by voluntary organisations. No previous requests for help by such groups have been made to the Department or the health and social services boards.

Young Children (Education)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what proportion of four-year-olds in Northern Ireland avails itself of *(a)* nursery education, *(b)* primary school education and *(c)* pre-school playgroup provision;

(2) what proportion of three-year-olds in Northern Ireland avails itself of *(a)* nursery education, *(b)* primary school education and *(c)* pre-school playgroup provision.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) on 24 February 1988, at column *190*.

Young Children

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what proportion of (i) the three-year-old population and (ii) the four-year-old population in Northern Ireland are within families with *(a)* a single parent, *(b)* both parents unemployed and *(c)* the parents in receipt of family income supplement;

(2) what proportion of the population of Northern Ireland is under five years old: and what plans there are to introduce an under-fives initiative to Northern Ireland of the type operating in other regions;

(3) what financial or other, assistance is given to pre-school playgroups by *(a)* each health and social services board and *(b)* each education and library board;

(4) what is the current population of *(a)* four-year-olds and *(b)* three-year-olds in Northern Ireland;

(5) how many mother and toddler groups operate in Northern Ireland: and what financial, or other, assistance is offered to them, by the Department of Education and by the Department of Health and Social Security.

Mr. Needham: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the replies given to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) on 24 February 1988, at columns *189-90*.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *675*, if he will institute a review of the command structure of Royal Ulster Constabulary headquarters mobile support units with a view to assessing the adequacy of the accountability systems operating within them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: These matters fall within the operational responsibility of the Chief Constable, but, as my right hon. Friend made clear in his statement on 17 February, he has accepted in principle all the recommendations of the McLachlan report, including those designed to ensure the highest standard in the selection of training of members of the special branch; the prevention of overspecialisation; the encouragement of cross-posting both within the RUC and with other police forces; and the further integration of the branch with the other parts of the force.

In addition, as my right hon. Friend said, Mr. McLachlan stresses that the regional assistant chief constables are now aware of the operations of the special branch within their respective areas, and re-emphasises the importance of their continuing to monitor them.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether those patients who have been given a date for admission to hospital are included in the general waiting list; how many patients are currently on the general waiting list in all hospitals in Northern Ireland; and how many patients have been given a date for admission.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 1 March 1988]*: General waiting lists include those patients who have been given a date for admission to hospital. At 30 September 1987, there were 25,625 awaiting admission to all hospitals in Northern Ireland.

Information on the number of these patients who have been given a date for admission could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 3 March 1988

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Derbyshire (ex-Chief Constable)

Mr. Benn: To ask the Attorney-General when he received a report from the Director of Public Prosecutions following the investigations conducted into the affairs of the former chief constable of Derbyshire, Mr. Parish; and what recommendations were made to the Director of Public Prosecutions by the West Mercia police and the Derbyshire constabulary.

The Attorney-General: I have received no report from the Director of Public Prosecutions concerning Mr. Parish. The contents of reports submitted by the police to the Director are confidential.

Labour Party (Red Cross Emblem)

Mr. Adley: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects the Director of Public Prosecutions to conclude consideration of the use by the Labour party of the Red Cross emblem on a party political leaflet; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Police inquiries into this matter are continuing. The Director will reach his decision after those inquiries have been completed and a full report has been submitted to him.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Corporal Punishment

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what new sanctions for bad behaviour have been introduced into schools since the abolition of corporal punishment; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: None. Corporal punishment was but one of several sanctions available to head teachers and governing bodies, who are responsible for disciplinary policy and practice within their individual schools. Her Majesty's inspectorate's report on good behaviour and discipline, published last year, gives schools guidance of best practice.

RRS Frederick Russell

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he intends to take to compensate for the withdrawal of the RRS Frederick Russell from service.

Mr. Jackson: It is for the Natural Environment Research Council to decide its scientific priorities within the total funds at its disposal. I understand from the NERC that the loss of the RRS Frederick Russell will in part be compensated for by the use of the replacement vessel for the RRS John Biscoe when it is not engaged on Antarctic duties and in part by the use of other countries' research vessels through bilateral arrangements. The replacement for the RRS John Biscoe is expected to enter service in 1990.

Education Reform Bill

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what provision will be made for circumstances where, under the terms of the Education Reform Bill, local authorities become liable to pay compensation or legal costs where governors of schools with financial delegation have in good faith contravened statutory or contractual requirements, including the provisions of the Race Relations, Sex Discrimination and Employment Protection Acts, and collective agreements with trades unions.

Mr. Dunn: In so far as such costs relate to dismissal of staff, the Bill provides that the local education authority shall meet them outside the school's delegated budget unless it has good reason for deducting them from that budget. For other cases it would be a matter to be settled as part of the operation of schemes of financial delegation whether such costs were to be met outside the school's delegated budget or could be deducted from that budget.

Consultancy (Higher Education)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many tenders were sought and received for his Department's consultancy with Tyzack and Partners on higher education corporation governing bodies.

Mr. Jackson: The Department invited three firms to submit proposals for consultancy on the membership of higher education corporations. Proposals were received from two of these.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the cost to public funds of the employment of Tyzack and Partners as consultants to advise his Department on the composition of higher education corporation governing bodies.

Mr. Jackson: The contract is for the sum of £50,000, exclusive of VAT.

Universities and Polytechnics

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has for safeguarding the independence of universities and polytechnics.

Mr. Jackson: The Government have no wish to see the proper freedoms of universities and polytechnics eroded. Universities' and polytechnics' substantial reliance on public funds means that the interests of the taxpayer have to be taken into account alongside desirable institutional autonomy. The right balance is being explored in debate during the Education Reform Bill's parliamentary passage.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what additional staff will be recruited by the London residuary body in the event of the abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Dunn: Most of the executive work of the London residuary body in respect of the Inner London education authority will take place at a stage when the body's work arising from the abolition of the Greater London council has largely ceased. The question whether additional staff will need to be recruited will be considered at the appropriate stage.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Merchant Navy Reserve (Bounty)

Mr. Barry Field : To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the new bounty proposed for the Merchant Navy Reserve is to be treated in the same way as the bounty paid to the Territorial Army and be free of tax.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The tax position of the proposed bounty for members of the Merchant Navy Reserve cannot be settled until the precise obligations of reservists, which give rise to the payment, have been established. I understand these are currently under detailed consideration.

Income Tax

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further research he intends to commission into the correlation between cutting the higher rates of income tax and the work effort and efficiency of those affected.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend has no plans to commission any research on this subject.

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much income tax will be paid in the present financial year *(a)* by a married man with two children earning £100,000 a year, *(b)* by a single man with no dependants earning £100,000 a year, *(c)* by a married man with two children earning £25,000 a year, *(d)* by a single man with no dependants earning £25,000 a year, *(e)* by a married man with two children earning £7,500 a year and *(f)* by a single man with no dependants earning £7,500 a year, in each case assuming no other income and no allowances other than personal allowances.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information is in the table:

Income tax liability, 1987-88

Annual earnings £	*Single man* £	*Married man* £
7,500	1,370·25	1,000·35
25,000	6,811·75	6,195·25
100,000	50,203·00	49,381·00

The calculations assume that the man's earnings are his only source of income and that he has no reliefs or allowances other than the appropriate personal allowance. The number of children in a family does not affect the tax liability.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the latest figures for levels of gross domestic product per capita in each of the United Kingdom regions.

Mr. Major: Provisional figures for gross domestic product per capita by standard region are available on page 86 of *Economic Trends*, November 1987, a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library. The figures are as shown:

Gross domestic product per head (£), factor cost: current prices:

	1986[2]
North	5,142
Yorkshire and Humberside	5,215
East Midlands	5,378
East Anglia	5,643
South East	6,575
South West	5,380
West Midlands	5,069
North West	5,232
Wales	4,795
Scotland	5,234
Northern Ireland	3,889
United Kingdom[1]	5,597

[1] Excluding the Continental Shelf region.
[2] Provisional.

Manufacturing Investment

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest projections for the growth of manufacturing investment in each of the regions of England, Wales and Scotland and the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Major: Official projections for individual regions do not exist. The Department of Trade and Industry's latest investment intentions survey, published in December 1987, projected a rise of 11 per cent. in United Kingdom manufacturing investment in 1988.

Interest Rates

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning interest rates.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on this subject.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the real level of interest rates in the United Kingdom, West Germany and Japan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: There is no unique measure of "real" interest rates. But the OECD's monthly publication "Main Economic Indicators" gives various interest rates and price indices for OECD countries.

Local Authorities

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of total central Government revenue is given to local authorities.

Mr. Major: 20·5 per cent. The February 1988 edition of CSO's financial statistics shows that in 1986-87 (the latest full year available) current and capital grants from central Government amounted to £22,831 million out of a total Consolidated Fund revenue of £111,211 million.

Tax Matters (Convention)

Mr. Madel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he proposes to take on the joint Organisation

for Economic Co-operation and Development and Council of Europe convention on mutual administration assistance in tax matters, which was opened for signature on 25 January.

Mr. Norman Lamont: We have already undertaken to consult widely among interested parties before reaching a decision on whether the United Kingdom should sign this convention and, if so, with what reservations. I have therefore asked the Inland Revenue to seek the views of the representative bodies which have expressed an interest in this matter, including the C B I and representative bodies of the accountancy and legal professions. We will be glad to consider any views which any other interested party may wish to express. Comments should be sent by the end of September. An Inland Revenue press release issued today gives further details.

Privatisation Sales (Advertising)

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the cost to the Government of advertising in each of the privatisation sales since British Telecom.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The cost to the Government of corporate and flotation advertising and advertising agency fees, exclusive of VAT, for each privatisation and residual share sale from British Telecom onwards is as follows:

	£ million
British Telecom	9·7
Britoil	3·0
Cable and Wireless	2·2
British Aerospace	1·7
British Gas	21·4
British Airways	2·8
Rolls-Royce	1·6
BAA	4·9
British Petroleum	18·3

This reply replaces that given to the hon. Member for Dunfermline East on 18 January, which did not treat each sale on a consistent basis and also contained inaccuracies.

Charities

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the procedures for registering charities in Scotland by the Inland Revenue, in the light of the 16th report of the Public Accounts Committee on the registration of charities in England and Wales.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 1 March 1988]:* There is no system of public registration of charities in Scotland. The Inland Revenue deals with claims to the tax exemptions available to bodies established for charitable purposes, on the same basis as it does elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Questions on general matters affecting charities in Scotland are for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Taxpayers

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what regional information is available on numbers and percentages of taxpayers on 50 per cent., 75 per cent., 100 per cent., 150 per cent., 200 per cent., 500 per cent., 700 per cent., 1000 per cent. and 2000 per cent. of average earnings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lawson *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* Information is not available in precisely the form requested. The table, based on the survey of personal incomes for 1985-86, shows the number of single people and married couples liable to tax on their total income and where the main source of income is pay. The ranges of annual pay shown in the table (of the husband in the case of married couples), are based on average full-time male weekly earnings in 1985-86 of about £198. Neither part-time nor part-year employees can be distinguished; thus those having average weekly earnings whilst in employment but working for less than half the year will be included in the less than 50 per cent. range. Pay will in some cases include taxable unemployment benefits or statutory sick pay. I regret that reliable information for the highest ranges of earnings requested is not available.

Numbers and percentages of single people and couples with pay as main source of income

Range of pay and percentage of average fulltime male weekly earnings at an annual rate	*North*		*Yorkshire and Humberside*	
	Numbers (thousands)	*Per cent.*	*Numbers (thousands)*	*Per cent.*
Up to 50 per cent.	185	22·9	319	25·1
Over 50 per cent. and up to 75 per cent.	216	26·8	354	27·9
Over 75 per cent. and up to 100 per cent.	220	27·3	316	24·9
Over 100 per cent. and up to 150 per cent.	150	18·6	225	17·7
Over 150 per cent. and up to 200 per cent.	27	3·4	37	2·9
Over 200 per cent.	8	0·9	20	1·5
Total	806	100·0	1,270	100·0

Numbers and percentages of single people and couples with pay as main source of income

Range of pay and percentage of average fulltime male weekly earnings at an annual rate	*North West*		*East Midlands*	
	Numbers (thousands)	*Per cent.*	*Numbers (thousands)*	*Per cent.*
Up to 50 per cent.	447	27·0	264	24·8
Over 50 per cent. and up to 75 per cent.	481	29·0	284	26·7
Over 75 per cent. and up to 100 per cent.	366	22·1	285	26·8
Over 100 per cent. and up to 150 per cent.	266	16·1	178	16·7
Over 150 per cent. and up to 200 per cent.	59	3·6	34	3·2

Range of pay and percentage of average fulltime male weekly earnings at an annual rate	North West		East Midlands	
	Numbers (thousands)	Per cent.	Numbers (thousands)	Per cent.
Over 200 per cent.	36	2·2	17	1·6
Total	1,650	100·0	1,060	100·0

Numbers and percentages of single people and couples with pay as main source of income

Range of pay and percentage of average fulltime male weekly earnings at an annual rate	West Midlands		East Anglia	
	Numbers (thousands)	Per cent.	Numbers (thousands)	Per cent.
Up to 50 per cent.	391	27·6	131	26·3
Over 50 per cent. and up to 75 per cent.	388	27·4	119	23·8
Over 75 per cent. and up to 100 per cent.	383	27·0	119	23·8
Over 100 per cent. and up to 150 per cent.	200	14·1	100	20·0
Over 150 per cent. and up to 200 per cent.	33	2·3	19	3·8
Over 200 per cent.	22	1·5	12	2·3
Total	1,420	100·0	499	100·0

Numbers and percentages of single people and couples with pay as main source of income

Range of pay and percentage of average fulltime male weekly earnings at an annual rate	South East		South West	
	Numbers (thousands)	Per cent.	Numbers (thousands)	Per cent.
Up to 50 per cent.	1,190	23·2	283	26·1
Over 50 per cent. and up to 75 per cent.	1,190	23·1	280	25·8
Over 75 per cent. and up to 100 per cent.	1,180	23·1	264	24·4
Over 100 per cent. and up to 150 per cent.	1,040	20·2	200	18·5
Over 150 per cent. and up to 200 per cent.	313	6·1	41	3·7
Over 200 per cent.	223	4·3	17	1·5
Total	5,130	100·0	1,080	100·0

Range of pay	Numbers and percentages of single people and couples with pay as main source of income					
	Wales		Scotland		Northern Ireland	
Percentage of average full time male weekly earnings at an annual rate	Numbers (thousands)	Percentage	Numbers (thousands)	Percentage	Numbers (thousands)	Percentage
Up to 50 per cent.	191	29·9	354	24·5	103	29·4
Over 50 per cent. and up to 75 per cent.	190	29·7	404	28·0	101	29·0
Over 75 per cent. and up to 100 per cent.	117	18·3	369	25·5	74	21·2
Over 100 per cent. and up to 150 per cent.	114	17·8	245	16·9	50	14·4
Over 150 per cent. and up to 200 per cent.	20	3·2	46	3·2	14	4·1
Over 200 per cent.	8	1·2	27	1·9	7	1·9
TOTAL	639	100·0	1,450	100·0	349	100·0

Note. Members of Her Majesty's forces and the Merchant Navy are excluded from the tables.

Rating Valuations

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide the terms of reference given to the interdepartmental group of the Board of Inland Revenue and the Scottish Session which is examining differences between English and Scottish assessors' valuation practice for rating purposes; when this group was set up; how many members it has; and when he expects it to report.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* A steering committee on harmonising rating valuation practice in England and Wales and Scotland was set up in 1986. It comprises the executive of the Scottish Assessors' Association and an official from Inland Revenue valuation office. In addition, there are four working groups on individual aspects of harmonisation. There are no formal terms of reference and the exercise will not lead to a formal report or document for publication. However, it is hoped that the groups' observations will lead to proposals to reduce differences in valuation practice during and after 1990.

Taxable Income

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, in the manner of his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, columns *473-74*, he will estimate the effect of a one-earner, two-child family, of introducing a reduced rate band of 20 per cent. on *(a)* the first £1,000, *(b)* the first £1,500, *(c)* the first £1,750, and *(d)* the first £2,000 of taxable income; and if he will estimate the full year costs, at 1988-89 incomes, of each measure.

Mr. Norman Lamont *(holding answer 19 February 1988]:* The table shows the gain from each of the reduced

rate bands for a married man whose wife does not work and the full year costs at 1988-89 income levels of each measure. The calculation of the gain assumes that the taxpayer has sufficient income to receive the full benefit from each reduced rate band. The cost of each reduced rate band has been calculated by comparison with the 1987-88 income tax regime indexed to 1988-89 levels according to the statutory formula. It has been assumed that separate reduced rate bands are available to both husband and wife where the wife has earnings.

Width of 20 per cent. reduced rate band £ *per year*	*Benefit to a one-earner couple* £ *per year*	*Full year cost at 1988-89 levels of income* £ *million*
1,000	70·00	1,650
1,500	105.00	2,400
1,750	122.50	2,750
2,000	140.00	3,100

Third World

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the totals of profits and dividends from outward investment repatriated to the United Kingdom from the Third world and to the Third world from the United Kingdom in each of the last five years.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 4 November 1987 at column *752*.

THE ARTS

Book Lending

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he intends to charge for basic book-lending at libraries.

Mr. Luce: No. As I have said in my recently published Green Paper, the Government's objectives are to preserve and support the provision at public expense of the free basic book-lending and reference services of public libraries. Within this context, I also want to encourage library authorities to expand their sources of revenue so as to provide their customers with better and more client-oriented and cost-effective services.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Lunar House

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing the number of applications by category dealt with at Lunar house in each year since 1979 and the number of staff dealing with them.

Mr. Renton: The number of citizenship applications dealt with since 1979 and after entry decisions dealt with since 1984 (comparable figures are not available before) are as follows:

Applications for citizenship completed

Year of Decision	*Category of Case* *Naturalisation*	*Registration*
1979	2,832	29,023
1980	7,442	31,542
1981	7,903	48,063
1982	8,416	73,643
1983	8,675	52,444
1984	15,226	62,894
1985	16,262	40,739
1986	15,209	35,327
1987	[1]19,895	[1]50,546

[1] Provisional

After-entry decisions[2] made 1984-87

Category of case	*Year of Decision* *1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Visitors	31,600	39,500	44,000	36,200
Working holiday makers	2,900	5,200	3,500	3,800
Students/trainees	72,300	81,000	78,000	71,500
Au pairs	1,400	1,600	1,700	1,300
Work permit holders	13,900	13,200	13,100	11,500
Permit free employment	13,700	14,100	12,500	10,200
Business/independent means	2,300	2,400	2,600	2,600
Fiance(e)s	500	500	400	300
Marriage	4,800	6,500	7,400	7,000
Refugees/asylum	3,100	4,100	3,500	2,800
Settlement	25,700	29,400	26,000	26,700
Others[1]	26,100	32,400	30,800	32,700
All decisions	198,200	227,900	223,500	206,600

[1] Largely return of passport cases.
[2] Including decisions taken by the regional public inquiry offices but excluding entry clearance cases.

The number of staff dealing with this work in the immigration and nationality department at Lunar house in January for each of the years 1985-88 was given in a reply to a question from the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on 9 February, at column *137*.

Ian Richard Thain

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the grounds for his Department's decision to accept Ian Richard Thain, convicted in Northern Ireland, into a prison in Britain.

Mr. Hurd: Private Thain's application for permanent transfer to an establishment in England and Wales was regarded favourably in the light of the normal criteria governing transfers between the two jurisdictions.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the arrangements made for Ian Richard Thain's imprisonment in Britain provided for a continuing role or responsibility by the Northern Ireland Office, given the grounds and place of his conviction.

Mr. Hurd: No.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he made the decision to release Ian Richard Thain on parole;

(2) what review body or parole board considered Ian Richard Thain's case; what was the date the matter was first referred to this body; what information this body had

before it in its considerations; what was the date the decision to recommend parole was taken; and to whom this recommendation was passed;

(3) what information was available to him as to whether Ian Thain was returning to Army service when the decision was made on his parole.

Mr. Hurd: Private Thain's case was considered by the local review committee at Liverpool prison on 3 September 1986 and subsequently by the parole board on 13 October 1986. In common with the cases of all life-sentence prisoners, the information before the parole board would have included full details of the nature and circumstances of the offences, the prisoner's previous record and response in prison, and the views of the trial judge and the Lord Chief Justice on the requirements of retribution and deterrence for the offence. The board would also have taken into account the degree of risk to the public if the prisoner were to be released. Having taken all these factors into account the parole board recommended Private Thain's release on licence, and I accepted the board's recommendation.

Both the parole board and I were aware that Private Thain's services had been retained by the Army and also that an undertaking had been given that, if released, there was no question of his again serving in Northern Ireland.

Greenham Common

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to how many individuals have been *(a)* prosecuted, *(b)* convicted and *(c)* imprisoned under those Greenham Common byelaws which Reading Crown court ruled on 25 February were invalidly made.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not available from the records of court proceedings held centrally.

Fire Stations (Closures)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each fire station in England and Wales that has been closed since May 1979; and if he will give details of the appliance deployment and whole time, day manning, or retained, fire fighter staffing, as appropriate, at each immediately prior to closure.

Mr. John Patten: The information sought is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. If, however, the hon. Member has any particular case in mind he may wish to write to me.

Fire Brigades

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each local authority fire brigade in England and Wales; and if he will provide details of the net loss of uniformed operational fire fighting posts which have been implemented in each, with ministerial consent, under the Fire Services Act 1947, for each financial year since 1978-79.

Mr. John Patten: The information sought, but on a calendar year basis, can be derived from the annual reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services for England and Wales for the relevant years, copies of which are in the Library. The Secretary of State's approval is required before a fire authority may reduce the number of whole-time members of the brigade other than those whose duties do not normally include fire fighting, and of part-time members of the brigade.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each local authority fire brigade in England and Wales; and if he will provide details of any net loss of fire appliances which have been implemented in each, with ministerial consent, under the Fire Services Act 1947, for each financial year since 1978-79.

Mr. John Patten: The local authority fire brigades in England and Wales are listed in the annual reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services for England and Wales, copies of which are in the Library. The other information sought is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners on remand from the Metropolitan police area were held in *(a)* Grimsby police station, *(b)* Lincoln police station, *(c)* Hull police station, *(d)* Scunthorpe police station, *(e)* Bradford police station and *(f)* Halifax police station on 1 March.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On Tuesday 1 March, 38 prisoners from the Metropolitan police area were held in Grimsby police station; seven in Lincoln police station; 34 in Hull police station and 16 in Halifax police station. No such prisoners were held in Scunthorpe or Bradford police stations on that date.

Leeds Prison

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* young, *(b)* long-term and *(c)* remand prisoners there were in Her Majesty's prison Leeds on the latest available figures.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information is given in the following table.

Population of Leeds prison on 31 January 1988: by type of prisoner

Type of prisoner	*Young offenders*[3]	*Adult prisoners*	*Total*
Untried	251	422	673
Convicted unsentenced	33	51	84
Non-criminal	1	8	9
Sentenced:			
Short and medium term[1]	37	396	433
Long term[2]	5	172	177
Total	327	1,049	1,376

[1] Including fine defaulters.
[2] Young offenders over three years, adult prisoners over four years.
[3] Persons under 21.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were in Her Majesty's prison Leeds in *(a)* 4 June 1985 and *(b)* 12 February 1988.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 4 June 1985, 1,306 prisoners were held in HM prison Leeds. On 12 February 1988 the figure was 1,410.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects construction work to start and to be completed on the extension of Her Majesty's prison Leeds.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Work on the redevelopment of HM prison Leeds is being undertaken in four phases, the first of which has now begun. It is expected that the final phase will be completed by August 1996.

London Information Business School

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what interchange of computer information took place prior to the raid upon the London Information Business School in connection with immigration matters; which other Government Departments were involved; whether this interchangeability is ad hoc or is to be permanent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: None.

Immigration Officers (Tottenham)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the cost of the proposed visit of immigration officers to the constituency of the hon. Member for Tottenham on 14 March.

Mr. Renton: I assume the hon. Member is referring to a visit by officials from the Home Office to Haringey on 15 March about which I wrote to him on 18 February. The costs incurred by the officials who travel to and from Haringey will be very small.

Police Officers (Killings)

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many killings of police officers in England and Wales, resulting in murder convictions, have taken place in each year since 1980.

Mr. John Patten: The information is given in the following table.

Offences currently[1] *recorded as homicide where the victim was a police officer by the result of court proceedings or other outcome England and Wales: Number of persons*

Year initially recorded	*Number of offences (victims)*	*Decided by the court to be*			*Other outcome*
		Murder	*Section 2 manslaughter*	*Other manslaughter*	
1980	1	1	–	–	–
1981	2	1	–	1	–
1982	6	3	–	1	2 (one suspect – committed suicide
1983	3	–	–	–	3 (no suspects)
1984	3	1	–	–	1 (no suspects, one suspect died)
1985	2	1	–	–	1 (suspects acquitted)
1986	1	–	–	1	–
1987[2]	3	1	–	–	1 (awaiting trial) 1 (suspect committed suicide)

[1] As at 1 March 1988.
[2] Provisional.

Prison Officers (Killings)

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many killings of prison officers in England and Wales, resulting in murder convictions, have taken place in each year since 1957.

Mr. John Patten: Since 1957, in England and Wales, one prison officer has been killed (in 1965) and the result was conviction for murder.

PRIME MINISTER

Canada

Q85. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to pay an official visit to Canada.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend will be attending the economic summit in Toronto in June.

Cawston

Q119. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to make an official visit to Cawston, near Rugby.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend has at present no plans to do so.

Identity Cards

Q160. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will set up a Cabinet Committee to consider the introduction of a system of identity cards.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I have nothing further to add to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) on 26 January, at column *133*, on the establishment of a Cabinet Committee. The introduction of identity cards along the lines of those issued in some European countries has been considered from time to time, but we are not persuaded that a sufficiently strong case could be made out for their issue here.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March.

Mr. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 3 March.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend is in Brussels for a NATO summit meeting.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Masons

Mr. Madden: To ask the Lord President of the Council if any Officer of the House, in the last five years , has booked or sought to book facilities within the House for purposes related to the Masonic order.

Mr. Wakeham: No such purposes have been declared by an Officer of the House. In accordance with the rules of the House, such facilities should only be booked for private meetings in connection with a parliamentary subject.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Lord President of the Council (1) if he will take steps to seek to make disclosure of membership of the Masonic order a requirement of the Register of Members' Interests;

(2) if he will take steps to seek to make disclosure of membership of the Masonic order a requirement of the Register of Parliamentary Journalists.

Mr. Wakeham: No. Any consideration of changes in the scope of the Register of Members' Interests or the Register of Parliamentary Journalists would, in the first instance, be a matter for the Select Committee on Members' Interests.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Headstart Programme

Mr. Bevan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many inner-city residents in the Government's task force areas will benefit from enterprise training under the headstart programme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Industrial Society, which runs the headstart in the inner-cities programme, plans to provide enterprise advice and training to at least 6,000 inner-city residents during the present one-year contract. The programme is funded jointly by my Department and the MSC, but our input is more than matched by the commitment of the society's member firms, whose managers put tremendous effort into the programme's seminars and conferences.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Cran: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many members of staff within his Department are located within each region outside London; what percentage this constitutes of staff within his Department; and what were the comparable figures in 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Direct comparisons between 1988 and 1979 are not possible because of machinery of Government changes. The figures for 1 January 1988 for DTI, with illustrative figures for employment by its predecessor Departments in 1979, are follows:

	1 April 1979	*Percentage of DTI total*	*1 January 1988*	*Percentage of DTI total*
Scotland	910	5·3	690	5·5
Wales	2,320	13·5	1,660	13·3

	[1] 1 April 1979	Percentage of DTI total	1 January 1988	Percentage of DTI total
Northern Ireland	35	0·2	5	—
North East	390	2·3	250	2·0
North West	490	2·8	380	3·0
Yorkshire and Humberside	250	1·5	220	1·8
East Midlands	150	0·9	170	1·4
West Midlands	200	1·2	280	2·2
South West	320	1·9	170	1·4
South East (excluding London)	750	4·4	600	4·8
Total Regions	5,815	33·9	4,425	35·4

[1] Department of Industry, of Trade and of Prices and of Consumer Protection.

Industrial Output

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which countries have had a smaller increase than the United Kingdom in industrial output between 1979 and 1987.

Mr. Maude: Of the major industrial countries, France had a smaller increase in industrial output than the United Kingdom between 1979 and 1986. However, since 1981 industrial production in the United Kingdom has increased more rapidly than in France, Germany, Italy or the United States of America. (Comparable figures are not yet available for 1987.)

European Regional Development Fund

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will seek an extension of the European regional development fund non-quota textile area regulation initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Council regulation (EEC) No. 724/75, on which the 1980 and 1984 textile area "non-quota" regulations are based, has been repealed. The current textile area regulation expires on 31 March 1989 and no further financial allocations can be made under it.

These special "non-quota" measures were always intended to operate for a limited period and to depend on the substantial European regional development fund funding which was temporarily made available.

However, small and medium-sized firms throughout Great Britain may now apply for the new consultancy grants recently announced as part of my Department's enterprise initiative.

Space Research (Report)

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he intends to respond to the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology's report on space research.

Mr. Atkins: A debate on the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology's report on United Kingdom space policy is planned in another place for 30 March. The Government's reply will take account of the views expressed in the debate.

Management (Report)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the recommendation of the efficiency committee report "Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps," which are within the area of responsibility of his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I intend to apply the recommendations in this report as rapidly and extensively as possible. The Department provides a wide range of services to industry and commerce, many from offices outside London, and the recommendations in the report should help in our drive to improve both the quality of these services and the value for money obtained by the taxpayer. Our first candidate will be the Companies Registration Office, whose headquarters are in Cardiff, and which employs just over 1,000 staff there and in offices in London and Edinburgh.

Chemical Industries Association

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met the director general of the Chemical Industries Association; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. and learned Friend has not met the director general of the Chemical Industries Association in his capacity as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, but there are frequent meetings between the association and Ministers in this Department. A wide range of issues of mutual interest is discussed.

Recording Industry

Mr. Butler: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what were the overseas earnings of the British recording industry in the latest available year.

Mr. Maude: The overseas earnings of the United Kingdom recording industry, comprising royalties from overseas on recordings made in the United Kingdom, services provided to overseas residents by the United Kingdom recording industry, profits and dividends from overseas branches and subsidiaries of United Kingdom recording companies, cannot be separately identified in the information provided to the Department for the balance of payments. In 1987 exports of pre-recorded gramophone records, tapes and other similar media were valued at £264 million.

EC (Internal Market)

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the extent and impact of the proposals contained in the European Commission's White Paper, "Europe without frontiers; Towards a Large Internal Market", in-so-far as his Department is concerned.

Mr. Alan Clark: Proposals contained in the European Commission's White Paper "Completing the Internal Market, 1985," cover a wide spectrum of economic activity. Areas of interest to my Department include the elimination of physical and technical barriers to the free

movement of goods; the liberalisation of trade in service; and the removal of various restrictions on freedom of establishment for the professions.

Removal of trade barriers will improve access to a market of 320 million people, encourage the growth of trade with other Member States, further improve economic efficiency and reduce costs to business.

Legal Profession

Mr. Stern: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any plans to increase the flexibility of the legal profession.

Mr. Maude: Continuing work is being undertaken by my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor to improve the efficiency with which legal services are provided. The Government also await with interest any proposals which may emerge from current consultations within the profession itself.

Textile Consignment (Occupied Territories)

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what response he has received from the European Commission following the alterations by Israeli authorities of the occupied territories' certification of origin of consignment of textiles for a United Kingdom customer; and what action he proposes taking.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Commission need to consult the Israeli authorities; I am pressing it to get an early response.

Carbon Carbon Technology (Export)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will institute an inquiry into the circumstances in which carbon carbon technology was exported to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics by Consarc of Bellshill in contravention of the regulations governing the export of sensitive materials to Communist bloc countries; what co-operation Her Majesty's Government intend to give to the United States Congressional inquiry into this matter: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) on 29 February, at column 416. I see no need to institute an inquiry.

Citizens Band Radio

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans the Government have for 934 MHz citizens' band radio.

Mr. Butcher: I am pleased to make such a statement. As the House knows, the Government, in common with other Administrations in Europe, are to consider the introduction of a short range radio (SRR) system in the band 933-935 MHz. One of the existing users of this band is the 934 MHz CB allocation. Approximately 3,000 users have these sets out of a total of over 115,000 CB licensees.

Once SRR becomes widely used, it is inevitable that the CB service will suffer an increasing level of interference and it is important that potential users of the band are aware of this, and that the many potential users of any new SRR service are adequately protected.

I have decided therefore that the Performance Specification MPT 1321 to which 934 MHz CB transceivers are manufacturer certified should be withdrawn from 30 December 1988. This will provide warning to traders and potential users alike that no new sets should be made or imported from this date.

It is of course only fair that existing users of the CB band get a good life from their sets. I can assure users that their existing equipment may continue to be used for its foreseeable useful life.

Merger Control

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when full details of the proposed legislative changes in merger control, announced in the recent White Paper "DTI—The department for Enterprise", will be published.

Mr. Maude: The details of the proposed legislative changes in merger control are being published today as part of a DTI paper on the policy and procedures of merger control. Copies of this paper are being placed in the Library of the House and in the Vote Office.

The paper sets out the present policy towards mergers; that the main consideration for determining whether a merger should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission will continue to be its potential effect on competition. However, the law will continue to give the Secretary of State discretion to refer mergers on other public interest grounds. The paper discusses some of the concerns expressed about this policy and restates the underlying rationale for the Government's view. We believe that intervention by public authorities in lawful commercial transactions should be kept to a minimum, since broadly speaking the free commercial decisions of private decision-makers in competitive markets result in the most desirable outcomes for the economy as a whole. The paper goes on to look at this rationale in more detail and to set out how the potential effect on competition is assessed.

While the broad thrust of merger policy remains unchanged, the Government have always considered there is room for improvement in merger procedures. A particular consideration is the length of time taken by the procedures; but the Government also want to ensure that the system is as flexible and efficient as possible.

The paper sets out three major legislative changes directed towards improving the procedures; a new formal, but voluntary, procedure for pre-notifying mergers; a new provision for legally binding undertakings to be given in some cases without an MMC reference; and a new statutory charge to cover the costs of the merger control process.

Prenotification.

Those who choose to prenotify a proposed merger will need to submit answers to a standard questionnaire about the transaction and businesses involved. In simple cases, this information will allow a proposed merger to be automatically cleared within four weeks provided it has been publicly announced. In more complex cases, the OFT will need more detailed information and in those cases the parties will be informed that the right to automatic clearance has lapsed. I would expect companies to see considerable advantages in using this prenotification system. If a merger is not prenotified, it will generally take

longer than four weeks to decide whether or not a reference to the MMC should be made. Moreover, mergers which are not prenotified will remain liable to reference to the MMC for a period of up to five years. Firms therefore have much to gain in certainty and speed under the new procedure.

Statutory Undertakings

Some mergers pose a threat to competition which is obvious even from a cursory examination, but which may nevertheless be capable of being removed by some modification of the merger arrangements. The parties to such mergers are often willing to promise such modifications. At present, however, there is no means by which such undertakings can be given statutory force except by invoking a full Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigation. Therefore, we propose to introduce new provisions for statutory undertakings to be given to the Secretary of State by the parties, as a possible alternative to a full Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigation. These undertakings may cover such possibilities as divestment of some of the assets of the merging enterprises or the post-merger behaviour of the new group. This new provision will give the Director General of Fair Trading an enhanced role in negotiating modifications to a merger proposal and will provide a quicker and more flexible mechanism for dealing with competition problems in certain cases. The paper goes into the proposal in more detail.

Charging

All these improvements in speed and quality will involve resource costs at the Office of Fair Trading and the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The Government propose to introduce a statutory charge to cover the costs of the merger control process. Details remain to be settled: one possibility is a charge payable by the acquiring company and leviable on mergers where a controlling interest is acquired and where the assets test is satisfied. The charging structure will be kept as simple as possible.

Apart from these three major changes, the paper suggests a number of other changes in procedure aimed at speeding up and improving the present process such as closer integration between the Office of Fair Trading and the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. It is the Government's aim that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigations should in most cases last no more than three months.

Newspapers

Cm. 278 in January announced that legislation will be introduced to enable the Secretary of State to specify the period within which the Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigations into newspaper mergers should be completed. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission has said that it will complete future inquiries into the general run of newspaper mergers within two months.

The Department of Trade and Industry has also examined its own procedures for handling cases and will issue a guidance note giving details of the procedures and specifying the information required by the Department in considering all applications for consent to a newspaper transfer. Early contact between the Department and parties to transfers will be encouraged and the streamlining of procedures within the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and the Department will make it more difficult for companies to argue that an Monopolies and Mergers Commission inquiry is ruled out by financial urgency.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Statistics

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to announce the level of gross national product devoted to official aid in 1987.

Mr. Chris Patten: I expect to be able to inform Parliament of the figure for 1987 by early June.

South African Development Co-ordination Conference

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list British contributions to South African Development Co-ordination Conference for each year since its formation.

Mr. Chris Patten: Since the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference was formed, the United Kingdom has committed the following amounts: £10 million in 1980-81; £2 million in 1982-83; £13 million in 1985-86; £10 million in 1986-87; £10 million in 1987-88.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the level of British bilateral aid to each of the member states of South African Development Corporation Conference from 1979 to 1986 inclusive, in 1986 prices.

Mr. Chris Patten: The figures are as follows:

Gross bilateral aid to SADCC countries at 1986 prices

£ thousand

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Angola	74	17	120	66	81	160	170	317
Botswana	13,790	16,661	13,199	9,111	15,207	17,530	9,090	12,805
Lesotho	11,457	6,648	8,236	5,116	5,373	5,742	2,467	3,784
Malawi	43,153	23,872	20,705	20,440	16,730	14,220	14,511	15,019
Mozambique	11,020	6,680	6,961	2,316	2,066	4,589	8,666	7,424
Swaziland	14,449	9,339	5,363	7,661	6,483	6,174	3,497	7,722
Tanzania	41,657	46,348	38,877	32,889	34,769	36,248	18,612	12,715
Zambia	50,451	29,864	31,214	17,134	17,720	36,104	26,469	35,366
Zimbabwe	8,772	52,532	64,771	25,832	22,261	16,528	24,484	12,242

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the level of British bilateral aid to each of the member states of the South African Development Corporation Conference from 1979 to 1986 inclusive.

Mr. Chris Patten: The figures are as follows:

Gross bilateral aid to South African Development Corporation Conference countries

	1979 £000	*1980 £000*	*1981 £000*	*1982 £000*	*1983 £000*	*1984 £000*	*1985 £000*	*1986 £000*
Angola	43	12	93	55	71	146	164	317
Botswana	7,970	11,546	10,199	7,570	13,289	15,975	8,775	12,805
Lesotho	6,622	4,607	6,364	4,251	4,695	5,233	2,382	3,784
Malawi	24,941	16,543	15,999	16,984	14,620	12,959	14,008	15,019
Mozambique	6,369	4,629	5,379	1,924	1,805	4,182	8,366	7,424
Swaziland	8,351	6,472	4,144	6,366	5,665	5,626	3,376	7,722
Tanzania	24,076	32,119	30,040	27,328	30,384	33,033	17,967	12,715
Zambia	29,159	20,696	24,119	14,237	15,485	32,901	25,552	35,366
Zimbabwe	5,070	36,405	50,048	21,464	19,453	15,062	23,636	12,242

Source: British Aid Statistics.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Waste

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the outcome of the European Parliament special committee of inquiry meeting into the mismanagement of nuclear waste in Europe in Brussels on 22 and 23 February.

Mr. Mellor: The meeting was of a preliminary nature and reached no conclusions. We understand that the Committee intends to hold its next meeting in Strasbourg on 10 March, to be followed by a series of formal hearings. They will also be requesting written evidence.

Panama

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on current relations between Her Majesty's Government and Panama.

Mr. Eggar: We maintain normal diplomatic relations with Panama. Together with our EC partners we have expressed deep concern about recent developments in Panama and have appealed to the present rulers of Panama to open the way for internal peace and democracy.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice is being given to British citizens in Panama in the light of recent events in that country.

Mr. Eggar: The situation in Panama remains calm. We have no reason to believe British citizens are at risk, but inquirers are being advised to contact Her Majesty's embassy on arrival for the latest information.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contingency plans exist to protect British maritime interests in Panama in the event of the closure of the canal.

Mr. Eggar: We keep the situation under constant review and are in touch with British shipping interests.

ENERGY

Electricity (Privatisation)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what recent representations he has received concerning the future of the nuclear industry following privatisation of the electricity industry.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have received representations from electricity consumers, unions, other nationalised industries and other interested parties about a wide range of issues related to the privatisation of the electricity supply industry, including the implications for the future of nuclear power.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if there will be any requirement on the new privatised power company including nuclear plant to renegotiate commercial contracts signed on 24 April 1986, by the Central Electricity Generating Board with British Nuclear Fuels plc for spent nuclear fuel reprocessing at the Sellafield thermal oxide reprocessing plant.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what capital value will be put on the Central Electricity Generating Board technical research centres at *(a)* Barnwood, *(b)* Marchwood and *(c)* Berkeley under privatisation;

(2) what capital value will be put on the Electricity Council research centre on electricity efficiency at Capenhurst under privatisation;

(3) what valuation will be put on *(a)* Central Electricity Generating Board's Magnox plants and *(b)* Central Electricity Generating Board's AGR plants under privatisation.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Government aim to achieve full value for the taxpayer for all parts of the industry, consistent with the Government's objectives for the privatisation. We will be seeking expert advice on the industry's value, but ultimately it will be determined by the market.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what requirements will be laid upon the new large power

company including the nuclear power stations to retain a holding in United Kingdom Nirex Ltd. under privatisation plans.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Details have yet to be considered, but present expectations are that the Central Electricity Generating Board's shareholding in United Kingdom Nirex Ltd. will pass to the successor operator of Central Electricity Generating Board nuclear power stations.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the implications for the present Central Electricity Generating Board commitment to research and development investment in the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority fast reactor programme of proposed privatisation plans.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Central Electricity Generating Board agreed to provide some 30 per cent. of the funding of the fast reactor programme with the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority from 1987-88. After privatisation, it will be a matter for the industry to decide how much it should spend on the fast reactor.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consideration has been given in his preparation of plans to privatise the electricity supply industry to the suitability of the present underwriting insurance arrangements in the case of a major accident at a nuclear power plant.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Arrangements under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 will continue after privatisation.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what valuation will be put on the spent nuclear fuel in storage ponds at Central Electricity Generating Board nuclear reactor sites under privatisation;

(2) what valuation will be put on low and intermediate-level nuclear waste at Central Electricity Generating Board nuclear plant sites under privatisation;

(3) what valuation will be put on *(a)* unreprocessed spent nuclear fuel, *(b)* uranium arisings, *(c)* plutonium arisings and *(d)* nuclear waste arisings from Central Electricity Generating Board nuclear fuel reprocessed at Sellafield under privatisation.

Mr. Michael Spicer: It is too early to say what the valuation of these materials will be at the time of the privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

CEGB

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Parkinson: I meet Lord Marshall frequently, and we discuss a range of matters.

Flue Gas Desulphurisation

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects the first flue gas desulphurisation plant to come into operation.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The CEGB envisages that the first stage of FGD plant planned for the Drax power station will be operational by 1993.

Sellafield

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make available to the European Parliament Committee on Energy Research and Technology the facility attachments agreed with EURATOM for the safeguarding of the British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. Sellafield magnox reprocessing line material balance areas, with all site maps, photographs or information on access routes to the site excused from the documentation.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) on 12 June 1986 at columns *268-69*.

Coal Imports

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the impact of his policy as outlined in the White Paper published on 25 February upon coal imports as they may affect *(a)* deep and *(b)* opencast mining; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The privatised electricity supply industry will be free to purchase its coal from any source. The best protection for United Kingdom coal industry sales to the electricity supply industry is that it should produce reliable supplies of coal at prices which are competitive on the world market. Since we came into office we have backed British Coal with over £9 billion of taxpayers money.

Onshore Licensing

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make an announcement about the results of the second onshore licensing round.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I have today announced the conditional award of 60 new-style exploration licences for blocks in England, Scotland and Wales. The licences allow companies to search and drill for petroleum, subject to the procedures of the planning system and the technical approval of my Department. Where the licences extend into coastal waters stringent conditions will be set to ensure that local interests will be fully taken into account before operations are undertaken.

Details of the awards have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Hot Dry Rock Project

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the outcome of the review conducted in 1987 of the geothermal hot dry rock project being conducted by the Camborne school of mines.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have today announced a new phase of the hot dry rock programme to run from October 1988 and costing up to £8.15 million. The new programme will include:

experimental work on the existing reservoir at Rosemanowes quarry to help test the feasibility of techniques that would be required to create a commercial system in a new reservoir approximately 6 m deep;

an initial design study for a 6km deep system in collaboration with interested industrial companies; supporting technical and economic studies.

Reports of the review are being published and I will arrange for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

TRANSPORT

Ferry Safety

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he has taken to improve the safety of roll-on/roll-off ferries since the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster of 6 March 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: Since the tragedy at Zeebrugge, I have been giving top priority to improving the safety of the travelling public on roll-on/roll-off ferries. I have therefore been bringing in a wide range of measures, based largely on the recommendations of the Sheen report, which are aimed at achieving this objective. The action I and my Department have taken since 6 March 1987 is as follows.

First, primary legislation. The Merchant Shipping Bill, which has completed its Committee stage in the House of Commons today, contains several important safety provisions. A ship can be classified as unfit to go to sea for a wider range of reasons. Penalties for an offence will include up to two years imprisonment or an unlimited fine, or both. Charterers and managers will be made responsible for their ships. There will be a totally new requirement that shipowners and managers must take all reasonable steps to secure the safe operation of their ships. The Bill stipulates that masters and other seafarers must exercise all due diligence so that they can carry out their duties without endangering the ship and its passengers; and it explicitly lays down that the duties of a master must include responsibility for the good management and safe operation of the ship.

I also decided to use the Bill to set up an independent marine accidents investigation branch, modelled on the existing air accident investigation branch. It will be headed by a Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents, who will report directly to me. I intend to set up the new branch as soon as possible after Royal Assent.

Second, I have made, or am preparing to make, a number of regulations. From 1 January all United Kingdom roll-on/roll-off passenger ships have had to be equipped with indicator lights and closed-circuit television on the bridge to show the condition of the loading doors, and vehicle spaces must be continuously monitored. From 31 July, these ships will also have to be fitted with self-contained supplementary emergency lighting. From 1 March, these measures have also been extended to foreign ships when they are in United Kingdom ports.

From 29 February, all major United Kingdom passenger ships have had to operate boarding card systems to check and control the numbers of passengers. From 1 April, subject to parliamentary approval, these measures will be applied to foreign ships sailing from United Kingdom ports.

From 9 March, new provisions covering the berthing of ferries and the closing of loading doors will apply to United Kingdom roll-on/roll-off passenger ships. Main loading doors and other weathertight or watertight doors above the water level will have to be closed either at the berth or as soon after leaving as is physically possible. Each operation will have to be reported and logged. Subject to parliamentary approval, these measures will be extended to foreign ships sailing from United Kingdom ports by 1 April.

On 31 July 1987, my Department issued a consultative document porposing that roll-on/roll-off passenger ships should be required to calculate and record draughts and stability before sailing, and that larger ships should be equipped with draught gauges and loading computers. This was followed up on 11 February by the issue, for consultation, of draft statutory instruments which would take effect from 1 November this year.

On 2 September last, my Department issued a consultative document proposing regular checks of the stability of United Kingdom roll-on/roll-off passenger ships, and for the compilation of more comprehensive stability data. Draft statutory instruments, which will take effect from 1 November this year, will be issued shortly.

On 23 December last, my Department circulated, for consultation, draft statutory instruments which would require every lorry to be weighed individually before being loaded on to a roll-on/roll-off passenger ferry, from 1 December this year.

On 22 January, my Department issued a consultative document proposing that special emergency equipment should always be carried, and that equipment should be available and fittings installed to make it easier to move around in a badly-listing ship. These measures will be taken forward together with earlier proposals for the fitting of emergency windows to make escape easier.

On 12 November, a consultative document was issued which proposed that all ships should carry comprehensive operating manuals, and that operators should name an individual in their shore management to be responsible for safety and for ensuring that the manuals are complied with. This document also proposed that log books should be more comprehensive, and that potentially hazardous occurrences should be reported. Draft statutory instruments and a merchant shipping notice, bringing these proposals into effect, will be issued shortly.

I have also asked for draft instruments to be prepared which will cover the loading of roll-on/roll-off passenger ferries and lay down requirements on the securing of lorries and their loads.

Third, we have introduced various measures which have not required legislation. Marine surveyors are stepping up their spot checks of passenger ships, including icognito checks. We have also decided that in future, counsel to the formal investigations into marine accidents will be appointed and instructed by the Attorney-General. In the past, my predecessors have appointed counsel both to the formal investigation and to represent my Department.

Fourth, we have taken steps on the international front. On 9 November the United Kingdom secured the adoption of a resolution at the International Maritime Organisation to give urgent consideration to the safety of roll-on roll-off ferries. The IMO is now considering specific proposals we have made for international measures equivalent to those adopted in this country.

Last October I wrote to the Shipping Ministers of 10 other European countries, proposing co-operation on ferry safety. Officials are discussing co-operative enforcement of our own measures, as well as parallel measures by the other Governments which will affect their own ports and ships.

Fifth, we have done a great deal of work on ship design. On 31 July last my Department called for full data on all roll-on roll-off ferries built before 1980 to be sent in by this April, so that assessments could be made of how these ships stand up to current tests of survivability in collisions. We will analyse this information fully, and intend to reach conclusions by the end of September.

On 30 October my noble Friend the Minister with responsibility for shipping set up a steering committee, under the Surveyor General, to administer a research programme into the stability and related safety aspects of roll-on roll-off passenger vessels.

We have awarded a research contract to examine the stability of existing roll-on roll-off ships, following collision damage, against new standards which are now before the International Maritime Organisation for adoption in April.

We will shortly be inviting tenders for research into the likelihood that a ship on a cross-channel route would be in shallow water if it capsized, and into the means of escape from a ferry on its beam ends.

We will also shortly be inviting tenders for a comprehensive programme of research to examine ways of reducing the risk of large volumes of water reaching the vehicle deck of a roll-on roll-off ferry, and to prevent such an event leading to a catastrophe. It is my intention that this work will be completed by the end of this year. Model tests will start at the same time, but will take somewhat longer.

We have invited further tenders for the application of risk analysis techniques to the safe design and operation of roll-on roll-off ferries, and we will be placing a contract shortly. I intend that this work should be completed by February 1989.

Sixth, there has been some further miscellaneous work. On 1 December my Department issued an advisory note proposing research into lifejackets that are simpler and esier to put on. We will issue a contract shortly.

On the same day, my Department issued another advisory note on the clear labelling of decks, exits, lifejacket stows and muster stations, as well as on emergency procedure information for passengers. We will be issuing merchant shipping notices shortly.

Last month, my Department issued a consultative document on the Sheen report's recommendation that the criteria for carrying lifeboats on ships that are never far from land should be reviewed.

We have also prepared a paper for the International Maritime Organisation, which includes proposals for improving communications between ships and helicopters used for search and rescue.

This long catalogue of follow-up action which we have already taken testifies both to the thoroughness of the Sheen report and to our commitment to implementing it. Since the report was published, we have been systematically working through its proposals and taking whatever action appears to be necessary. I am glad to say there has been widespread recognition of what we have already done.

There have been steady improvements in ship safety, including ship stability, over the past decades; and the Sheen report made various further recommendations for work in this area. Last year I announced that I was making a further £1 million available for a research programme. This work is now being put out to contract, and I am determined that any results which would allow real improvements in passenger safety will be obtained as quickly as possible.

Finally, we have to remember the facts. Roll-on/roll-off ferries in the United Kingdom have an outstandingly good safety record. Until the loss of the European Gateway in 1982, there had been no major loss of life on a British roll-on/roll-off ferry since the Princess Victoria in 1953. They carry upwards of 20 million passengers a year, and their record compares well with other modes of passengr transport.

But that is no excuse for complacency. I am determined to try to do even better.

Near Misses

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority about procedures for the reporting and investigation of air misses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: I have discussed the present arrangements for reporting and investigating air misses with the chairman of the CAA, and I have asked him to review them. We both agree that the purpose of the procedures must be first to enhance flight safety by encouraging reporting so that lessons can be learnt from each incident; and, secondly, so far as is consistent with that, to strengthen public confidence in the air traffic control system through maximum openness and impartiality in the reporting and investigation of air misses. The chairman has now written to me with proposals that I warmly welcome as going a long way to meet our joint objectives. The text of the chairman's letter is as follows:

We have discussed the recent reports of airmisses and the procedure for reporting and investigating them. You asked me urgently to review these arrangements. I am now in a position to make a preliminary report.

We are in agreement that the procedures for handling information about airmisses and for investigating them should meet two objectives:—

(i) Primarily, they should be designed to enhance flight safety by providing lessons from which all involved in aviation can benefit. This means that they should encourage the reporting of incidents by pilots and air traffic controllers, make for the speedy, accurate and impartial investigation of airmisses and draw on all relevant expertise in identifying causes and remedies.

(ii) Secondly, they should give the public confidence in the air traffic control system by making available, wherever reasonably possible, prompt and accurate information about airmisses and their causes and provide for investigations that are not only expert and impartial but are seen to be so.

As you know, the present procedure is that all reported airmisses, military and civil, are brought to the attention of the Joint Airmiss Working Group (JAWG) by the Joint Airmiss Section (JAS) of the NATS. JAS provides the Chairman and Secretariat of the JAWG, but otherwise the Working Group consists entirely of independent members from outside NATS, including representatives from the armed services, civil airlines and pilots and other airspace users. JAWG, having had all airmisses investigated, analyses them and three times a year circulates the results of its analyses in confidence to the aviation community in a volume known as the "Blue Book". We agree that these arrangements for providing information about airmisses, for investigating them and for reporting the outcome are entirely satisfactory for operational purposes.

The CAA publishes statistics for airmisses three times a year based on the results of the JAWG's investigations. These show that there has been no deterioration in safety in the air

over the United Kingdom. Indeed the figures for risk-bearing airmisses involving commercial aircraft in recent years show a downward trend.

In my view, this present system meets the primary objective well. I am most grateful to the NATS Staff in JAS and to the whole membership of the JAWG for the important work they have carried out so painstakingly and effectively over the years.

However, the system was not designed with the secondary objective in mind. I have therefore considered particularly how the procedures might be modified so as to meet the second objective without impairing achievement of the first.

My proposals are set out below.

Initial CAA Reaction to an Airmiss

It has been our practice, in line with the well-established principle of confidentiality, neither to confirm nor to deny the occurrence of an airmiss. Nevertheless, airmisses do become public knowledge and, as recent incidents clearly show, the ensuing publicity without any official information, can present a misleading impression. I have therefore decided that as soon as we know an airmiss has occurred involving an aircraft on a commercial air transport flight, we will from now on announce it with whatever reliable information is immediately available.

Joint Airmiss Working Group

One of the criticisms of the present arrangements for investigating airmisses has been that JAWG is within NATS and may thus appear to be insufficiently independent of the organisation providing most of the UK's air traffic control services. I am entirely satisfied that JAWG (with its outside membership) has always in practice functioned quite indepndently of NATS in carrying out its investigations. It should in any case be borne in mind that an airmiss may result from a failure in the aircraft as well as on the ground.

However, in order to establish the JAWG's independent status still more clearly, I propose to have the Chairman of JAWG submit its reports in future directly to me and the Chief of the Air Staff as the Joint Chairmen of the Air Traffic Control Board. Moreover, I intend to consider with JAWG some enlargement of its membership, with a view for example to including on it one or two members currently active in air traffic control operations.

Publication of JAWG Airmiss Investigations

At present the results of airmiss investigations are circulated widely within the aviation community but are not made public. This policy is designed to maintain the confidence of pilots and airspace users so as to encourage the full and frank reporting which is essential to ensure that airmisses are fully analysed and essential flight safety lessons drawn from them. It has served the cause of flight safety well over many years. Recently, however, it has been undermined by the frequency with which incomplete information has been unofficially disclosed.

I accept that there is a legitimate public interest in the outcome of investigations of airmisses involving commercial air transport aircraft in UK airspace. I have decided therefore that the outcome of these investigations should be published. It is important that this is done in a way that not only satisfies public interest but also avoids jeopardising confidence in the objectivity and impartiality of the investigation system. I intend therefore to seek the advice of aircraft operators and pilots on the manner of publication as well as taking into account other comments that I receive. I shall reach a decision without undue delay.

Reporting of Incidents by Air Traffic Controllers

Recently, it has been alleged that the reporting procedures for controllers are inferior to those for pilots and that controllers' reports, being submitted via their line managers, are sometimes delayed or suppressed. I do not accept these allegations. Nevertheless, we are now in the process of devising improved reporting procedures which will be better designed for recording potentially serious incidents between aircraft and will provide for controllers to send reports direct to the Authority's Safety Data Analysis Unit. We will be consulting controllers' representatives on these procedures before introducing them. Our objective is to ensure that any incidents observed by controllers but not by pilots will be reported.

Conclusion

I believe that the procedural changes described above will go a very long way to meet both the objectives I set out at the beginning of this letter. Not only should they maintain the already-proven effectiveness of the system in analysing the causes of airmisses and distributing information about them within the aviation community; they should also enhance its openness and the visibility of its independence and in doing so help reassure the public about the safety of our airspace.

Cheap Bus Fares

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will consider seeking to amend legislation to allow the provision of cheap bus fares for retired males between the ages of 60 and 65 years, along the lines of provision presently available for other pensioners.

Mr. David Mitchell: We have no plans to change the present arrangements which effectively link eligibility for concessionary travel for the elderly to state pension age. It is open to all transport operators to give additional concessions; British Rail operates a scheme on a commercial basis which provides cheap fares for the elderly of both sexes from the age of 60.

M11 Link Road

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps have been taken to promote and publicise development opportunities along the route of the M11 link road between Hackney and central London.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The A12 Hackney Wick to M11 link road will run from the A102(M) at Hackney to a point just west of the M11 at Redbridge roundabout. Possible development along this route is a matter for the relevant local authorities.

"The Nuclear Trains"

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek to obtain for his departmental library the recent research report entitled, "The Nuclear Trains" by Large and Associates for the London nuclear information unit.

Mr. David Mitchell: The report has now been examined by the Department. The issues raised have been considered before, particularly at the Sizewell inquiry, where Sir Frank Layfield considered that the adequacy of the IAEA tests for ensuring flask integrity in an accident had not been effectively challenged.

London Regional Transport

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the dates and methods by which he published the current financial and other objectives on determinations applicable to London Regional Transport under the terms of section 16 of the London Regional Transport Act 1984; and what period of time elapsed between publishing those objectives and the closing of public comment on the first draft of the first strategic plan of London Regional Transport.

Mr. David Mitchell: The only objectives hitherto set under section 16 of the London Regional Transport Act

1984 are those set in the then Secretary of State's letter to the chairman of London Regional Transport of 20 July 1984. The text of that letter was reproduced in *Hansard*, on 20 July 1984 at columns *373-74*, and in a departmental press notice of the same date. London Regional Transport conducted a public consultation on its first statement of strategy the following spring. The closing date for comments was 10 May 1985.

Motorway Works (Speed Limits)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to introduce a mandatory 50 mph speed limit in areas of motorways which are subject to roadworks.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are considering, with the police, the question of speed limits at motorway roadworks, as part of our current wider review of motorway safety. We hope to announce the conclusions of that review before long.

Heavy Lorries

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his policy towards lorry regulation, in the light of the National Audit Office report entitled "Regulation of Heavy Lorries", particularly in relation to the number of bridges which are not considered strong enough to cope with the level of freight they are carrying.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: As the NAO report noted, the Department's policy is to maximise the net benefits of road transport by lorry while taking full account of the effect of heavy lorries on people and the environment. The Committee of Public Accounts published its own report on the regulation of heavy lorries on 2 March and the Government will respond to that shortly.

On bridge strengthening, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) on 24 November 1987 at column *110*.

Compressed Gases (Transport)

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what account has been taken of the degree of hazard posed during road transportation of compressed gases in specifying the safety requirements placed upon the transport of compressed gases;

(2) if he will review the specification for the design and construction of vehicles used for the transport of compressed gases requiring that the structures are strong enough to withstand a collision with other vehicles;

(3) if he will take steps to require the owners of dangerous materials being transported in or around Britain to hold third party insurance capable of covering claims that could arise from any accident;

(4) what requirement is placed upon the owners of cargoes to consult or obtain approval from the police authority in the transportation of compressed gases; and if there is any requirement to obtain or secure approval from each police area through which compressed gases are being transported.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Compressed gases carried in bulk in a road tanker or tank container are subject to the Dangerous Substances (Conveyance by Road in Road Tankers and Tank Containers) Regulations 1981. These regulations, which take account of the hazards involved, require tankers and containers to be properly designed, of adequate strength, of good construction and suitable for the purpose. A tanker or tank container cannot be used for the carriage of a dangerous substance unless it has been initially examined and tested by a competent person and is periodically re-examined and tested thereafter.

Consignors of dangerous substances are required to ensure that vehicle operators are provided with accurate information about the hazards of such substances. Vehicle operators are required to hold third-party insurance, including cover for the additional risks from any dangerous substances carried.

There is no requirement on owners to consult or obtain approval from police authorities.

There are no plans to change these statutory requirements.

WALES

Community Programme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact of proposed changes in the community programme on voluntary organisations in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Manpower Services Commission officials will shortly be discussing with individual community programme scheme managers their plans in relation to the new adult training programme. I hope that as many projects as possible will continue into the new programme.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will establish a community fund in Wales to continue financial support for those schemes presently funded through the community programme, which will not be eligible for support under Her Majesty's Government's proposals for a reformed community programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: As the Manpower Services Commission said in its response on the new adult training programme, it hopes to explore with appropriate Government Departments the possibility of making financial provision for some community programme projects which are of particular benefit to the community but which will not have the training content needed for inclusion in the new programme.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of places currently offered under the community programme in Wales are provided by voluntary sector sponsors.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The proportion of filled community programme places in Wales provided by the voluntary sector was 44 per cent. at 29 January 1988.

Sports Centres (Rates)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what exemptions from the payment of rates local authorities offer to *(a)* privately run and *(b)* community run sports centres in Wales; and what information he has as to the extent to which local authorities encourage applications for such exemptions.

Mr. Peter Walker: This information is not held centrally.

Community Care

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to consult the voluntary sector in Wales concerning his Department's policy towards community care; and what specific plans he has for consultations in the future.

Mr. Grist: The Department is in regular contact with voluntary organisatons on a range of issues, including community care. We would normally expect to consult such organisations on significant developments of policy and we are always eager to have their views.

Debt

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures are being undertaken by his Department to assist people to deal with the problems associated with indebtedness in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has responsibility for consumer credit matters and consumer protection generally. However funding from my Department is provided under the urban programme to a number of organisations, including for example some citizens' advice bureaux, which offer advisory services which include assistance on money-related problems.

Community Facilities

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what specific financial assistance is available from his Department, from other agencies working through his Department, from agencies of his Department and from other Government agencies in Wales, to community halls, centres and community sports facilities in Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: Assistance may be available from the Department under the urban programme and the voluntary youth service village hall and community centre project. The Sports Council for Wales can provide assistance and the Manpower Services Commission can help through its community project scheme. Local authorities may also provide assistance under their various powers.

In addition, other agencies in Wales may also provide specific financial assistance if the criteria of their individual grant regimes are met; in particular the Development Board for Rural Wales can provide assistance under the Development of Rural Wales Act 1976, the Wales tourist board can assist projects which will improve tourist amenities and facilities under the Development of Tourism Act 1969 and assistance may be available in the South Cardiff urban development area from the Cardiff Bay development corporation. Also, European regional development fund grant aid is available for leisure and sports facilities if they are linked to the promotion of tourism.

Pensioners (Housing)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many households in each district authority area in Wales include at least one pensioner; and what proportion of those households *(a)* share a lavatory with another household, *(b)* share a bath with another household, *(c)* have no bath and *(d)* have no inside lavatory.

Mr. Ian Grist: Estimates from the Welsh intercensal survey 1986 are given in the table:

	Total pensioner households	*Shared WC per cent.*	*Shared Bath-Shower per cent.*	*No Bath-Shower per cent.*	*No inside WC per cent.*
Alyn and Deeside	8,600	0·0	0·0	3·2	2·9
Colwyn	10,700	0·5	0·5	0·7	0·7
Delyn	8,700	0·3	0·3	1·1	2·2
Glyndwr	5,700	0·0	0·0	3·2	3·7
Rhuddlan	8,700	0·3	0·3	0·3	0·3
Wrexham Maelor	14,300	0·0	0·0	1·6	2·6
Carmarthen	7,600	0·0	0·0	4·1	4·9
Ceredigion	10,500	0·2	0·2	5·7	4·7
Dinefwr	6,300	0·2	0·4	3·3	5·8
Llanelli	12,100	0·2	0·4	3·3	6·0
Preseli	9,500	0·6	0·9	2·6	1·2
South Pembroke	5,400	0·0	0·0	3·0	2·3
Blaenau Gwent	10,900	0·0	0·0	3·1	5·0
Islwyn	7,900	0·0	0·0	2·4	10·0
Monmouth	9,800	0·0	1·1	1·4	1·4
Newport	15,900	0·7	0·8	2·3	2·8
Torfaen	10,800	0·0	0·0	2·4	3·1
Aberconwy	9,600	0·5	1·0	1·0	1·5
Arfon	7,800	0·3	0·3	4·8	6·0
Dwyfor	5,200	0·0	0·0	8·4	7·3
Meirionnydd	5,200	0·0	0·0	2·5	3·8
Ynys Mon	9,400	0·0	0·0	4·4	3·1
Cynon Valley	8,700	1·1	1·1	9·8	13·6
Merthyr Tydfil	8,000	0·0	0·0	7·7	11·3
Ogwr	16,100	0·3	0·3	2·0	3·2
Rhondda	12,000	0·2	0·6	12·8	14·7
Rhymney Valley	12,500	0·2	0·2	3·7	5·3
Taff-Ely	10,700	0·2	0·2	3·1	5·5
Brecknock	5,700	0·0	0·0	2·1	4·3
Montgomeryshire	7,700	0·5	0·5	5·5	4·7

	Total pensioner households	Shared WC per cent.	Shared Bath-Shower per cent.	No Bath-Shower per cent.	No inside WC per cent.
Radnor	3,500	0·0	0·3	5·4	6·2
Cardiff	35,000	0·4	0·8	1·5	2·8
Vale of Glamorgan	13,500	0·4	0·4	0·2	1·2
Port Talbot	7,000	0·0	2·0	2·0	5·1
Lliw valley	8,400	0·0	0·0	1·6	6·4
Neath	9,100	0·0	1·9	0·6	3·6
Swansea	25,100	0·4	0·4	2·1	3·5
Total	383,400	0·2	0·4	3·1	4·4

Pensioners (Housing)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of pensioners in each district authority area in Wales live in *(a)* sheltered housing and *(b)* residential care.

Mr. Grist: The estimated proportion of pensioner households living in sheltered housing at 1 April 1986 in each district authority in Wales is given in the table:

Percentage of pensioner households in sheltered accommodation

Welsh districts	Percentage
Aberconwy	5·6
Alyn and Deeside	8·5
Arfon	3·7
Blaenau Gwent	2·7
Brecknock	10·7
Cardiff	1·4
Carmarthen	2·5
Ceredigion	2·4
Colwyn	6·6
Cynon Valley	1·1
Delyn	14·2
Dinefwr	1·4
Dwyfor	1·7
Glyndwr	5·8
Islwyn	6·7
Llanelli	4·1
Lliw Valley	4·4
Meirionnydd	2·7
Merthyr Tydfil	4·4
Monmouth	7·6
Montgomeryshire	6·4
Neath	3·4
Newport	6·7
Ogwr	1·7
Port Talbot-Afan	1·2
Preseli	3·9
Radnor	8·1
Rhondda	1·9
Rhuddlan	4·6
Rhymney Valley	6·8
South Pembrokeshire	4·3
Swansea	1·7
Taff-Ely	3·1
Torfaen	8·4
Vale of Glamorgan	2·9
Wrexham Maelor	3·5
Ynys Mon	6·3

Information concerning the proportions in residential accommodation is not available specifically for pensioners, but numbers of men and women aged 65 and over in residential accommodation are shown in the table:

Number of residents aged 65 and above accommodated in local authority private and voluntary residential homes at 31 March 1987[1]

County council	Number of residents	Percentage of population[3]
Clwyd	2,828	4·2
Dyfed	1,709	2·9
Gwent	1,303	2·0
Gwynedd	1,598	3·6
Mid Glamorgan	1,656	2·1
Powys	603	3·0
South Glamorgan[2]	1,958	3·3
West Glamorgan	1,243	2·0

[1] Including homes for the elderly, younger physically handicapped, blind, mentally ill and mentally handicapped.
[2] Includes two residents accommodated in a voluntary home for alcoholics.
[3] Aged 65 and above.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether, as part of his Department's submissions for regional development funding from the EEC, he is seeking funds for the proposed Cardiff bay barrage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: The European Commission has awarded ERDF aid to my Department towards the cost of the initial feasibility studies for the Cardiff bay barrage. The Government have yet to reach a view on the barrage proposal and further applications for ERDF support will be considered in the context of that decision.

Hospital and Community Health Services

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing the relevant figures in tables 17.25 and 17.27 of Cm. 288-II adjusted by the hospital and community health services pay and prices deflator; and what were the equivalent figures in 1978-79.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 29 February 1988]:* The table sets out the information requested.

Total net expenditure on hospital and community health services
£ million

Year	Actual	[1]Adjusted
1978-79	299·8	710·8
1983-84	596·2	764·6
1984-85	639·6	775·9
1985-86	690·9	785·0
1986-87	726·9	784·3
1987-88	[2]803·0	803·0

[1] 1987-88 prices using the hospital and community health services pay and prices indices. Figures relating to the hospital and

community health services pay and prices terms have been constructed by reference to indices maintained by the Department of Health and Social Security from English data: no separate pay and prices indices for Wales are available. The figures for 1987-88 are provisional.

[2] The estimated outturn for 1987-88 excludes the additional £3·8 million announced on 16 December 1987.

Note: The totals include expenditure on the services for the disabled and the administrative costs of the artificial limb and appliance service which will from 1 April 1988 be transferred to the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Bus Group

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he intends to privatise the Scottish Bus Group as a single entity or in its individual company units; on what date he expects to publish his legislation in respect of this; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No decisions have yet been taken on the form of the privatisation of the Scottish Bus Group or on the timing of the necessary legislation. Financial advisers are being appointed to advise on whether the group should be privatised as it stands or in a number of companies.

Labour Statistics (Motherwell)

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest unemployment figures in the agriculture and food sectors of the economy in the Motherwell, North constituency.

Mr. Lang: Information on unemployment by industry grouping is not available. However the total number unemployed in the Motherwell, North constituency in January 1988 was 5,817. This represents a fall of 1,135 or 16 per cent. since January 1987.

Private Forestry

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about his policy towards the promotion of private forestry.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend has received many representations in recent months, particularly with regard to planting in Caithness and Sutherland.

Strathclyde Regional Council

Mr. Millan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the reply by his Department to the letter dated 4 February from the Strathclyde regional council requesting a meeting with Ministers to discuss the level of capital allocations to the region; and if he will now arrange for such a meeting to take place.

Mr. Rifkind: My Department responded to the council's letter on 1 March. I am arranging to publish the reply in the *Official Report*. It is not the normal practice for Ministers to meet individual authorities to discuss their capital allocations, but on this occasion, my hon. Friend the Minister of State hopes to meet the council later in the year.

Following is the letter:

Dear Mr. McFarlane,

STRATHCLYDE REGIONAL COUNCIL: FINANCIAL PLAN 1988-89 TO 1991-92

I refer to your letters dated 4 and 10 February addressed to Joan Fraser in which you restate the Council's request for a Ministerial meeting to discuss the Council's non-housing capital allocations.

Your Council's representations were partly founded on the premise that its capital allocations do not equate directly with the level of population of the region. In previous correspondence with your Council at both official and Ministerial level, we have emphasised that population factors are not the main determinant of the level of capital allocations: and we have set out the main elements which are taken into account. I do not think that there is anything I can usefully add to the exchanges between the Scottish Office and your Council on this aspect. More generally Strathclyde is certainly not alone in receiving capital allocations which fall short of its aspirations. The resources available for distribution in the form of capital allocations are finite and for 1988-89, the pressure on the Scottish Block is especially severe as a consequence for the local authority current expenditure settlement for that year. An extra £71 million had to be found from within the Block to finance that settlement and local authority capital expenditure provision could not be exempted from meeting its share of these additional costs.

Your Council will, I hope, by now have received Mr. Cameron's letter of 22 February notifying final capital allocations for 1988-89 and provisional figures for the following 2 years. Mr. Lang carefully considered your Council's renewed request for a meeting but he concluded that the representations were not such that he would merit departing from his and his predecessor's normal policy of not meeting individual Councils about their capital allocations. I can assure your Council, however, that the representations you made were fully taken into account before final decisions were made by him and the Secretary of State.

Notwithstanding this policy, I am however pleased to inform you that when he is visiting the area later this year, (at a time yet to be determined), Mr. Lang has agreed to pay a visit to your Council when he will be prepared to hear at first hand, your Council's representations on such issues. The Council will then have a full opportunity to put before him your views on the capital expenditure programmes.

Yours sincerely

J. Stephen

Capital Programmes

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which capital programmes of his Department resulted in an underspend in the year 1986-87; and what was the underspend in each case.

Mr. Rifkind: The underspend on central Government capital programmes within my responsibility for the year to March 1987 was as follows:

Programme	*Net underspend £000*
Agriculture	3,885
Industry	4,983
Tourism	149
Roads and Transport	7,030
Housing	2,431
Other Environmental Services	80
Law, Order and Protective Services	209
Health	7,296
Social Work	216

Fife Health Board (Ministerial Meeting)

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the meeting of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health with the Fife health board chairman; and what agreements were reached.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I met the chairman of Fife health board on Monday 1 February 1988 to discuss health matters in Fife. The question of reaching agreements did not arise.

Correspondence (Costs)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the costs to public funds of the letter from the Minister with responsibility for home affairs and the environment at the Scottish Office, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), delivered to the home of the hon. Member for East Kilbride at 1 am on Saturday 27 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: There is no identifiable cost to public funds. The letter was considered urgent and a driver who had been engaged in other duties on the evening of 26 February delivered it without any significant deviation from his route.

Tobacco Products (Oral Use)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if it is his intention to offer any compensation to the United States Tobacco Company and its work force for the consequences of the announcement made by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) on 26 February, *Official Report*, column *362*, concerning a prohibition on tobacco products for oral use.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South has invited representations from interested bodies and until these have been received and considered no final decision on the prohibition on tobacco products for oral use will be taken. The question of possible consequences of any prohibition does not therefore arise at this stage.

Civil Scientific Research

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the funds allocated for civil scientific research in Scotland, in 1986 money, for each year since 1977.

Mr. Lang: The annual review of Government — funded R and D, published by the Cabinet Office since 1983, gives details of the R and D spending of Scottish Departments. Copies of the annual reviews are available in the Library. Information in the form requested could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

M8 (Baillieston and Newhouse)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects work to commence on the extension to the M8 between Baillieston and Newhouse; what is the projected expenditure; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The proposed extension of the M8 between Baillieston and Newhouse is currently planned to be carried out in two phases. I expect the necessary preparatory work for both phases, the first between Baillieston and Shawhead and the second between Shawhead and Newhouse, to be completed in time to allow construction starts in late summer 1991 and early summer 1994 respectively. The actual timing of starts will depend upon priorities within, and the finance available for, the trunk road programme at those dates. The current estimate of cost for the whole works between Baillieston and Newhouse is £29 million.

Operations

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the mean number, plus or minus two standard deviations, of operations performed in Scottish hospitals for each day, Monday to Friday inclusive.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In the time available the information cannot be provided in the form requested. In 1985 a total of 443,365 operations were performed.

Scottish Special Housing Association (Loan)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to his reply on 25 February to the hon. Member for East, Kilbride, *Official Report*, column *286*, if he will give an estimate of the effect on the average rent charged to Scottish Special Housing Association tenants arising from the loss of £742,000 on the short-term loan from the national loans fund.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There was no effect on the average rent levels.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will write off the loss of £742,000 in the short-term loan on £16 million advanced to the Scottish Special Housing Association from the national loans fund on 30 June 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The SSHA repaid on 31 December 1987, the £16 million loan advanced from the national loans fund at the association's request on 30 June 1987 together with interest of £742,000. The question of write-off does not therefore arise.

Pupils (Qualifications)

Mr. McTaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pupils left Scottish schools with no formal qualifications in each of the last five years; and what percentage of the total that figure represents.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: the table gives information on school leavers who did not hold a Scottish Certificate of Education (SCE) qualification. Some of these school leavers would have held other qualifications such as the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE), the Scotvec National Certificate or other vocational qualifications, but the numbers involved in this category are not available.

Scottish school leavers with no SCE qualification

	Number	*Percentage of all leavers*
1981-82	24,800	28
1982-83	23,800	26
1983-84	23,500	26
1984-85	21,600	25
1985-86[1]	19,800	24

[1] Provisional.

Glaucoma

Mr. McTaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of glaucoma have been diagnosed in the Greater Glasgow health board area in each of the last five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not available centrally.

Hospital and Community Health Services Capital

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the proposed distribution of the hospital and community health services capital for 1988-89.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend has allocated £110·05 million to health boards to meet their gross capital expenditure commitments on hospital and community health services in 1988-89. This includes £21 million specifically for the improvement and upgrading of the NHS estate.

The allocations to individual health boards are as follows:

Health boards	*Capital allocation (£ million)*
Argyll and Clyde	7·450
Ayrshire and Arran	10·900
Borders	3·550
Dumfries and Galloway	2·235
Fife	4·000
Forth Valley	9·932
Grampian	8·808
Greater Glasgow	21·365
Highland	4·787
Lanarkshire	7·790
Lothian	17·900
Orkney	1·642
Shetland	1·642
Tayside	7·184
Western Isles	0·865
Total	110·050

In addition, a further £4·55 million will be made available for projects not specifically allocated to individual health boards. Also £13·4 million has been allocated to the Common Services Agency and £0·9 million has been allocated for the state hospital. In total, this amounts to £128·90 million.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Church Land

9. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from tenants of the Church Commissioners on his proposals for diversification from agriculture.

34. **Mr. McLeish:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from tenants of the Church Commissioners on his proposals for diversification from agriculture.

103. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from tenants of the Church Commissioners on his proposals for diversification from agriculture.

Mr. Gummer: I have received no representations from the Church Commissioners nor has my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland from the Church of Scotland.

15. **Mr. Wall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the proportion of land used for agricultural purposes in the United Kingdom which is owned by the Church Commissioners.

24. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the proportion of land used for agricultural purposes in the United Kingdom which is owned by the Church Commissioners.

31. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the proportion of land used for agricultural purposes in the United Kingdom which is owned by the Church Commissioners.

55. **Mr. Pendry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the proportion of land used for agricultural purposes in the United Kingdom which is owned by the Church Commissioners.

Mr. Gummer: According to the latest available Church Commissioners' annual report the Church Commissioners' agricultural estimates at 31 December 1986 were some 165,938 acres which was equivalent to 67,154 hectares.

17. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the proportion of agricultural produce which is produced in England and Wales on land which is owned by churches.

77. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the proportion of produce which is produced in England and Wales on land which is owned by the Churches.

84. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the proportion of agricultural produce which is produced in England and Wales on land which is owned by Churches.

85. **Mr. Heffer:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the proportion of agricultural produce which is produced in England and Wales on land which is owned by Churches.

Mr. Gummer: I regret that this information is not available.

26. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the secretary general of the General Synod on his policy on the use of agricultural land.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams).

27. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will meet representatives of the Church of England to discuss the implications for rural areas of Her Majesty's Government's agricultural policy.

70. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will meet representatives of the Church of England to discuss the implications for the standard of living of rural people of Her Majesty's Government's agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) and for Leyton (Mr. Cohen).

29. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will meet representatives of the General Synod of the Church of England to discuss the social and economic prospects for agricultural tenants.

32. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will meet representatives of the General Synod of the Church of England to discuss the social and economic prospects for agricultural tenants.

Mr. Gummer: No such meeting has been requested by the General Synod, but I frequently meet representatives of landlords and tenants to discuss matters of mutual interest.

35. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will meet representatives of the General Synod of the Church of England to discuss the social and economic prospects for agricultural tenants.

Mr. Gummer: No such meeting has been requested by the General Synod, nor from the Synod of the Church in Wales. However, I frequently meet landlords and tenants to discuss matters of mutual interest.

40. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will meet the Church Commissioners to discuss the impact of Government policy on the use of their agricultural land.

41. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will meet the Church Commissioners to discuss the impact of Government policy on the use of their agricultural land.

90. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will meet the Church Commissioners to discuss the impact of Government policy on the use of their agricultural land.

Mr. Gummer: No such meeting has been requested by the Church Commissioners.

50. **Mr. Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from clergymen in rural areas about the effects of Her Majesty's Government's agricultural policy on the rural areas.

92. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from clergymen in rural areas about the effects of Her Majesty's Government's agricultural policy on the rural areas.

94. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representation he has received from clergymen in rural areas about the effect of Her Majesty's Government's agricultural policy on the rural areas.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) on 25 February at column *313*.

81. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the secretary general of the General Synod on his policy on use of agricultural land.

101. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representation he has received from the secretary general of the General Synod of the Church of England on his policy on the use of agricultural land.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams).

86. **Mr. Benn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will meet the Church Commissioners to discuss the impact of Government policy on the use of their agricultural land.

Mr. Gummer: No such meeting has been requested by the Church Commissioners, nor have there been any requests from the URC or Continuing Congregationalists.

Pig Industry

16. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received about problems facing pig producers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friends the Members for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) and for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst).

107. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to deal with the problems in the pig sector; and whether he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the pig industry to discuss the state of the industry.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Members to the reply which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) earlier today.

Green Pound

19. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the devaluation of the green pound.

39. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received on the level of the green pound, and its effect on British producers.

45. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received about the case for adjusting the value of the green pound.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received about the level of the green pound; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones).

71. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further steps he proposes to take to alleviate the adverse financial effects of current green pound rates on the agricultural industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor: Decisions on the green pound rates are best taken during the price fixing. The Government are fully aware of the real concern of United Kingdom producers about current rates and are considering the best approach to adopt in negotiations taking this and the other economic factors into account.

22. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about recent changes in the level of the green pound.

Mr. MacGregor: Green pound changes are best made at the time of the price fixing. At the last price fixing in June 1987, devaluations were agreed of 7 percentage points for beef and 5·5 percentage points for most other products. This gave us a better outcome than any of our major EC competitors.

Horse Sales

20. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent assessment he has made of the likely level of compliance with his proposed voluntary code of practice to implement the Farm Animal Welfare Council's recommendations relating to conditions at horse sales and markets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: It is not possible to estimate the likely level of compliance with a code of practice which is still being drafted.

Surplus Food and Wine

21. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total volume and value in pound sterling of surplus food and drink in the EEC.

Mr. Donald Thompson: A note setting out the volume of EC intervention stocks of agricultural commodities is deposited in the Library of the House and updated monthly. The estimated book value of the EC stocks set out in the most recently deposited note is £5·7 billion.

37. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on recent developments in the control of surpluses of agricultural commodities in the European Community.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 15 February about the outcome of the recent meeting of the European Council at which major decisions were taken involving substantial CAP reforms.

52. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the present annual cost of storing surplus food stocks in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The cost of storage of intervention stocks in 1986-87 was £129 million. The cost of financing intervention stocks in 1985, the latest year for which information is available, was £86 million.

58. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what special sales of surplus stocks of food and wine have been approved by the management committee of the EEC over the past 12 months; and what was the price, in pence per pound weight, of each such sale.

Mr. Donald Thompson: At any one time CAP arrangements provide for a number of sales schemes. These tend to follow established patterns, but the following sales from EC intervention stocks to non-EC countries, agreed over the past 12 months, have distinguishing features:

Commodity	*Date*	*Quantity (tonnes)*	*Country of destination*	*Sale price p/lb equivalent*
Wheat	November-December 1987	1,012,000	USSR	[1]2·1
Butter	February 1987	35,000	USSR	[2]6·5
Butter	February 1987	65,000	USSR	[2]6·5
Butter	March 1987	181,500	USSR	[2]6·0
Butter	April 1987	18,500	USSR	[2]6·0
Butter	November 1987	200,000	USSR	[2]6·0
Beef	August-November 1987	8,000	Peru	[3]23.0-23.3

[1] The price is calculated from the dollar equivalent of the price actually paid by the purchaser (including MCAs), converted into sterling at the spot rate at the time of the sale. None of the wheat was exported from the United Kingdom.
[2] The price is the actual sale price out of intervention (exclusive of MCAs) and converted into sterling at the green rate. None of the butter was exported from the United Kingdom.
[3] The price is the sale price (including MCAs) that would have obtained if the beef had been exported from the United Kingdom, which it was not.

I regret that the prices quoted for beef sales in reply to my hon. Friend's previous question on this subject on 4 December 1987, at columns *775-78*, were incorrect. Instead of 28·2 to 36·4 p/lb equivalent, the prices should have been recorded as 23·0 to 31·2 p/lb equivalent.

Alternative Land Use

23. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with other European Economic Community Ministers regarding the proposed set-aside scheme; and if he will make a statement.

33. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement about the operation of the European Community set-aside scheme in the United Kingdom.

59. **Mr. Lord:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he now expects a set-aside scheme for arable land to be introduced in Great Britain.

88. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will introduce a cereals set-aside scheme for Great Britain.

91. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will implement a scheme to enable farmers to set-aside cereals land in Great Britain.

93. **Mrs. Gillian Shephard:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a cereals set-aside scheme will be implemented in Great Britain.

100. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent progress has been made in developing a set-aside scheme for arable land.

Mr. MacGregor: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reported to the House on 15 February, the general principles of a new set-aside scheme were agreed at the European Council on 11 to 13 February. This scheme goes wider than the extensification measure agreed in June 1987, and will supersede it. Discussions are proceeding in Brussels on the legal texts required to implement the agreement, and the Agriculture Council will be considering the matter next week. The Government will be making decisions about the implementation of the scheme in the United Kingdom, including the date on which the scheme will start, when the exact terms of the Community legislation are clear and we have completed consideration of the views expressed earlier in response to the consultation document issued in December.

17. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next intends meeting representatives of conservation groups to discuss the operation of the European Community set-aside scheme in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gummer: Ministers and officials of my Department are in regular contact with conservation bodies on this subject. A wide range of such bodies sent us views on the consultation document issued in December.

64. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning his proposals to encourage tree-planting on surplus agricultural land.

Mr. Gummer: We announced revised proposals for the farm woodland scheme in November following a consultation exercise last year. Since then I have discussed the revised scheme with representatives of the main interested organisations. Most of the changes we made have been welcomed on all sides.

Research and Development

25. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the future of employment for staff employed in research and development in fisheries.

43. **Mr. O'Neill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the future of employment for staff employed in research and development in agriculture.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the future of employment for staff employed in research and development on food.

Mr. Gummer: We are currently reviewing all our R and D programmes against the background of the Government's more general reappraisal of science and technology priorities and our policy that industry should fund more of the work of benefit to it. Future staffing levels will, as now, be designed to meet our objectives in the most efficient and cost effective way.

30. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning his review of agricultural research and development.

Mr. MacGregor: The review is an internal exercise which does not involve formal consultation outside Government. But we are receiving views from a number of bodies in the course of the study.

47. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to be able to make an announcement about the future of research and development in agriculture, fisheries and food.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State gave to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) on 4 February at column *734*.

Forestry

28. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he is having with local authorities on the future of forestry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State has had discussions recently with local authority representatives about 'the proposed farm woodland scheme.

Upland Farming

36. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the future of upland farming in Britain.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I remain committed to ensuring a secure future for upland farming. The recent decisions of the European Council will provide farmers throughout the United Kingdom with a more stable framework within which they can now plan for the future.

Free Food Scheme

38. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress made in organising the European Economic Community free food scheme in the United Kingdom.

49. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the latest position in the United Kingdom for the European Economic Community's free food scheme.

68. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards British participation in the EEC's scheme to provide free food for the needy from EEC intervention stocks.

83. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress of the operation of the European Commission free food scheme in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gummer: The period for receipt of application from organisations wishing to distribute under the arrangements ended on 29 February. The Government are examining these applications to establish what amounts the Commission should be asked to authorise for distribution in the United Kingdom. I shall make a further announcement in due course.

74. **Mr. Sean Hughes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he is having with organisations eligible to operate the European Community free food scheme.

Mr. Gummer: Officials of my Department last met charitable organisations on 12 February, and we are in contact also with the local authority representative bodies.

Sheepmeat

42. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he anticipates the European Community review of the European sheepmeat regime will be completed.

44. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on current progress on reform of the sheepmeat regime.

51. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he is having in the European Community about the sheepmeat regime.

Mr. MacGregor: The recent focus of discussions in the Council on the review has been upon stabilisers for sheepmeat and other CAP regimes. Now that these have been agreed, I expect that further work will resume on the basis of the Commission's proposals of October 1987. The issues at stake are undoubtedly difficult and complex, and so it is not possible at this stage to say what conclusions will be reached.

Fishing Industry

46. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has for reducing the costs and other burdens borne by the fishing industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: These matters are subject to frequent review and I would be happy to respond to any specific point which the hon. Member may have in mind. At a time of increasing prosperity in the industry with low fuel costs and value of landings at record levels, it is appropriate for fishermen to continue to make a contribution towards the cost of the services provided for it.

Spirit Drinks

48. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current position of negotiations in respect of the draft European regulations concerning the nomenclature of spirit drinks in the European Community and the use of the term cider brandy.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Negotiations on the draft EC Council regulation defining the major spirit drinks are continuing. Provision for spirit drinks which traditionally use the term "brandy" but which are not made from a distillate of wine, such as "cider brandy", is likely to be dealt with later, during consideration of the detailed, implementing rules.

Common Agricultural Policy

53. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he is having with his European colleagues about the future of the common agriculture policy.

Mr. MacGregor: Forthcoming meetings of the Council of Agriculture Ministers will be concerned with the implementation of the agricultural elements of decisions reached at the recent European Council, and with the proposals the Commission will be making for the 1988-89 price fixing.

Agriculture Industry

54. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received about the present state of the agriculture industry.

Mr. MacGregor: I have received a number of representations on this subject.

Sea Defences

56. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has had from coastal local authorities regarding grant-aid for sea defence and coastal protection schemes in the current year and for 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: A number of coastal local authorities have expressed concern as to whether sufficient capital allocation can be made available to them to enable them to undertake the coast protection schemes they consider necessary. I have advised them that the overall sum available will be allocated amongst the authorities concerned in a way that takes full account of the priority of the work.

Agricultural Support Costs

57. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current cost of agricultural support in the United Kingdom; and what will the cost be in 1988-89 expressed in 1988 prices.

62. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cost of supporting agriculture in the United Kingdom in 1978-79; what is the most recent cost; and if he will make a statement.

87. **Mr. Ken Hargreaves:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current cost of agricultural support in the United Kingdom; and what was the cost in 1978-79.

102. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current annual cost of agricultural support in the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor: Public expenditure on agricultural grants and subsidies for the years requested is as follows:

	£ million
1978-79 (outturn)	537
1988-89 (estimate)	[1] 1,783

[1] *Source:* 1988 Public Expenditure White Paper (figure for 1978-79 from Annual Review of Agriculture).

The Government also support the industry in a number of other ways such as research and development, advisory veterinary and administrative services.

104. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the cost of supporting British agriculture each year since 1979.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 9 February 1988 at column *156*.

Food Prices

60. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the average annual rate of increase in food prices since 1979.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The average annual rate of increase in the food component of the retail prices index was 5·8 per cent. during the period May 1979 to January 1988 and recent figures indicate that the rate has now fallen to 2·9 per cent. These figures reflect the success of the Government's food policies and can be compared with the rate of increase in food prices of 16·7 per cent. per annum between October 1974 and May 1979, the period in office of the last Labour Administration.

98. **Mr. Marland:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the increase in food prices in 1977 and 1987.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The average annual increase in food prices in 1977, when the last Labour Administration was in office, was 19 per cent. By contrast, the increase in 1987 was 3·1 per cent. This indicates the success of the Government's food policies.

99. **Sir Dudley Smith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the annual rate of increase in food prices in each year since 1979.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The annual rate of increase in food prices since 1979 is given in the table.

Increase in food component of the retail prices index

	per cent.
1979	12·0
1980	12·1
1981	8·4
1982	7·9
1983	3·2
1984	5·6
1985	3·1
1986	3·3
1987	3·1
[1]1988	2·9

[1] January.
Source: Department of Employment.

Animal Welfare

61. **Mr. Greg Knight:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations have been made to him about farm animal welfare.

96. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has recently received about farm animal welfare.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My Department is in regular contact with all the main organisations interested in farm animal welfare, and they have made representations on a wide variety of topics.

63. **Miss Fookes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the promotion of animal welfare.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I am not aware of any recent representations on this. However, the Farm Animal Welfare Council is just setting up a group to look into the subject, and I expect that it will report in due course.

73. **Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that full information is made available about improvements in farm animal welfare.

106. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he takes to ensure that the public is fully informed about improvements in animal welfare.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The welfare codes, which embody the latest scientific advice and the best current husbandry practice, are sent to all known livestock keepers and my staff visit farms to make information available about improvements in welfare. My Department also makes regular announcements to the media about the steps it is taking to improve animal welfare.

Agricultural Advisory Services

65. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the future work of the agricultural advisory services.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The advisory and R and D work undertaken by the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service (ADAS) is described under programmes 46 to 48 of the annual publication "Ministerial Information in MAFF (MINIM) which also gives details of ADAS contributions to other MAFF programmes. A copy of the most recent publication covering the period 1986-87 to 1988-89 is in the Library of the House.

Dairy Industry

66. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next intends to have discussions with the National Farmers Union about the dairy industry.

Mr. MacGregor: I plan to meet representatives of the National Farmers Union on 13 April 1988 to discuss the future operation of the milk quota system.

New Zealand Butter

67. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will next review the quota of New Zealand butter imported into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Council of Ministers is due to take a decision by 1 August 1988 on quotas for the import of New Zealand butter from 1 January 1989. That decision will be based on a proposal and report from the Commission.

Intervention Stocks (Costs)

69. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the total cumulative cost to date of EEC intervention storage in *(a)* Stratford and *(b)* east London as a whole.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I regret that records are not kept in a form which enables this information to be readily extracted.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

72. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the uptake of grant in the environmentally sensitive areas.

Mr. Gummer: We estimate that grant payments to farmers for the first year of operation in the first five English ESAs will amount to some £3 million.

75. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effects of the introduction of environtally sensitive areas.

Mr. Gummer: We are in the process of establishing a monitoring programme to assess the effects of environmentally sensitive areas. This will collect and analyse data on landscape, wildlife, historic features, farming practices and socio-economic developments. Our objective will be to assess the scheme's effects on those inter-related items. I hope to publish a first report, as required by section 18(8) of the Agriculture Act 1986, during the course of 1988.

82. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what impact the environmentally sensitive areas scheme has had on conservation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Farmers who applied to join the ESA scheme in the first year have been following the scheme conditions for 10 months. The impact of ESAs on conservation will be a gradual process, and to take account of that we will be monitoring its effects over the next five years. In the first year we have established a baseline of information on the land use, landscape, ecology and historic features of each area against which we will be able to monitor future trends.

Animal Feedingstuffs (Cereals)

76. **Mr. Curry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to receive proposals from the Brussels Commission concerning an allowance to incorporate cereals in animal feedingstuffs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The European Council has requested the Commission to examine what measures could be introduced for the utilisation of cereals in compound feedingstuffs and to submit appropriate proposals in the context of the 1988-89 price fixing. I continue to have reservations about the cost-effectiveness of schemes intended to increase the usage of cereals in animal feedingstuffs.

Tree Planting (Essex)

79. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about tree planting in Essex; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about the replanting of woodlands in south-east England, including those in Essex, damaged in last October's storm.

Food Exports

80. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the latest figures for British exports of food.

89. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current level of British food exports.

105. **Mr. McLoughlin** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the progress of British food exports over the last 12 months.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the level of British food exports over the past year.

Mr. Donald Thompson: In 1987, United Kingdom food exports reached a record level of £3,063 million. This is 14·8 per cent. higher than in 1986. Over the same period food imports increased by only 2·1 per cent. This indicates the success of Government policies in supporting the British food industry.

Small Farmers Association

95. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the president of the Small Farmers Association; and what subjects he discussed.

Mr. Gummer: Sir Richard Body has taken a number of opportunities to put his views to me on issues of agricultural policy. I am always ready to meet him.

Agriculture Ministers (Talks)

97. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his latest discussions with the Agriculture Ministers of the EEC.

Mr. MacGregor: The Agriculture Council last met on 8 February, and I reported the outcome to the House on 9 February in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker). Agreement on a number of key issues of agricultural policy was reached at the European Council on 11 to 13 February, which was the subject of the statement by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in the House on 15 February.

Family Farms

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what specific measures he hopes to take to protect the future of family farms, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: All farmers need a stable framework of policy against which to plan their business decisions. This was lacking while CAP spending was not subject to proper budgetary control and while exhaustion of CAP funds threatened the collapse of the system. The decisions reached, notably on CAP reform, at the recent European Council have averted that threat and provided the clear framework farmers need.

Forestry Training

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what forestry training is received by Agricultural Development and Advisory service advisers.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Agricultural Development and Advisory Service employs 180 chartered surveyors who have a sound basic training in forestry and the related questions of conservation and amenity in woodlands. This training will continue to be kept up to date in co-operation with the Forestry Commission. Twenty-four of these officers have already also received further specialist training under Agricultural Development and Advisory Service policy of continuing professional development.

Departmental Purchasing

Mr. Cran: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to announce the results of his Department's review of its purchasing procedures; and what priority he attaches to improving access for smaller firms.

Mr. Donald Thompson: As part of the purchasing initiative to seek value for money improvements in Government spending, my Department has carried out a review of its purchasing procedures for internal control purposes and has issued revised guidelines intended to assist all purchasing staff in achieving this aim. These guidelines cover advice on purchasing from small firms, and it is now this Ministry's policy to include at least one small firm wherever practical within each product group reviewed.

In addition, as part of this Ministry's developing purchasing strategy, closer relationships with suppliers are being developed through regular purchasing seminars, and detailed guidance has been drawn up for issue to potential suppliers, including small firms, on how to gain access to the Ministry's major contracts. All main purchasing points have also been issued with a guidance booklet entitled "Payment on Time" intended particularly to assist small suppliers.

Cereal Production

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many organisations responded to his consultation document "An Extensification Scheme"; which organisations supported the principle of reducing cereal production by set aside; which organisations supported the principle of reducing production by promoting less intensive farming methods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: More than 260 responses have been received, expressing a wide range of views on these matters. The conclusions I and my colleagues draw from these will condition our decisions on the United Kingdom scheme, on which I will be making a statement in due course.

Cereals

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the total cereal crop for 1987 and give for each cereal and for each grade an estimate of production, consumption and amount sold into intervention.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My Department's present estimates of United Kingdom production of cereal in 1987 and domestic consumption of home-grown cereals in the 1987-88 marketing year are set out in the following table:

	'000 *tonnes*[1]	'000 *tonnes*[2]	'000 *tonnes*[3]
Wheat	11,874	10,144	1,730
Barley	9,130	6,170	2,960
Oats	441	441	—
Other cereals	59	59	—
	21,504	16,814	4,690

[1] Estimated production.
[2] Estimated domestic consumption of home-grown cereals.
[3] Tonnages surplus to domestic demand in 1987-88.

A breakdown of grades of cereals is not available. The volume of sales of wheat and barley into intervention this season will depend largely on the industry's success in finding export markets for the surplus tonnages. Only 1,429 tonnes of barley had been delivered into intervention in the period to 29 February, and total offers of cereal this season are expected to be less than 1 million tonnes.

ENVIRONMENT

Sporting Events (Attendances)

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on total annual attendance figures in the following sports *(a)* football, *(b)* cricket, *(c)* athletics, *(d)* swimming, *(e)* speedway, *(f)* ice-hockey and *(g)* motor-racing.

Mr. Moynihan: Information held by the relevent governing bodies shows the following attendance at sporting events:

(i) Football: League matches and the four major Cup competitions in 1986-87—21·4 million.
(ii) Cricket: First class matches in 1986—0·82 million.
(iii) Athletics: The 18 televised events—0·11 million.
(iv) Ice Hockey: Premier and 1st divisions, Autumn cup and Wembley Championships—0·59 million.

Attendance figures for swimming, speedway and motor racing events are not collected centrally.

EC (Internal Market)

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the extent and impact of the proposals contained in the European Commission's White Paper, "Europe without frontiers; towards a large internal market", in so far as his Department is concerned.

Mr. Ridley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today. My Department has a particular interest in proposals covering free trade in construction products, as removal of barriers created by national standards will open up Community markets to United Kingdom exporters. PSA will welcome equality of opportunity for contractors competing for public works and supplies contracts.

Housing Associations (Tenants)

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tenants of housing associations *(a)* in England and Wales and *(b)* in Greater London, have bought their homes in each of the past five years; how many have bought under the transferable discount scheme; and what proportion in each case these figures are of the total number of tenancies with housing associations.

Mrs. Roe: The available information for England and for London for the years 1982-83 to 1986-87 is as follows. For Welsh figures, I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Sales of housing association dwellings to sitting tenants
Number (percentage of dwelling stock)

Financial year	*England*	*Greater London*
1982-83	13,890 (3·2)	3,270 (2·6)
1983-84	7,870 (1·7)	1,670 (1·3)
1984-85	4,080 (0·9)	820 (0·6)
1985-86	3,700 (0·8)	900 (0·7)
1986-87	3,100 (0·6)	670 (0·5)

In addition to those sales, the following numbers of housing association tenants in England bought dwellings through the transferable discount scheme of home ownership for tenants of charitable housing associations:

	Number	*Per cent. of dwelling stock*
1984-85	160	less than 0·1
1985-86	2,570	0·5
1986-87	1,240	0·3

Figures for London are not readily available.

Departmental Buildings

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) of 8 December, *Official Report*, column 97, he is now able to give the final cost of the refurbishment and building work at Richmond terrace, Whitehall; if he will identify separately *(a)* the cost of carpets and *(b)* the cost of gold leaf; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: On the total cost of construction and fitting out of Richmond House, I have nothing to add to my answer of 8 December. The final cost will depend on settlement of the final account including claims still being negotiated.

The cost of carpets for the entire building was £202,760 including VAT. There was no expenditure on gold leaf.

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the annual cost to the Exchequer of rents, rates and maintenance of all Government buildings and agencies within London; what has been the percentage increase over the past 10 years; and what has been the increase in the annual rate of inflation over the same period.

Mr. Christopher Chope: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to his question concerning accommodation in London for the Department of the Environment, on Wednesday 2 March. The percentage increases in expenditure by the Property Services Agency on rents and maintenance over the 10 years period to March 1987 for buildings occupied by Government Departments in London are 110 and 42 per cent. respectively. The percentage increase for contributions in lieu of rates is not available. Equivalent figures for Government-funded agencies are not held centrally and could be produced only at disproportionate cost. Over the same period inflation, as measured by the GDP deflator, was 116 per cent.—representing an average annual increase of 9 per cent.

Radiation Monitoring

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to include local authority schemes for monitoring radiation, including Radmoss in Somerset and Radmil in Lancashire, in his national response plan for any future radiation emergency.

Mr. Moynihan: Local authorities will be able to contribute data to the national radiation monitoring system provided they have been collected and supplied according to agreed procedures. Further details of the arrangements are given in the Government's statement of "National Response Plan" proposals published earlier this year. Copies of the publication have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the Rimnet monitoring equipment will be used to provide the public with information about a domestic nuclear accident.

Mr. Moynihan: Yes.

Rural Deprivation

Mrs. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his policy on rural deprivation, in the light of the report submitted to him by Mr. Brian McLaughlin on the subject of deprivation in rural areas.

Mr. Moynihan: The rural enterprise package, published in March last year, set out the Government's policy on the rural economy. The Development Commission is the principal agency for carrying forward that policy in England, and we are encouraging it to develop and implement a range of initiatives for improving economic and social conditions in the countryside.

Nuclear Waste

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to submit a memorandum to the European Parliament committee of inquiry on current United Kingdom practices for managing and packaging nuclear materials and wastes sent from the United Kingdom to Mol in Belgium and Hanau in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 1 March 1988]*: No transfer of nuclear wastes from the United Kingdom to Mol or Hanau has been authorised by the Department and no request for a memorandum has been received from the European Parliament Committee referred to. Questions involving the managing and packaging of nuclear materials are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

DEFENCE

Belize

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what request he has received from the Government of Belize for additional military assistance to make good the sudden loss of support through the United States military aid programme; and what reply he has given.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Any such requests would remain confidential between the Government of Belize and Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration is being given to the more extensive use of facilities in Belize for the training of British forces.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Regular consideration is given to ways in which training for British forces can be carried out more effectively within the limits of the facilities and resources available both in the United Kingdom and overseas. There are no plans at present to extend the use of facilities in Belize for the training of British forces.

AWRE (Contracts and Agreements)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with how many universities or other institutions of higher education the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment has research contracts or agreements currently placed.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) on 24 February 1988, at column 197.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, column *540*, whether the definition there used of an enhanced radiation-capable shell includes those which can function as an enhanced radiation shell with the addition of a separate module.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the detailed technical questions concerning United States nuclear artillery shells. However, I can assure the hon. Member that the deployment to Europe of enhanced radiation nuclear artillery shells plays no part in NATO's plans.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the W-79 nuclear warhead, or any variation of it, is enhanced radiation-capable.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Some W79 nuclear artillery shells produced by the United States before the fiscal year 1985 are of the enhanced radiation (ER) type. However, as the United States Department of Defence's "Annual Report to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1984", page 234, makes clear, all United States ER weapons are being stockpiled solely on United States territory. NATO has no plans to deploy such weapons to Europe.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the W-82 nuclear warhead, or any variation of it, is enhanced radiation-capable.

Mr. Stewart: As the United States Department of Defence's "Annual Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 1987", page 227, makes clear, the United States is not planning to produce any W82 nuclear artillery shells of the enhanced radiation type.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many W-79 nuclear warheads there are in Europe; and how many he expects to be in Europe by 1995;

(2) how many W-82 nuclear warheads there are in Europe; and how many he expects to be in Europe in 1995.

Mr. Stewart: The number of nuclear artillery shells deployed in Europe by NATO now, or in the future, is classified.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the extent to which the new generation of nuclear weapons are likely to be used.

Mr. Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) on 23 February, at column *161*.

Parachute Regiment (Incident)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of Defence whether he proposes to undertake an inquiry with a view to disciplinary action in respect of the incident on 17 February in which members of the Parachute Regiment in a Land Rover, registration No. 94 AV 45, damaged a caravan and interfered with another vehicle; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: There were two separate incidents on 17 February. The first involved two soldiers of the Parachute Regiment, who were guarding an operational "out of bounds" area on Salisbury Plain. The two soldiers were in a Land Rover vehicle, registration No. 94 AV 45. They stopped a civilian driving a car through the prohibited area, and began to question him. The driver quite rightly told them that only MOD police had the right to question a civilian in such circumstances. He subsequently reported the matter to 3 PARA HQ, but made no formal complaint, nor did he wish for any further action to be taken. The soldiers concerned were reminded of the extent of their powers.

The second incident, during the night of 17 February involved civilian occupants of a caravan on Salisbury Plain

reporting to the MOD police that soldiers had picked up the caravan, moved it 10 yds, and cut a CB radio cable. The MOD police promptly investigated the incident, but the occupants of the caravan were unable to identify those concerned, and the investigation produced no evidence that soldiers had been involved. No further action was thus possible.

As both incidents were followed up at the time, I do not consider any further inquiry to be necessary.

Trident Base (Clyde)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what road developments in connection with the Trident base on the Clyde have been undertaken; and at what total cost.

Mr. Freeman: An external network of new roads to relieve local communities of construction traffic from the Clyde submarine base development has been completed at a cost of some £20 million. Within the Clyde submarine base other roadworks are included in the various construction projects of the development programme.

Greenham Common

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications for (i) military presence at the Greenham common base, (ii) access to the base and (iii) any other matters of the decision on 25 February at Reading Crown court in the cases of Georgia Smith and Jean Hutchinson that the Greenham common bylaws were not applicable; what action he proposes in consequence of this ruling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The implications of the judgment will be considered in the light of the legal advice that I have requested.

Tactical Nuclear Capacity

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any sum has been included in his Department's long-term costings in respect of the modernisation and development of Britain's tactical nuclear capacity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is not the practice of this or previous Administrations to provide details of the content of the long-term costings. No decisions have yet been taken on the modernisation of British tactical nuclear weapons.

HMS Valiant

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the refitting of HMS Valiant to be completed.

Mr. Sainsbury: The refitting of HMS Valiant is currently expected to be completed in the latter half of this year.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the incident involving the repair of pipes leading from the nuclear reactor in HMS Valiant.

Mr. Sainsbury: I am glad to say that there has been no incident affecting nuclear safety on board HMS Valiant during her refit.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has renegotiated the price for the refitting of HMS Valiant.

Mr. Sainsbury: Because the refit of HMS Valiant commenced before the introduction of commercial management, it was not practicable to negotiate a fixed price contract at the outset. It has since been agreed that labour costs will be covered by incentive arrangements. Other elements, for example, materials and sub-contract costs, will be priced on the basis of actual ascertained costs. Any extra work under the contract will be covered by these arrangements.

Indonesia (Rapier Missiles)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of Her Majesty's armed forces are currently visiting Indonesia in connection with the sale of Rapier missiles, how long they are expected to remain there; and at what cost.

Mr. Sainsbury: A small British military advisory team is currently on a loan service posting in Indonesia in connection with the sale of Rapier missiles. It is currently planned for the team to return to the United Kingdom in January 1989. The cost is in confidence between the parties concerned.

RN Helicopter Flight (Lee-on-Solent)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of rescue sorties carried out by the Royal Navy helicopter flight at Lee-on-Solent in each year since 1979.

Mr. Freeman: The total number of rescue sorties carried out by the Royal Navy helicopter flight at Lee-on-Solent since 1983 is as follows:

1983 155, 1984 121, 1985 125, 1986 119, 1987 136

Information on sorties prior to 1983 could be provided only with disproportionate effort.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many rescue sorties were carried out by the Royal Navy helicopter flight at Lee-on-Solent in order to assist military personnel or ships in each year since 1979.

Mr. Freeman: The following rescue sorties were carried out by the Royal Navy helicopter flight at Lee-on-Solent in order to assist military personnel or ships since 1983.

1983 nil, 1984 nine, 1985 one, 1986 five, 1987 five.

Information on sorties prior to 1983 could be provided only with disproportionate effort.

Radioactive Incidents (Monitoring)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the meteorologists on the 45 sites to be part of the radioactive incident monitoring network will be required to sign a declaration under the Official Secrets Act.

Mr. Sainsbury: All staff of the Meteorological Office, including those working at sites involved in the radioactive incident monitoring network, would be bound by the Official Secrets Act as a matter of course.

Submarine Hull-Mounted Sonar System

Sir Geoffrey Pattie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent competition on the submarine hull-mounted sonar system.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department has today announced the placing of a contract worth about £10 million with Plessey Naval Systems Limited for the development and manufacture of a new sonar for Royal Navy hunter-killer submarines. The equipment is to be known as Sonar2074 and will include new arrays and associated processing and display equipment.

The contract, which is firm-priced, was awarded to Plessey following a competition. The work will last about five years and will be carried out at the company's factories at Templecombe in Somerset and Newport, Gwent.

Sonar2074 will be retrofitted in three Trafalgar and Swiftsure class submarines and is being procured at around one third of the cost of the equipment which it replaces. The new processing and display equipment will also be considerably more compact than the existing systems, a major advantage in the confined space of a submarine.

The reduction in the cost of this sonar and its much smaller size owes much to the research work on computer technology and signal processing carried out at the Admiralty Research Establishment at Portland. This work is also being applied in the development of other new sonar systems for RN submarines and surface ships.

Good sales potential is envisaged for a suitably modified version of Sonar2074, particularly the compact processing and display sub-systems.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Medicines

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services why applications made under article 3 of the Medicines (Exemption from Licences) (Special and Transitional Cases) Order 1971, as extended by article 3 of the Medicines (Exemption from Licences) Manufacture and Assembly Temporary Provisions Order 1972, are no longer being processed.

Mr. Newton: The Licensing Authority has for some time been increasingly concerned at certain problems created by the article 3 exemption system, mainly in relation to identifying the source of the products concerned. A review of the position has revealed serious legal doubts about the validity of these exemptions and as a result it is proposed to revoke article 3.

The views of interested parties on this proposal are being sought as required by section 129*(b)* of the Medicines Act 1968. In the meantime no further exemptions are currently being allowed. I have today placed in the Library a copy of a consultation letter which is being issued to all known holders of article 3 exemptions, to applicants for such exemptions and to professional and industrial organisations.

Cervical Cytology Laboratories

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was (i) the annual running cost, (ii) the staff complement and (iii) the number of cervical cytology smear results processed in the cervical cytology laboratories in *(a)* Warrington and *(b)* Macclesfield in the latest available year.

Mrs. Currie: Such information as is available is set out in the table. Details of the annual running costs of laboratories are not held centrally and my hon. Friend may care to contact the district health authority chairmen for the information.

1986

	Macclesfield	*Warrington*
Number of cases examined	15,909	10,600
Of those examined number diagnosed as positive	172	98
Trained staff in post at 31 December 1986 (whole-time equivalent)	3·2	4·0

Source: DHSS form SBH140.

Notes:

1. A woman who was tested more than once was counted on each occasion, but where more than one smear was taken from the same patient at the same session, they were counted as one test.

2. Staffing levels relate to fully trained staff with a whole-time equivalent being calculated for staff employed part-time. The following staff are included in the figures: Pathologists and other medically qualified staff, medical laboratory scientific officers, scientific officers and laboratory cythology screeners. We do not hold details of staff complement.

London School of Prosthetics

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what would be the estimated cost of modernisation if the London school of prosthetics were to remain at Roehamption and Paddington;

(2) what would be the estimated cost involved in transferring the London school of prosthetics from Roehampton and Paddington to Salford.

Mr. Scott: These are matters for the Disablement Services Authority to which my hon. Friend should address his questions.

Benefit Payments

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the identifiable cost to public funds of his campaign to persuade benefit recipients to take payments through bank accounts.

Mr. Portillo: About £2 million.

Heating Allowances

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the number of recipients of supplementary benefit heating allowances prior to April; and if he will list them by category of claim.

Mr. Portillo: The latest information from which the number of supplementary benefit claimants receiving weekly heating additions can be extracted shows that 2,829,000 claimants are receiving a heating addition. The number of heating additions in payments broken down by category of heating addition is as follows:

	Numbers (000s) Feb' 86 figures	*Rate from July 1986 (£)*
Basic rate (including age related)	1,189	2·20

	Numbers (000s) Feb 86 figures	Rate from July 1986 (£)
Higher rate (including disabled persons heating addition)	681	5·55
Central heating addition—		
1-4 rooms	401	2·20
5 or more rooms	571	4·40
Estate rate heating addition—		
1-4 rooms	51	4·40
5 or more rooms	13	8·80
Others (amenity charges etc)	21	—
TOTAL	[1]2,927	

Source: 1986 Annual Statistical Enquiry.
[1] In certain cases more than one heating addition may be payable to the claimant.

Social Fund

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will amend the social fund manual to give effect to the undertaking given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security on 15 December 1987, Standing Committee E, *Official Report*, column 638, that, when a social fund officer arranges for an applicant to be interviewed following an application for a review, the applicant will be given a written explanation of the reasons for the social fund officer's decision before he attends the interview.

Mr. Portillo: Social fund officers' decisions will be notified by letter. Where payment is refused, or is awarded to a lesser extent than that claimed, the letter will always include the reasons for the decision. Applicants will therefore be aware of the reasons for the decision before the interview, and no amendment to the social fund manual is required to accomplish this.

Benefits

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many young people had their benefit reduced or suspended between April 1987 and February 1988 for either *(a)* refusing a youth training scheme place or *(b)* leaving a scheme early in (i) the Leeds, West constituency, (ii) the Leeds metropolitan district council area and (iii) Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is not available in the precise form requested since the boundaries of the Leeds, West constituency and the Leeds metropolitan district council area are not conterminous with the areas covered by the Department's local offices. However, the following information which is provisional, and therefore subject to amendment, may be of interest.

Number of cases in which Supplementary Benefit was reduced for refusal of or premature termination of a youth training scheme place: 8 April 1987 to 9 February 1988

	Refusal	Premature Termination
The Department's offices at[1]		
Leeds (North)		
Leeds (North West		
Leeds (West)	Nil	1
Leeds (East)		
Leeds (South)	Nil	2
Great Britain	58	815

Notes:
[1] An area roughly approximating to the Leeds (West) constituency.
[2] An area roughly approximating to the Leeds Metropolitan District Council area.

Incapacity for Work

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will place in the Library a copy of the instructions and guidance issued to his officials, including adjudication officers, regarding the circumstances in which the question of a person's incapacity for work is to be referred to a medical practitioner under regulation 8 of the Social Security (Adjudication) Regulations 1986.

Mr. Portillo: Current advice to adjudication officers on this is covered in part V of the insurance officer's guide and in IOG memos 462 and 463, copies of which are in the Library. From April 1988, this guidance will be in volume 8 of the adjudication officer's guide and copies will be placed in the Library.

Adjudication Officers' Guide

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will deposit additional copies of the available parts of the adjudication officers' guide in the Library for the use of hon. Members.

Mr. Portillo: The complete 10 volumes of the adjudication officer's guide will be published by HMSO before 11 April 1988. Three copies will then be placed in the Library in accordance with the usual practice.

Sickle Cell Anaemia and Thalassaemia

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list by district the screening and counselling centres for sickle cell anaemia and thalassaemia; how many counsellors work from each centre; and whether they are engaged full-time or part-time.

Mrs. Currie: It is for district health authorities to decide the resources to be devoted locally to these inherited blood disorders in the light of local needs and competing priorities. Detailed information about screening and counselling centres is not held centrally but I understand that there are counselling centres in the following districts:

Brent
Birmingham
City and Hackney
Haringey
Islington
Lambeth
Liverpool
Manchester
Newham
Nottingham
Southwark
Waltham Forest

Children in Care

Dr. Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many children are currently in institutional care.

Mrs. Currie: Information is not available centrally in exactly the form requested. It is estimated that there were 16,900 children in care of local authorities in England who were in residential care at 31 March 1986.

Breast Cancer and Cervical Cancer

Dr. Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average cost per head of breast cancer screening and cervical cancer screening.

Mrs. Currie: Expenditure on cervical cancer screening is not separately identified in health authority accounts. It has been estimated that the average cost of taking and examining a cervical smear is about £10. It is estimated that, based on the economic appraisal in the Forrest report, the average revenue cost per woman screened by mammography for breast cancer is about £14 including, where necessary, the cost of assessment and diagnosis.

Measles

Dr. Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the latest figures for the number of cases of measles recorded in England and Wales and the percentage of children vaccinated.

Mrs. Currie: The information is as follows:

	[1]*1986*
Notifications of measles[2]	82,061
Percentage of children[3] born in 1984 and immunised by the end of the second year after birth (measles)	71

[1] England and Wales.
[2] Source: OPCS Monitor MB2 87/4.
[3] Source: DHSS form SBL607.

Elderly People

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to what percentage of people *(a)* over 70 years and *(b)* over 80 years are able to do their own shopping, cooking, housework and personal care.

Mrs. Currie: The 1985 general household survey shows the following percentages of people aged 70 and over and 80 and over who can perform the tasks listed on their own:

	Aged 70 and over Per cent.	*Aged 80 and over* Per cent.
Cook a main meal	90	81
Do the household shopping	81	61
Wash small amount of clothing by hand	90	80
Brush hair or shave	98	96
Cut own toenails	65	46
Bath, shower or wash all over	89	78
Clean windows	76	55
Sweep floors	85	71
Do jobs involving climbing a stepladder or steps	62	39
Wash face and hands	99	98

The 1985 general household survey interviewed nearly 20,000 people aged 16 and over living in private households in Great Britain.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of people over the age of 70 years and over the age of 80 years (i) live at home, (ii) live with members of their family, (iii) live in sheltered accommodation and (iv) live in residential homes, institutions or hospitals.

Mrs. Currie: The information is not available precisely as requested but in the 1981 census the percentage of people in Great Britain who were not resident in private households (that is lived in hospitals, homes, communal establishments or other institutions) was 5·2 per cent. of those aged 70 and over and 12·2 per cent. of those aged 80 and over. The general household survey does not cover institutional populations but provides the following information about people resident in private households:

Great Britain, 1985

Percentages

Household type	*Aged 70 and over*	*Aged 80 and over*
Living alone or with spouse only	82	75
Living with spouse and others	5	4
Living with siblings or children	11	19
Other	2	2

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to what percentage of people over the age of *(a)* 70 years and *(b)* 80 years are (i) mentally fit and (ii) physically fit.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that we do not hold this information.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the projection for numbers of people who will be *(a)* over 80 years, *(b)* over 90 years and *(c)* over 100 years in five, 10, 20 and 25 years, respectively.

Mrs. Currie: The information available is shown in the table for the United Kingdom, using 1986 as the reference year.

United Kingdom

Age	*Projected resident population at mid year*[1] *(in thousands)* *1986*	*1991*	*1996*	*2006*	*2011*
80 years and over	1,841	2,150	2,365	2,637	2,678
90 years and over	201	254	329	452	492
100 years and over	..	..	..	..	..

[1] *Source:* Mid 1985-based principal population projections prepared by the Government Actuary.
.. denotes not available.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the figures for 1987, 1977, 1967 and 1958 of the number of people living in the United Kingdom aged over 100 years, aged over 90 years and aged over 80 years.

Mrs. Currie: The information available for the years and age bands requested is shown in the table. Figures for mid-1986 are the latest available.

United Kingdom

Age	Estimated resident population at mid-year (in thousands) 1986	1977	1967	1958
80 years and over	1,841	1,414	1,180	945
90 years and over	201	152	..	..
100 years and over	..	..	..	..

.. denotes not available.

Under-fives Initiative

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to receive the evaluation report by Willem van der Eyken on the under-fives initiative; when he expects to publish it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We expect to receive the final document shortly, and will make an announcement about publication and circulation when we have studied it.

Social Security Reform

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has discussed the administration of the new benefit system with the Data Protection Registrar; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: There has been discussion with the Data Protection Registrar to clarify the data protection requirements in connection with personal data systems administered by the Department, but the administration of the new benefit system has not been discussed specifically. The housing benefit scheme is administered by local authorities who are responsible for the confidentiality of personal data. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on Thursday 18 February at columns *695-96*.

Pensioners (Benefits)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the population of pensionable age in Wales is dependent on means-tested benefits.

Mr. Portillo: It is estimated that some 20 per cent. of the population of pensionable age in Wales receive supplementary benefit. This carries with it entitlement to certificated housing benefit. Similar figures for standard housing benefit are not available.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many pensioners in Wales are entitled to supplementary benefit but do not claim it; and what measures his Department is taking to eliminate such underclaiming.

Mr. Portillo: We will continue to promote take-up of supplementary benefit by issuing claim forms to all retirement pensioners, and by a range of other measures.

Take-up estimates are available only for Great Britain as a whole. A convenient summary of the overall position is provided on pages 272 and 273 of Cm. 288 (the 1988 public expenditure White Paper). These suggest that in 1983, 79 per cent. of available benefit was claimed by eligible pensioners. The indications are that the average amount unclaimed by pensioners is small, £3.40 per week, including some 60 per cent. entitled to less than £3. The 1983 take-up estimates are uncertain because of apparent deficiencies in the information obtained by the family expenditure survey from pensioner respondents.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many pensioner households in Wales will receive a reduced amount of housing benefit with the implementation of the Social Security Act 1986 in April; and how many such households will lose their entitlement to housing benefit entirely.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that the information is not available for Wales alone.

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the names of the members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines, giving the professional and business background of each member.

Mr. Newton: The names of members of the committee, their professional qualifications and the employment positions they currently hold are as follows:

Professor A. W. Asscher, BSc, MD, FRCP (Chairman), Dean, St. George's Hospital Medical School.

Dr. G. Booth, B. Pharm, PhD, FPS, MCPP, Senior Lecturer in Pharmacy Practice, University of Bradford and ex-President of the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain.

Professor A. M. Breckenridge, MD, MSC, FRCP, Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, University of Liverpool.

Professor J. G. Collee, MD, FRCP, FRCPath, Professor of Bacteriology, University of Edinburgh.

Professor P. H. Elworthy, B Pharm, PhD, DSc, MSC, CChem, MRSC, FPS, MCPP, Emeritus, Professor of Pharmacy, University of Manchester, Visiting Professor in Pharmaceutics at King's College, London and School of Pharmacy, London.

Professor A. T. Florence, PhD, DSc, CChem, FRSC, MPS, MCPP, Professor of Pharmaceutics, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.

Professor M. W. Greaves, MD, PhD, FRCP, Professor of Clinical Dermatology, University of London.

Professor H. S. Jacobs, BA, MD, FRCP, Professor of Reproductive Endocrinology, Middlesex Hospital Medical School, London.

Dr. W. A. Jerrett, MB, BCh, FRCGP, General Practitioner, Glamorgan.

Professor M. J. S. Langman, BSc, MD, MBBS, FRCP, Professor of Internal Medicine, University of Birmingham.

Professor D. H. Lawson, MD, MB, ChB, FRCP(Ed), Consultant Physician in Clinical Pharmacology, Glasgow.

Mr. F. E. Loeffler, FRCS, FRCOG, Gynaecologist, London.

Professor J. O'D McGee, MD, PhD, FRCPath, MA, Professor of Morbid Anatomy, Oxford.

Professor A. E. M. McLean, BM, PhD, FRCPath, Professor of Toxicology, University College Hospital, London.

Dr. Elizabeth Mayne, MB, BCh, BAO, MRCP, FRCPath, Department of Haematology, University of Belfast.

Professor S. R. Meadow, MA, FRCP, DCh, Professor of Paediatrics and Child Health, Leeds University.

Professor S. A. Montgomery, MD, BSc, MB, BS, FRCPsych, DPM Eng, Professor of Psychiatry, St. Mary's Medical School, London.

Professor G. Nuki, MB, BS, FRCP(Ed), FRCP(Lond), MRCS, Professor of Rheumatology, University of Edinburgh.

Dr. B. L. Pentecost, MD, FRCP, Consultant Physician, Birmingham.

Professor M. D. Rawlins, MD, FRCP, BSc, Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Professor M. P. Vessey, MB, MD, FFCM, Professor of Social and Community Medicine, University of Oxford.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidelines he lays down for the working of the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

Mr. Newton: The Committee on Safety of Medicines works within the statutory framework set out in the Medicines (Committee on Safety of Medicines) Order 1970 (SI 1970, No. 1257), made under section 4 of the Medicines Act 1968. The committee's statutory purposes are giving advice with respect to safety, quality and efficacy, in relation to human use, of any substance or article (not being an instrument, apparatus or appliance) to which any provision of that Act is applicable; and to promoting the collection and investigation of information relating to adverse reactions, for the purpose of enabling such advice to be given.

Under paragraph 4 of schedule 1 to the Medicines Act 1968, the committee has power to regulate its own procedure. Committee members are appointed for their medical, scientific and pharmaceutical experience and expertise. Guidelines on safety, quality and efficacy are published by the United Kingdom licensing authority and the European Community for use by applicants for product licences; the resulting applications may be put to the committee for its advice. Members are bound both by section 118 of the 1968 Act, which broadly restricts the disclosures of information furnished to a person in pursuance of the Act, and also by the law on confidentiality. Members are required to follow guidelines on declaration of interests as such interests may preclude members from participating in committee proceedings in relation to a particular product.

The figures for 1987 are not yet available. Figures in this format for England alone are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Figures for hospital and community health services are not collected centrally. Figures are based on a sample of prescriptions of approximately 1 in 200 in England and Wales and 1 in 100 in Scotland.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many yellow card reports of suspected adverse reactions to medicines were submitted to the Committee on Safety of Medicines in each of the years 1978 to 1987 inclusive; and how many in each of these years were in respect of *(a)* benzodiazepines in general and *(b)* lorazepam in particular.

Mr. Newton: The table gives the figures requested. Reports of suspected adverse drug reactions do not necessarily imply a causal relationship.

Year	*Total yellow card reports received*	*Total where suspected drug is a benzodiazepine including lorazepam*	*Total where suspected drug is lorazepam*
1978	11,873	201	36
1979	10,840	218	29
1980	10,179	232	31
1981	13,032	166	24
1982	10,922	226	24
1983	12,689	274	35
1984	12,163	243	20
1985	12,652	179	29
1986	15,527	143	21
1987	16,431	100	16

Notes:

The second column gives the actual number of reports received by the CSM in the calendar year. The third and fourth columns are taken from computer records.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the cost to the National Health Service of the prescribing of *(a)* benzodiazepines, and *(b)* lorazepam in each of the years 1978 to 1988 inclusive.

Tranquillisers

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to ensure that general practitioners take action on the Committee on Safety of Medicine's advice in its "Current Problems" No. 21, on the danger of overprescribing benzodiazepines.

Mr. Newton: Doctors must exercise their professional judgment based on current knowledge in deciding how best to treat their patients. The problems of benzodiazepine therapy have been known for some time and the number of prescriptions for these drugs is falling. The advice contained in "Current Problems" No. 21 supported and added to advice doctors already had available from a variety of sources such as manufacturers' data sheets and articles in professional journals. In addition, the Department funds the distribution to doctors of independent publications including the *British National Formulary*, *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin* and *Prescribers' Journal* which have all provided guidance on the prescribing and use of benzodiazepines. Doctors of the Department's regional medical service which monitors general practitioner prescribing will continue to take a specific interest in the prescribing of benzodiazepines.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many prescriptions for the tranquilliser lorazepam were issued in each of the years 1978 to 1987;

(2) how many prescriptions were made out for *(a)* all benzodiazepines, and *(b)* lorazepam in each of the years 1978 to 1987 inclusive.

Mr. Newton: The number of prescriptions for *(a)* all benzodiazepines and *(b)* lorazepam dispensed by community pharmacists in Great Britain in each of the years 1978-1986 inclusive was as follows:

Millions

Number of prescriptions	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
All benzodiazepines	30·6	30·7	29·1	29·5	29·7	28·7	28·0	25·7	25·3
Lorazepam	1·8	2·1	2·4	2·9	3·5	3·5	3·2	3·1	3·1

Mr. Newton: The cost to the family practitioner services[1] in England of benzodiazepines and lorazepam for the calendar years 1985 and 1986[2] were as follows:

£ million

	Benzodiazepines	*Lorazepam*
1985	27·3	3·4
1986	28·2	2·7

Notes:

[1] Figures are not available for costs in the Hospital and Community Health Services, as Health Authority accounts only record total expenditure on drugs.

[2] The information requested is not available in the form requested prior to 1985, and is not yet available for 1987.

Long-Stay Patients

Dr. Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how much of the cost of all long-stay patients, respectively, for geriatric, mentally handicapped, mentally ill, and psychiatric patients, the National Health Service can claim back from social security;

(2) how much the National Health Service could claim back annually from social security if the same arrangements applied for claiming the cost of residence as apply in local authority residential homes and private residential homes;

(3) what would be the additional annual revenue to the National Health Service if patients whose incomes make them ineligible for social security payments were charged the cost of residence in long-stay hospitals.

Mr. Portillo: None. Social security is available only to individual claimants. The National Health Service, local authorities and independent residential care and nursing homes cannot claim any costs from social security. However, people in local authority and independent homes may be able to get help with charges from supplementary benefit. No data are available on which to base estimates of the amount of supplementary benefit which would be payable if health authorities were able to charge on the same basis as either local authorities or the independent sector.

I regret that no information is available centrally to identify the number of National Health Service patients in long-stay hospitals whose income would make them ineligible for income-related social security benefits.

Benefits (Disqualification)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will reconsider his proposals to extend the maximum disqualification period for benefits to six months.

Mr. Portillo: An order to amend section 20(1) of the Social Security Act 1985 (which gives the power to disqualify a person for unemployment benefit) increasing the maximum period of disqualification from 13 to 26 weeks, was debated and approved by the House on 1 March.

Terrorism, Jerusalem (Compensation)

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many dependants of the victims of the terrorist outrage in Jerusalem, perpetrated on 22 July 1946 by the Irgun Zvai Leumi, are still in receipt of compensation from his Department; and what levels of compensation are paid.

Mr. Portillo: I am not aware of any.

Meningitis

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement about the recent increase in the incidence of meningitis.

Mrs. Currie: The country has been experiencing an upsurge in the number of cases of meningococcal infection similar to one which occurred in the mid-1970s. Notifications have been rising since 1984 and the indication are that there will be some increase this year over last year's figure of 1,090 cases of meningococcal meningitis and 158 deaths from meningococcal infection.

To ensure that doctors and health authorities were fully informed about the situation and were prepared to deal effectively with local outbreaks, Sir Donald Acheson the Government's Chief Medical Officer, wrote to all doctors last year and again early last month when he enclosed a copy of a leaflet produced for parents by Gloucester district health authority. He also sent regional medical officers a check list for management purposes and asked them to inform him of their regional plans to deal with the disease. These were discussed at a meeting held later in the month.

I have arranged for a copy of the letter to all doctors to be placed in the Library.

Young Persons (Housing)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what advice he intends to give 16 and 17-year-olds who have left home but receive no income support about housing themselves from September onwards;

(2) how he proposes to determine the circumstances under which a 16 or 17-year-old may be justified in leaving home once income support has been withdrawn from under 18 year-olds.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 25 February 1988]:* Regulations have yet to be prepared, but it is the Government's intention that 16 and 17-year-olds who are not required to be available for work—for example, the lone parent and the severely disabled—will be entitled to income support at all times. School leavers who have good reason for being away from home and who have registered for a job or a YTS place will be entitled to income support during the child benefit extension period—up to the end of the calendar year for summer school leavers and up to three months for others—whilst they are considering the job or youth training scheme opportunities that are available. The regulations will include those young people with no living parent or guardian, those who have recently been in local authority care, those placed away from home by a probation officer of social worker and those who cannot live at home because they would be threatened with physical or sexual abuse.

Those unemployed young people who wish to live away from home and who are not covered by the regulations will have no entitlement to income support unless the Secretary of State directs that, exceptionally, benefits should be paid on the ground of severe hardship. Someone who joins the

young training scheme will be able to receive income support, if appropriate, to supplement his training allowance.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he proposes to make any exceptions to the withdrawal of income support for under 18-year-olds so that income support could be given to those resident in an approved scheme of rehabilitation, such as that provided by the Young Men's Christian Association; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many 16 and 17-year-olds he expects to be both living away from home and unable to pay rental and accommodation charges in September; what that number will be for the constituency of Stoke-on-Trent, North; and what advice he will give to the Young Men's Christian Association to enable it to continue to accommodate 16 and 17-year-olds until September in the knowledge that they will no longer be able to pay the charges when income supplement is withdrawn in September.

Mr. Scott [*holding answer 25 February 1988*]: The Government do not intend to make any exceptions to its general rules on income support to cater specifically for 16 and 17-year-old residents of accommodation provided by the Young Men's Christian Association.

Some will be entitled to income support without time limit because they are incapable of work, whilst those who are fit for work, who are living away from home with good cause—for example, orphans and those who would be threatened with physical or sexual abuse—and who have registered for a job or a youth training scheme place will be entitled to benefit for a short period whilst they consider the job and youth training scheme opportunities that are available.

The guarantee of a youth training scheme place to all 16 and 17-year-olds who want one will be seen by the majority of young people as an opportunity to make a good start in life. Someone who joins the youth training scheme will be able to receive income support, if appropriate, to supplement his training allowance.

No estimates are available of the number of 16 and 17-year-olds who will be living away from home in September and who will be unable to pay rental or accommodation charges. We estimate, however, there are some 21,000 in the age group in Great Britain who are either boarders or householders; there are no comparable figures for the Stoke area.

Patient Expenditure

Mr. Lofthouse: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the average annual expenditure per patient in 1986-87 by the Pontefract district health authority.

Mrs. Currie [*holding answer 1 March 1988*]: For 1986-87, hospital costing returns submitted by the Pontefract district health authority show average costs per patient treated as follows (average costs for the Yorkshire region are also included for comparative purposes).

Hospital name and type	*In-patients*		*Out-patients*		*Accident and emergency patients*		*Day patients*		*Day cases*
	Cost per in-patient per day £	*Cost per case* £	*Cost per attendance* £	*Cost per new case* £	*Cost per attendance* £	*Cost per new case* £	*Cost per attendance* £	*Cost per new case* £	*Cost per attendance* £
Yorkshire region									
Acute (51 to 100 beds)	81·03	566·46	25·92	114·56	[1] n/a	n/a	[1] n/a	n/a	75·33
Mainly acute	79·98	710·46	27·04	122·46	20·03	28·50	37·21	1,314·36	38·72
Mainly long-stay	62·15	[2]—	33·34	175·80	10·50	21·87	19·21	535·68	63·25
Geriatric	41·85	[2]—	22·19	78·71	10·19	19·98	22·93	728·84	[1] n/a
Mental illness	41·23	[2]—	27·24	182·85	8·36	17·24	17·90	1,713·48	[1] n/a
Pontefract district									
Ackton									
Acute (51 to 100 beds)	55·79	1,498·89	20·98	130·84	[1] n/a	n/a	[1] n/a	n/a	[1] n/a
Pontefract general infirmary									
Mainly acute	85.05	581·74	26·01	114·24	20·81	30·60	18·76	751·23	44·15
Castleford, Normanton and district									
Mainly long-stay	59·62	[2]—	19·89	82·36	8·68	18·60	16·54	353·74	36·00
Southmoor									
Geriatric	41·31	[2]—	[1] n/a	n/a	[1] n/a	n/a	31·01	854·56	[1] n/a
Warde Aldam									
Mental illness	58·34	[2]—	9·29	33·66	8·36	17·24	[1] n/a	n/a	[1] n/a

[1] No patients of this type were treated during the year.
[2] Average costs per in-patient case in respect of hospitals providing long-stay treatment are not routinely calculated.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Banbridge District Council

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he intends to take in view at Banbridge district council's decision to prevent further consultation between the town and country planning department and the district council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) will continue to consult the Banbridge district council on all planning applications involving land within its administrative area. This will take the form of the presentation on a regular basis of a schedule of applications received. Schedules will indicate the

preliminary opinion of the Department as to how each application should be determined. In accordance with established practice, if the Department does not receive the comments of the council within two weeks, a decision will be issued in accordance with the provisional opinion.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Training Scheme

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much has been spent on advertising the job training scheme; and how much that was per filled place since its inception.

Mr. Nicholls: Expenditure on advertising up to the end of January was some £8,370,000. This represents a cost of £115 per place filled since the start of the scheme in November 1986 up to December 1987, the latest date for which information is available.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of entrants to the job training scheme in Barnsley have obtained a credit or qualification as a direct result of their time on the scheme since its inception.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, *Official Report*, Tuesday 23 February, at column *127*.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many applications there have been for the child care allowance on the new job training scheme.

Mr. Nicholls: At the end of January 1988, the latest date for which figures are available, there had been 13 applications for child care allowance on the new Job Training Scheme in the 10 pilot areas where this allowance is available.

Jobcentres (Docklands)

Mr. Leyton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans the Manpower Services Commission has for setting up jobcentre facilities in London docklands.

Mr. Lee: Responsibility for jobcentres now rests with Department of Employment's employment service. It has a network of 23 local offices in the docklands boroughs of which 11 offer jobcentre facilities. It is currently reviewing this network with a view to helping the largest possible number of local unemployed people find work.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from the Justice group on the industrial tribunal system; and if he will make a statement on any response he proposes to make.

Mr. Nicholls: I am considering, in conjunction with the presidents of the industrial tribunals, the recommendations made by Justice in its report on industrial tribunals published in December 1987.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many subject access requests under the terms of the Data Protection Act his Department has received; what was his estimate of this number; whether he is reconsidering the subject access fee charged by his Department as a result; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The Department of Employment group, comprising the Department of Employment, the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service, the Health and Safety Executive, and the Manpower Services Commission has received a total of 102 subject access requests under the Data Protection Act. Prior to the subject access data of 11 November 1987, it was not possible to make any firm estimate of the number of requests which would be received. We have no plans at present to reconsider the subject access fees charged by the Department of Employment Group.

Community Programme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what specific provisions are being made to ensure that smaller voluntary organisations will be able to continue to sponsor places on the revised community programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Following publication of the White Paper "Training for Employment" on 16 February 1988 the Manpower Services Commission is developing the detailed rules for the new adult training programme. There will be a variety of opportunities for voluntary organisations to participate and I refer the hon. Member to para 5.13 of the White Paper which states:

"The Government are very concerned that voluntary organisations and others which have an established role in the Community Programme should have the opportunity to make a major contribution to the new programme".

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what specific proposals he is considering to ensure a smooth transition in funding to the proposed new community programme for voluntary sector projects and organisations.

Mr. Nicholls: Existing providers who become training managers in the new adult training programme will be funded for all their filled places under the arrangements set out in the White Paper "Training for Employment" published on 16 February 1988. To ensure a smooth transition the Manpower Services Commission's area managers will be talking in detail with their agents and independent sponsors about these arrangements, and the positive role we hope they will play in the new programme.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what specific consideration he gives to regional variations in needs and opportunities in making allocations for project-based schemes under the community programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Community programme places are allocated to regions and areas in the light of both national priorities set out in planning guidance issued on an annual basis, and local priorities determined in consultation with area manpower boards. The following factors are taken into account when deciding on regional allocations:

1. The distribution of eligible unemployed people.
2. Current and past performance in achieving filled place targets.
3. The relative buoyancy of labour markets.
4. Flexibility to meet special needs which may arise during the year.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make an estimate of the proportion of those current community programme schemes which will not fall within the guidelines for eligibility under the proposals for the programme's reform.

Mr. Nicholls: The Manpower Services Commission are currently developing the detailed guidelines and criteria for the new adult training programme. It is not possible, therefore, to estimate the number of current community programme schemes that will not meet the guidelines for the new programme. However, the new programme will provide at least 170,000 places for project-based training, and this should ensure that the experience of existing community programme agents and sponsors can continue to be harnessed.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consultations he will be undertaking with organisations running existing community programmes and adult training schemes concerning the implementation of the new adult training scheme and other proposals contained in the recent White Paper from his Department.

Mr. Cope: The Manpower Services Commission has decided to establish a task group representing employers, trade unions, local authorities, voluntary bodies and other organisations running existing community programme and adult training schemes to advise on the implementation of the new adult training programme. In the course of local planning, the Manpower Services Commission will also be consulting area manpower boards and potential providers of the new programme.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of the entrants to the community programme on the 12 months to December 1987 were *(a)* to full-time places, *(b)* men, *(c)* single, *(d)* aged over 25 years, *(e)* unemployed for over 12 months and *(f)* were formerly benefit claimants.

Mr. Nicholls: The latest information available is that relating to the 12 months to the end of November 1987. This is given in the table.

	Number	*per cent.*
Total entrants	272,697	
of whom		
(a) Full-time	31,633	11·6
(b) Male	202,342	74·2
(c) Single	203,977	74·8
(d) Aged over 25 years	115,351	42·3
(e) Unemployed for over 12 months	216,794	79·5
(f) Formerly benefit claimants in direct receipt of benefit	263,153	96·5
(g) Formerly benefit claimants indirectly in receipt of benefit	5,858	2·1

Major Hazards

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the members of the Health and Safety Commission sub-committee on major hazards; and if he has set a timetable for its work.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Commission's advisory committee on major hazards completed its work in 1984. The commission's standing advisory committee on dangerous substances subsequently set up a sub-committee on the major hazard aspects of the transport of dangerous substances. The current members of the sub-committee are:

Mr. A. J. Williams, Health and Safety Executive (Chairman);
Dr. D. Plester, Dr. I. Canadine, Mr. S. Hope and Mr. J. Middlemas (appointed after consultation with the Confederation of British Industry);
Mr. R. Coyle and Mr. D. Matthews (appointed after consultation with the Trades Union Congress);
Mr. W. Cooney and Mr. E. Johnson (appointed after consultation with local authority associations), Mr. P. Abbott, British Rail;
Dr. V. Marshall, an independent expert.

There is no set timetable for the work of the sub-committee. It will report as soon as possible, but the timing of final conclusions will depend upon the complexity of the problems revealed.

Work Accidents

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have suffered injuries or death in work accidents in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* Scotland for each year since 1974.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) *Official Report* 16 December 1987, at column *578* in which I gave the available information for Great Britain. A breakdown of these figures for England, Wales and Scotland could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The position in Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many prosecutions have been brought in respect of work accidents for each year since 1974.

Mr. Nicholls: The available information is set out in the table. Not all these cases arose from accidents at work.

Year	*Number of prosecutions: information laid*			
	All[1]	*LAs*[2]	*Fact & Agric. Insp.*[3]	*Fact. Insp.*[4]
1975	—	—	—	2,956
1976	—	—	—	2,174
1977	—	—	—	2,814
1978	—	—	—	2,603
1979	—	—	2,427	—
1980	3,169	545	—	—
1981	2,408	516	—	—
1982	2,810	468	—	—
1983	2,749	511	—	—
1984	2,792	585	—	—
1985	2,764	451	—	—
1986-87[5]	2,628	453	—	—

[1] Data include prosecutions taken by HM Factory and Agricultural Inspectorates, Local Authorities (where known), Explosives Inspecorate, HM Mines and Quarries Inspectorate, Railway Inspectorate and the Petroleum Engineering Division of the Department of Energy, from 1983 but exclude the Poilution Inspectorate (formerly the Industrial Air Pollution Inspectorate). From 1980 to 1982 figures are for HM Factory Inspectorate, HM Agricultural Inspectorate and Local Authorities only.
[2] Local Authorities.
[3] HM Factory and Agricultural Inspecorate only.
[4] HM Factory Inspectorate only.
[5] Provisional data for the 12 month period April 1986 to March 1987.

Benefit

Mr. McTaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of people disqualified from unemployment benefit for each area office in the Glasgow area within the last year, giving the reasons for disqualification and the length of the period of disqualification.

Mr. Lee: The number of adjudication officers' decisions that disqualified claimants for receipt of unemployment benefit during the latest period for which figures are available (year ending 30 June 1987) are detailed in the table, broken down by reasons for disqualification. Figures are not available on an individual office basis and those given therefore represent the total number of disqualifications by adjudication officers in Glasgow. The figures do not cover disallowances of benefit, nor disqualification of those absent from Great Britain. No analysis is made of the length of the disqualification imposed, and this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Year ending 30 June 1987

Leaving Voluntarily	8,716
Misconduct	3,113
Refusal of Suitable Employment	24
Neglect of a Reasonable Opportunity of Suitable Work	1
Refusal to Carry Out Written Recommendations	1
Refusal or Failure to Take a Reasonable Opportunity of Approved Training	22
Trade Dispute	4

Mr. McTaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what proportion of people disqualified from receiving unemployment benefit within the last year have appealed against that disqualification in *(a)* Glasgow, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Britain as a whole;

(2) how many people disqualified from receiving unemployment benefit have appealed the decision; and what percentages of disqualifications this represents.

Mr. Lee: Separate records of the number of appeals against disqualifications of unemployment benefit are not kept, and such information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The table shows the numbers of appeals against all adverse decisions, including both disqualifications and disallowances within *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Britain as a whole for the year ending December 1986. The Department has no figures for other areas available.

Great Britain	
Total of disallowances and disqualifications	1,081,394
Total appeals	44,874 = 4·15 per cent.
Scotland	
Total of disallowances and disqualifications	116,109
Total appeals	6,272 = 5·4 per cent.

Training Schemes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for each of the Manpower Services Commission's areas in Greater London, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, the Birmingham and Solihull Manpower Services Commission area and for Great Britain as a whole, what are the most recent monthly statistics for new job training schemes, for all those trainees who have left the scheme, how many (i) found work, (ii) failed to attend, (iii) went on to another course of training or education, (iv) completed the course, (v) left for sickness or (vi) went back on to unemployment and showing the total number of currently filled places.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* At 29 January 1988, the latest date for which figures are available, some 26,249 formerly unemployed people were participating in the new job training scheme. The area breakdown is set out in the table.

As for leavers from the scheme, a return from managing agents seeking information on the reasons for leaving was first requested in October 1987. Data from this return is known to be incomplete so far and will not be comparable between areas and managing agents in all places. The data does not provide reliable information about job entry rates, or other trainee destinations. This information will be gathered by an independent follow-up survey of all trainees which has now started. Early results are expected in the spring. Managing agents' returns will be considered in the light of that information.

Number of participants in training on 29 January 1988

	Number
MSC—London areas	
North London	386
East London	438
South London	308
West London	176
Inner London North	512
Inner London South	910
MSC—Merseyside and Manchester areas	
Mcr Central	815
Mcr East	389
Mcr North	410
Merseyside	625
MSC Birmingham and Solihull	823

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, for each of the Manpower Services Commission's areas in Greater London, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, the Birmingham and Solihull Manpower Services Commission area and for Great Britain as a whole, what are the most recent monthly statistics for new job training schemes, showing *(a)* entrants in the latest available period, *(b)* the number of cumulative entrants since the scheme started, *(c)* a breakdown of entrants, showing how many were (i) male and (ii) female, the length of time they had been out of work, their ethnic backgrounds and whether or not they had any disability.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The tables give the requested information about entrants to the new job training scheme.

Table 1
Manpower Services Commission—London areas

	North London	East London	South London	West London	Inner London north	Inner London south
Number of entrants in latest available period (January)	177	180	51	109	172	194
Cumulative entrants since scheme started (April to January)	1,482	990	882	838	1,327	1,923
Cumulative						
(a) Male	983	625	580	489	532	1,346
(b) Female	499	365	302	349	795	577
(c) Length of time out of work						
(1) 6 to 12 months	689	435	421	398	656	836
(2) Over 12 months	367	216	226	226	380	484
(3) Over 24 months	426	339	235	214	291	603
(d) Ethnic background						
(1) White	682	519	531	374	638	786
(2) Black/African Caribbean descent	400	196	153	150	412	663
(3) Indian Sub-Continent descent	177	158	69	162	94	98
(4) None of these	155	85	94	97	112	190
(5) I prefer not to say	68	32	35	55	71	186
(e) Disabled persons	23	37	41	19	29	59

Note: Due to difficulties in data collection some of the information given above is incomplete.

Table 2
MSC—Merseyside and Manchester Areas

	Mcr Central	Mcr East	Mcr North	Merseyside
Number of entrants in latest available period (January)	317	203	145	253
Cumulative entrants since scheme started (April to January)	2,437	1,341	1,358	2,429
Cumulative				
(a) Male	1,912	1,074	1,063	1,774
(b) Female	524	267	295	655
(c) Length of time out of work				
(1) 6-12 months	901	571	960	747
(2) Over 12 months	526	351	464	599
(3) Over 24 months	514	335	509	1,083
(d) Ethnic background				
(1) White	1,783	1,126	1,084	2,118
(2) Black-African Caribbean descent	158	30	15	16
(3) Indian sub-continent descent	85	44	56	8
(4) None of those	348	115	158	252
(5) I prefer not to say	62	26	45	35
(e) Disabled persons	122	35	76	47

Note: Due to difficulties in data collection some of the information given above is incomplete.

Table 3
MSC—Birmingham, Solihull and Great Britain

	Birmingham and Solihull	Great Britain
Number of entrants in latest available period (January)	789	9,662
Cumulative entrants since scheme started (April to January)	2,461	79,779
Cumulative		
(a) Male	1,721	56,113
(b) Female	740	18,966
(c) Length of time out of work		
(1) 6-12 months	915	31,547
(2) Over 12 months	580	18,009
(3) Over 24 months	966	25,170
(d) Ethnic background		
(1) White	1,446	60,492
(2) Black/African, Caribbean descent	416	3,968
(3) Indian sub-continent descent	331	2,956
(4) None of those	219	5,727
(5) I prefer not to say	49	2,015
(e) Disabled persons	46	2,785

Note: Due to difficulties in data collection some of the information given above is incomplete.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, for each of the Manpower Services Commission's areas in Greater London, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, the Birmingham and Solihull Manpower Services Commission area and for Great Britain as a whole, what are the most recent monthly statistics for new job training schemes on *(a)* the number of trainees in the latest available period who entered work placements, *(b)* the cumulative total of how many are in work places at the latest available dates, *(c)* the numbers of trainees who left the scheme in the latest available period, and *(d)* the number of cumulative leavers since the scheme started.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 22 February 1988]:* The table gives the requested information on practical experience placements and leavers to the new job training scheme.

Manpower Services Commission—London areas

	North London	*East London*	*South London*	*West London*	*Inner London North*	*Inner London South*
Entered first practical experience placements in January	48	not known	5	4	34	26
In practical experience placement at latest date (end January)	246	not known	87	26	473	293
Number of leavers in latest available period (January)	163	186	69	93	118	226
Cumulative leavers since scheme started (April-January)	1,096	552	574	735	815	1,013

MSC—Merseyside and Manchester areas

	Mcr Central	*Mcr East*	*Mcr North*	*Merseyside*
Entered first practical experience placements in January	110	67	75	84
In practical experience placements at latest date (end January)	450	248	294	434
Number of leavers in latest available period (January)	260	152	134	289
Cumulative leavers since scheme started (April to January)	1,625	953	949	1,745

MSC—Birmingham, Solihull and Great Britain

	Birmingham and Solihull	*Great Britain*
Entered first practical experience placements in January	102	3,392
In practical experience placements at latest date (end January)	457	15,389
Number of leavers in latest available period (January)	243	7,175
Cumulative leavers since scheme started (April-January)	1,638	52,029

Note: Due to difficulties in data collection some of the information given above is incomplete.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 4 March 1988

WALES

Reception Classes

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many four-year-old children in each local education authority in Wales attend reception classes in primary schools; what percentage of the estimated four-year-old population in each local education authority area this represents; and what is the average pupil-to-teacher ratio in local education authority for these classes, for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information is not collected centrally in the form requested. However, the number of four-year-olds attending primary schools as at January 1987 is as follows:

	Number of pupils	*Pupils as a percentage of the estimated 4-year-old population*
Clwyd	4,828	100·0
Dyfed	4,039	100·0
Gwent	5,418	98·5
Gwynedd	2,708	100·0
Mid Glamorgan	6,887	97·0
Powys	1,324	100·0
South Glamorgan	4,802	94·2
West Glamorgan	4,495	99·9

Education Statistics

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing the number of children whose education is governed by statements under the provision of the Education Act 1981 as a proportion of the total school population of each local education authority in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information as at January 1987 is as follows:

	Number of statemented pupils	*Proportion of total school population*
Clwyd	1,208	1·8
Dyfed	478	0·9
Gwent	1,210	1·7
Gwynedd	765	2·0
Mid Glamorgan	3,244	3·4
Powys	206	1·1
South Glamorgan	1,219	1·9
West Glamorgan	1,884	3·3

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing the number and proportion of children whose education is governed by statements under the provision of the Education Act 1981 in maintained primary and secondary schools, in special schools, in each local education authority in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information as at January 1987 is as follows:

	Primary and secondary schools		*Special schools*[1]	
	Number of statemented pupils	*Proportion of pupils*	*Number of statemented pupils*	*Proportion of pupils*
Clwyd	316	0·5	788	98·5
Dyfed	147	0·3	290	93·5
Gwent	597	0·9	476	100·0
Gwynedd	450	1·2	282	100·0
Mid Glamorgan	2,392	2·6	655	99·4
Powys	54	0·3	138	87·9
South Glamorgan	551	0·9	645	97·3
West Glamorgan	1,533	2·8	333	100·0

[1] Includes pupils in the process of assessment for statements. Pupils who were in special schools at the time of implementation of the Education Act 1981 were subject to transitional arrangements and not, in all cases, included by local education authorities in their statistical returns as fully statemented.

The number of statemented pupils include only those who are the responsibility of a given local education authority and are receiving education in that authority's area.

ENERGY

Coal Imports

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy from which countries Britain has imported coal in the last 12 months; and how many tonnes have been imported from each respective country at the latest available date.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Coal imports into the United Kingdom during 1987 were as shown in the following table:

Country of origin	*'000 tonnes*
Australia	3,441
USA	2,898
Poland	1,083
Netherlands	664
Canada	362
Colombia	297
FR of Germany	256
South Africa	221
Belgium/Luxembourg	192

Country of origin	'000 tonnes
China	146
Others[1]	220
Total	9,780

[1] 10 countries, each of which supplied less than 100,000 tonnes of coal to the United Kingdom in 1987.
Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Coal Mining Subsidence

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he is taking to make his Department's leaflet entitled "Coal Mining Subsidence Damage—A Guide to Claimants Rights" widely known.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Since the leaflet was published in May 1986 over 100,000 have been issued to prospective claimants through agencies such as the citizens' advice bureaux, libraries and local authorities, as well as the professional bodies and British Coal. My Department also deals direct with regular requests for replacements. I believe that the leaflet is well known in coal mining areas.

Electricity Supply Industry (Sale)

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when his Department will be appointing outside consultants to advise on the sale of the electricity supply industry; if he will list the areas where he will be seeking outside advice and the names of the consultants who have applied to advise his Department; and when these appointments are likely to be made.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The consultants listed were appointed last year to provide advice on electricity privatisation:

Kleinwort Benson —preliminary financial advice
Touche Ross —regulatory and accounting advice
Slaughter and May —legal advice
Merz and McLellan—technical advice

The Department is considering the appointment of financial advisers for the next phase of electricity privatisation. Other appointments will be made in due course.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Family Law Reform Act 1987

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General if Her Majesty's Government have decided upon the commencement date for the Family Law Reform Act 1987; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor will bring the Family Law Reform Act 1987 (which reforms the law relating to the consequences of birth outside marriage) into force on 4 April 1988 except for part II, sections 24 and 25, which are directly dependent on part II, and section 23 which deals with scientific tests. Before section 23 can be brought into force, detailed arrangements for the purpose of facilitating the introduction of testing by DNA profiling will need to be devised. The Lord Chancellor is considering with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary how this might best be done.

THE ARTS

Items in Lieu of Tax

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether the credits made available to the Inland Revenue by his Department which were specified in his answer to the hon. Member for Warley, East on 16 February, *Official Report*, columns *571-2*, represent bookkeeping entries within central Government accounting not involving any payment of money.

Mr. Luce: These cases, and other acceptance in lieu transactions, involve payments to the Inland Revenue, not bookkeeping entries.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Manufactured Goods and Services

Mr. McFall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has a revised figure for the anticipated balance of trade in *(a)* manufactured goods and *(b)* services for the United Kingdom for the current year; and what was the figure for 1979.

Mr. Major: My right hon. Friend will be making a forecast for the current year at Budget time. In 1979 the balance of trade in manufactured goods showed a surplus of £2,698 million and services a surplus of £3,815 million.

Balance of Payments

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the balance of payments for the United Kingdom in 1988-89.

Mr. Major: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be making a new forecast at Budget time.

Cash Limits

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give revised cash limits for 1987-88 which take account of the decision by some Departments not to seek supplementary provision to cover the carry forward allowed under the end-year flexibility scheme.

Mr. Major: Under the end-year flexibility scheme, announced in 1983, some 33 1987-88 cash limits were increased to allow for the carry forward of capital underspend in 1986-87—*Official Report*, 23 July 1987, columns *434-38*. In the case of five voted cash limits, the relevant Departments have not sought parliamentary approval for the extra provision in a Supplementary Estimate. To keep the control figures in line with provision, the cash limits are accordingly being reduced; a list is shown in the following table.

Revisions to 1987-88 voted cash limits resulting from the carry forward of capital underspends in 1986-87 not being required

Class	Vote	Accounting department	Description of expenditure	Current cash limit £000	Decrease £000	Revised cash limit £000
V	5[1]	Department of Trade and Industry	International trade: export credit services, insurance of investment overseas (central services)	39,325	1,250	38,075
XI	5	Lord Chancellor's Department	Administration of justice: England and Wales	129,529	2,000	127,529
XII	3	Department of Education and Science	Universities, etc	1,714,201	95	1,714,106
XIX	13	Her Majesty's Treasury	Central management of the Civil Service: computers and telecommunications	18,084	293	17,791
XX	9[2]	Land Registry	Records, registrations and surveys	3	1	2
				—	3,639	—

[1] Capital expenditure on this vote is not classified as public expenditure.
[2] This was a token cash limit change to cover carryover of £97,000 taken in the form of increased appropriations-in-aid.

National Savings

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on the implications of a negative public sector borrowing requirement for the role of the national savings movement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the current role and objectives of the national savings movement.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 3 March 1988]:* There is no longer a voluntary national savings movement. The work is undertaken by the Department for National Savings. The Department's tasks are to contribute towards both the funding of Government borrowing and the refinancing of maturing stock through sales of a range of products to personal investors, and to continue to offer customers who have invested in national savings the best possible service within the resources available.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Altnaheglish Reservoir

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost of the works recently completed at Altnaheglish reservoir.

Mr. Needham: The cost of the work was some £2·1 million, including professional fees.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will detail the principal works carried out to the Altnaheglish reservoir; by how much the height of the dam was increased; and by how much the storage capacity of the reservoir was increased in *(a)* gallons and *(b)* days supply.

Mr. Needham: The work at Altnaheglish included the strengthening of the dam by the construction of a series of terraces on the downstream side, the provision of a new spillway and the installation of new monitoring equipment.

The height of the dam has not been increased but the works have allowed the maximum water level to be raised some 5 m. This has increased the effective capacity of the reservoir by about 113 million gallons, which is equivalent to 23 days' consumption.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Departmental Staff

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many members of staff within his Department are located within each region outside of London; what percentage this constitutes of staff within his Department; and what were the comparable figures in absolute and percentage terms in 1979.

Mrs. Rumbold: A total of 609 (24 per cent.) of the Department's 2,541 staff are employed at its Darlington office and a further 577 (23 per cent.) regionally based HMI and support staff are located at divisional and local offices throughout the country. Comparable detailed figures for the location of the 2,635 staff employed in 1979 are not available, but the proportions would be broadly similar.

Departmental Buildings

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the location and status of all buildings within his Department located in London and the annual cost of rents, rates and maintenance of each.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 2 March at column *584*. My Department occupies accommodation in eight buildings in the Greater London area ranging from its main HQ building at Elizabeth house to local offices for Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many subject access requests under the terms of the Data Protection Act his Department has received; what was his estimate of this number; whether he is reconsidering the subject access fee charged by his Department as a result; and whether he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Up to the end of February 1988 my Department had received a total of eight requests. This figure was in line with our expectations. The fee charged by the Department, currently £8, will be reviewed towards the end of this year.

School Meals

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list, by local education authority *(a)* the amount of subsidy per child made by each local education authority in England and Wales for each school meal provided at the full price charged by the authority and *(b)* the charges made for school meals by local education authorities in England and Wales.

Mr. Dunn: Data relating to level of subsidy on school meals made by local education authorities are not collected centrally. The charges made for fixed-price school meals in LEAs in England are included in the Department's annual report on the school meals census, which is available in the Library of the House.

Matters relating to Wales are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the estimated cost to local authorities of meeting, by 1 September 1991, the standards laid down in the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981; whether he is making any special arrangements to meet those costs; and if he will make a statement on progress in meeting the provisional arrangements required by the regulations.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Table 16 of the survey of school buildings, published last November, presented the following national estimates of the cost of meeting statutory accommodation requirements and the main structural requirements most directly attributable to the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981. Costs were shown in ranges because of the sampling error in grossing up from the survey data. The estimates must be treated with caution.

	Primary cost range £ million	*Secondary cost range £ million*
Statutory accommodation requirements (recreation area, playing fields teaching area, staff accommodation and other requirements)	240-450	150-300
Main structural requirements related to regulations (structure, roofs, walls, windows, heating and other essential services)	360-490	270-370

Notes:

1. The estimates relate to schools expected to remain on the same site, ie more than 80 per cent. of the sample.
2. Estimates were prepared by grossing up the sample to the total population of county and voluntary controlled schools. While the sample of 392 primary and 403 secondary schools is considered reasonably representative, the relative smallness of the sample means that the sampling error is considerable for many categories of cost.
3. The estimates are at November 1985 prices.

Since the survey was carried out in the early part of 1986, local authorities have undertaken a substantial number of projects to improve school buildings. The programme of capital expenditure which I announced in November last year should enable local education authorities and voluntary bodies to spend more than £750 million over the next three years on projects to improve school buildings, and authorities will no doubt make use of the flexibilities open to them—for example, through the use of capital receipts—to increase spending on improvements still further where they consider it appropriate to do so. Within the increased provision, I have allocated £55 million in 1988-89 specifically to help LEAs to tackle the accumulated deficiencies identified by the survey and to allow voluntary school governors to continue the programme of replacement and improvement begun last year. I have also increased provision for local authority spending on repairs and maintenance by about £120 million in 1988-89, some 40 per cent. above spending in 1985-86.

PRIME MINISTER

United States Aircraft and Nuclear Weaponry

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what information she has given to (i) American senators who have recently visited Britain and (ii) representatives of the United States Administration about Her Majesty's Government's policy on accepting more United States aircraft and nuclear weaponry in Britain.

The Prime Minister: No decisions about NATO force adjustments have yet been taken. The United Kingdom, like its NATO allies, remains committed to preserving NATO's ability to respond effectively to aggression at whatever level it may occur, as was confirmed by the recent NATO summit.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister how many subject access requests under the terms of the Data Protection Act her office has received; what was her estimate of this number; whether she is reconsidering the subject access fee charged by her Department as a result; and whether she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Cabinet Office has received 22 subject access requests. Most of these have been from employees of the office who are not charged a fee. For other requests the standard fee of £10 is charged. The office did not expect a large number of requests and is not reconsidering the fee.

Royal College of Midwives

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister if she will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letter dated 4 February sent to her by the Newham branch of the Royal College of Midwives, together with any reply she has sent.

The Prime Minister: It is not my usual practice to give information on correspondence from third parties. I can, however, confirm that I have received such a letter and a reply will be sent in due course.

Official Inquiries

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list all official inquiries initiated by Her Majesty's Government which were chaired by members of the House of Lords since 1981; and if she will give in each case the subject of the inquiry and its total cost to public funds.

The Prime Minister: The information requested by the hon. Gentleman is not held centrally and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Northern Development Company

Mr. Cran: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what quantifiable evidence he has of the performance of the Northern Development Company.

Mr. Atkins: The Northern Development Company, to which my Department gives financial support, has recently published its corporate programme and budget for 1988-89. This document includes information on a number of output measures. More information will be available when the company publishes the annual report of its activities for the financial year 1987-88, which will be no later than September 1988.

Building Societies

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will introduce legislation amending the Financial Services Act to prohibit building societies from operating their own unit trusts.

Mr. Maude: No. The powers of building societies are defined under the Building Societies Act and not the Financial Services Act. My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury announced on 2 February, at columns *537-39*, certain extensions to these powers, including the power to manage unit trust schemes.

Departmental Advertising

Mr. Blair: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how much the Department of Trade and Industry will spend in the current financial year 1987-88 on advertising and promotion of the Department and its schemes;

(2) how much his Department spent in advertising and promotion in each financial year for 1978-79 to 1986-87;

(3) how much it is projected his Department will spend on advertising and promotion over the next three years.

Mr. Butcher *[holding answer 3 March 1988]:* Information is not readily available for expenditure, other than centrally, nor for 1978-79, on advertising and promotion of my Department.

The figures which are available are as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	0·85
1980-81	1·46
1981-82	2·20
1982-83	3·24
1983-84	2·72
1984-85	3·56
1985-86	2·09
1986-87	2·00
[1]1987-88	13·31

[1]Estimated.

Expenditure for the next three years has not yet been agreed. Its level will depend very much on the impact of present activities, which are being carefully and continuously monitored.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Gambling (Children)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he now proposes to seek to amend the legislation relating to local authorities powers to control slot machine gambling by children;

(2) what representation he has received regarding the law on local authorities' powers to control slot machine gambling by children;

(3) what surveys on slot machine gambling by children he has received since 1 July 1987, other than the recently published survey by the Spectrum Children's Trust of Taunton.

Mr. John Patten: We have received the results of a number of surveys or inquiries of that nature in this field. Some are based on the direct questioning of young people about their use of amusement machines. Others have taken the views and experience of persons and interests concerned, such as local authorities, licensing justices, the police and probation services, teachers and education authorities, those who provide the machines and other traders, individuals and organisations concerned with people with problems of gambling addiction, and research bodies. The sources of the surveys include:

The Association of Chief Officers of Probation; the Amusement Arcade Action Group; the Gordon House Association; the Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland; Parents of Young Gamblers; HJM Caterers Ltd.; Thomas Organisation Ltd; Birmid Leisure Ltd.; Wilson Leisure Ltd.; Stardust Leisure Ltd.; Countgrade Ltd.; Kendor Entertainments Ltd.; Showboat Holdings Ltd.; JCM Holdings (Yorkshire) Ltd.; Shipley and Sons; the Magistrates' Association; the Centre for Leisure Research; the National Council on Gambling; Mr. Neil Farmer; the Devon Branch of the Magistrates' Association; the National Housing and Town Planning Council; and the British Amusement Catering Trades Association.

In addition, we have received the results of research which the Home Office research unit commissioned of Carrick James Market Research Ltd. and the Susie Fisher Group, and the report of a programme of visits to amusement arcades by the inspectors of the Gaming Board. Other material sent in response to our review of the law on amusement arcades may take account of surveys which are not explicitly referred to.

In the course of the review we have received a range of representations about the powers of local authorities to grant or refuse permits for premises having amusement-with-prizes machines, or otherwise to control such premises. Some of these representations are to the effect that the current law is adequate, and that additional controls would limit unnecessarily the provision and use of the machines and premises where they are found. The focus of representations that the law should be amended concern the suggestion that young people may become addicted to playing the machines, and that this may lead to anti-social or criminal behaviour. The suggestion most frequently made in these representations is that access to places providing the machines or use of the machines themselves should be restricted to people aged over 16 or 18 years. It has been variously suggested that such a restriction should be imposed nationally, or be within the power of local authorities, or that of the licensing Justices.

We hope to be able to reach conclusions on our review of these issues in due course.

Motorways (Vehicle Removal)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are used by the Metropolitan police when approving businesses for the removal of vehicles from motorways.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that garages are selected for removal work on the basis of proximity to the motorway. Garages are approved only if they provide a 24-hour service, can deal with vehicles of any age or condition, and have secure storage facilities.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are used by the Metropolitan police when deciding which approved business to call when arranging the removal of vehicles from motorways.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The police select the garage nearest to the motorway junction which will give quickest access to the incident. Where that garage cannot provide immediate service the next nearest will be selected.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the businesses approved, with date of approval, by the Metropolitan police for removal of vehicles from the M3 via junction 1 and from the M25 via junctions 13, 14 and 15.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has provided the following information:

Location	*Vehicle type*	*Approved garage*	*Date of approval*
M3, junction 1			
Westbound, junction 1 to river and eastbound, junction 2 to junction 1	Heavy goods vehicles	1. National Rescue Group, Rescue House, Unit T151, Brooklands Industrial Park, Oyster Lane, Byfleet, Surrey	June 1984
		2. Radley Autos, Central Garage, High Street, Harmondsworth, Middlesex	July 1976
		3. Commercial Recovery and Repairs, 10 Ascot Road, Clockhouse Lane Estate, Bedfont, Middlesex	December 1969
Westbound, junction 1 to river, and eastbound, junction 2 to junction 1	Cars, motorcycles, etc.	1. Grimshaw and Wake Ltd., Oldfield Road, Hampton, Middlesex	February 1984
		2. Ashford Coachworks, Ashford Road, Ashford, Middlesex	September 1985
M25, junctions 13, 14 and 15			
Northbound, junctions 13-15 and southbound, junctions 15-13	Heavy goods vehicles	1. National Rescue Group (see above)	
		2. Radley Autos (see above)	
Northbound, junctions 13-15	Cars, motorcycles, etc	1. Ashford Coachworks, Bell Weir Garage, Wraysbury, Middlesex	April 1987
		2. National Rescue Group (see above)	
Southbound, junctions 15-13		1. Radley Autos (see above)	
		2. Hounslow West Motors, 343 Staines Road, Hounslow, Middlesex	November 1970

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how often during *(a)* 1986 and *(b)* 1987 each approved business was called by the Metropolitan police to remove vehicles from the M3 motorway via junction 1, and from the M25 motorway via junctions 13, 14 and 15.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested is not available centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Prisons (Night Sanitation)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison places it is anticipated will lack access to night sanitation by the end of 1999.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is anticipated that 14,500 places will lack access to night sanitation by the end of 1999. By then 12 establishments now without night sanitation should have facilities for all inmates, and a further nine establishments for some inmates.

Semi-automatic Rifles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what he estimates will be the cost of the semi-automatic rifle compensation — buy back programme.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the debate on the money resolution in connection with the Firearms (Amendment) Bill on 1 March at columns 939-47.

Home Defence

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will name the home defence exercise which is planned to take place in March or April to train Government staff in north-east England home defence region No. 2; what number and grades of officials from each Department will participate in the exercise; and which local government staff, public and private utility staff and staff from other agencies with designated war appointments will take part in the exercise.

Mr. John Patten: A limited exercise, called REGEX, is due to take place within home defence region No. 2 in April 1988. Its aim is to test the procedures for the

operation of regional government headquarters in wartime. About 50 designated staff of various grades will be taking part, drawn from a number of Departments and public services, including the police and fire services and the armed forces.

Parole

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for each of the past five years, how many life sentence prisoners convicted of murder held in British gaols have received parole in *(a)* the third, *(b)* the fourth, and *(c)* the fifth year of their sentence, indicating what minimum sentences had been recommended by courts.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information is given in the table. All these prisoners were released on licence following a favourable recommendation by the parole board and after consultation with the judiciary as required by section 61 of the Criminal Justice Act 1967. None had been the subject of a formal minimum recommendation under section 1(2) of the Murder (Abolition of Death Penalty) Act 1965.

More detailed information about all life sentence prisoners is given annually in "Prison Statistics — England and Wales" table 1(f) of the latest issue, for 1986 (Cm. 210), a copy of which is in the Library.

Persons serving sentences for murder released on licence between 1983 and 1987 from prison department establishments in England and Wales having served five years or less under sentence in such establishments.

Time under sentence[1]	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Up to 2 years	—	—	—	—	—
Over 2, up to 3 years	—	—	—	—	1
Over 3, up to 4 years	1	—	—	—	—
Over 4, up to 5 years	—	3	1	1	1

[1] Excluding any time spent on remand in custody, in non-prison department establishments or following any subsequent recall.

Downing Street (Access)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what authority the Metropolitan police have established a permanent road block to prohibit free access to Downing street.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Commissioner has advised me that his officers restrict access to Downing street in pursuance of their common law duty to prevent crime and disorder.

Licensing Bill

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from English vineyard owners about the Licensing Bill.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Since the report stage of the Licensing Bill, I have met representatives from the English Vineyard Association and we have received three letters from hon. Members representing vineyard owners in their constituencies, including one from my hon. Friend.

Local and Community Radio (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many new local and community radio stations are planned for Northern Ireland;

(2) what regulations will be introduced to cover the expansion of local and community radio in Northern Ireland so as to ensure *(a)* diversity, *(b)* balance of news and *(c)* balance of opinion.

Mr. Renton: It will be for the radio authority to decide how many licences should be awarded in Northern Ireland, having regard to the spectrum available and to criteria reflecting those in paragraph 7.23 of the Green Paper "Radio: Choices and Opportunities". It will be a condition of all licences that news is presented with accuracy and impartiality.

IPEC '87

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he had as to the nations which would be represented at the IPEC '87 police and internal security equipment sales exhibition when he authorised participation by his Department; and what representations he intends to make to the exhibition organisers regarding the invitation list for the current year.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The exhibition, which was organised by a private company, was open to the general public. I understand that IPEC 1988 is also being organised by a private company; the arrangements are a matter for them.

Police National Computer

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of *(a)* current cases and *(b)* cases in the past year involving allegations of abuse of the police national computer or any other police computer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is for the chief officer of the force concerned to investigate any reports of abuse of the police national computer or any other police computer. No reports on any such investigations have been received by the Home Office in the past year.

Electoral Registration Officers

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what clarification and guidance he issues to electoral registration officers in pursuance of their statutory obligation under section 53 of the Representation of the People Act 1986.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Advice on the exercise of their responsibilities under the Representation of the People Acts and regulations is currently given to electoral registration officers in the Home Office RPA circular No. 296 of 20 November 1985, a copy of which is in the Library.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now list the other recent incidents referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East of 10 December 1987, *Official Report*, column *235*, relating to firearms control.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The incidents referred to are as follows:

Plumstead on 9 July 1987
Wolverhampton on 6 October 1987
Bristol on 14 October 1987
Gunthorpe on 3 November 1987

Southall on 11 November 1987
Chard on 21 November 1987
Woolwich on 23 November 1987
Stowmarket on 26 November 1987

Independent Broadcasting Authority

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make an announcement regarding a new chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

Mr. Renton: An announcement will be made in due course.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that no past or present member of the Conservative party will be appointed as the new chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

Mr. Renton: No. The appointment will be made on the basis of personal distinction, experience and ability, not of political affiliation.

Panama

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what anti-drug training has been given to Panamanian personnel in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Five Panamanian anti-drugs officers completed a course in narcotics detection at the Lancashire constabulary dog training school at Preston between April and June 1987.

TV-am

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what evidence he has about the extent of foreign shareholding in TV-am over the past three years;

(2) whether he has conducted an inquiry into the extent of foreign shareholding in TV-am over the past three years;

(3) what steps he has taken to monitor whether TV-am has been in breach of its responsibilities under the Broadcasting Act 1981 during the past three months with regard to the quality and extent of its news coverage.

Mr. Renton: It is for the IBA to secure that disqualified persons, including companies based or controlled from outside the European Community, do not become or continue as ITV contractors, and to judge contractors' adherence to their contracts in regard to programming. I understand that three shareholdings above 5 per cent. in TV-am may themselves have been controlled from outside the Community.

Microwave Video Distribution

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department has conducted an inquiry into the feasibility and development of a microwave video distribution system.

Mr. Renton: A feasibility study into the technical and financial prospects for MVDS (Multipoint Video Distribution Systems) was commissioned by the Home Department and the Department of Trade and Industry as announced on 14 October 1987.

Television Franchises

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has received any evidence from *(a)* the Independent Broadcasting Authority, and *(b)* the Independent Television Association about the feasibility of auctioning independent television franchises in 1992.

Mr. Renton: The comments of the authority and the association on the report of the Peacock committee both express views about the recommendation that ITV contracts should be awarded by competitive tender.

Missing Cats

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidance to chief constables to the effect that records should be kept of cases of missing cats; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Cats and Dogs (Experiments)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what safeguards are applied by universities to ensure that cats and dogs used for the purpose of experiments are owned by, or have been legally obtained by those who supply them: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Controls on the source of commonly used laboratory animals, including the specific provision that cats and dogs are obtained only from the designated breeding establishments at which they were bred, are contained in the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. They will be brought into force in January 1990, as part of the phased programme of implementation of the provisions of the Act.

It has long been the practice of Home Office inspectors to encourage laboratories to obtain supplies of animals only from reputable and legal sources and to take particular care where cats and dogs are involved. This advice was reinforced recently in additional guidance issued to laboratories including those at universities.

Young Offenders (Custody)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 14-year-old males and 15-year-old females were sentenced to a period of custody by the courts in England and Wales during each year since 1982.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 1 March 1988]:* The information held centrally, which may be incomplete, is given in the following table.

Males aged 14 and females aged 15 given custodial sentences[1] England and Wales

Sex and age	*Number*
Males aged 14	
1982	1,034
1983	919
1984	863
1985	830
1986	578
Females aged 15	

Sex and age	Number
1982	16
1983	33
1984	32
1985	34
1986	15

[1] Detention centre order, borstal training (up to May 1983), youth custody (from May 1983) and detention under section 53 of Children and Young Persons Act 1933.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Light Dues

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to which European Economic Community countries levy light dues on fishing vessels.

Mr. Gummer: Comparison with practices elsewhere in the European Community is not appropriate. Following the transfer of the cost of the Racal Decca navigator system to the general lighthouse fund, the Government decided that larger fishing vessels should make a contribution to the fund. Under these arrangements, fishing vessel owners are better off because the fishing vessel light dues are generally less than the hire charge made under the previous system.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many subject access requests under the terms of the Data Protection Act his Department has received; what was his estimate of this number; whether he is reconsidering the subject access fee charged by his Department as a result; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: During the period 11 November 1987 to 29 February 1988, my Department has received 114 requests for subject access under the terms of the Data Protection Act. It had been estimated that during this period, in the order of 400 requests might be received. This estimate has been calculated from an assumed annual access rate of 0·1 per cent. of the estimated populations covered by the 40 registrations made by my Department. I am not at present reconsidering the subject access fee charged by my Department.

Sheep (Radioactivity)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the answer of 29 December 1987, why in the light of the fact that his Department first became aware on 30 June 1986 of the high level of rainfall over west Yorkshire following the Chernobyl accident, no intensive monitoring of sheep for radioactivity was undertaken in the Skipton area until November 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: As I said in my replies to the hon. Member on 29 January 1988, *Official Report*, column *421*, and 10 February, *Official Report*, column *240*, the significance of receipt of rainfall data from the Meteorological Office was superseded by the use of results of surveys of actual deposition and of monitoring. These did not indicate any need for intensive activity in Yorkshire. The activity that was undertaken in November 1987 was in response to local public concern following local newspaper reports. Although that exercise did result in the detection of marginally elevated levels in two sheep at one location on the moorland near Skipton, it also confirmed the earlier conclusion that there was no unacceptable risks to food supplies in west Yorkshire as a result of the Chernobyl fall-out.

Quarantine

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) for each year since 1980, how many prosecutions have been brought against *(a)* United Kingdom residents and *(b)* United Kingdom visitors for attempting to evade United Kingdom quarantine laws.

(2) if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each month over the last three years the number of animals in quarantine in the United Kingdom;

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 2 March 1988]:* The information provided relates to the rabies quarantine controls. The details of prosecutions brought by the local authorities and notified to my Department are:

	Number of prosecutions	of which:		
		British citizens	Foreign citizens	Airlines etc.
1980	75	13	45	17
1981	74	21	42	11
1982	52	10	32	10
1983	73	20	40	13
1984	29	5	23	1
1985	77	21	49	7
1986	75	20	51	4
1987	42	9	26	7

Information about the number of animals in quarantine in the United Kingdom each month over the last three years cannot be provided without disproportionate cost. However, during the last three years the following import licences have been issued for animals subject to the rabies quarantine requirements:

Number of import licences issued	1985	1986	1987
dogs	4,630	4,738	5,249
cats	2,527	2,329	2,927
other mammals	28,195	39,193	95,999

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what special measures have been proposed to ensure that animals cannot enter the United Kingdom either illegally or accidentally *(a)* while the Channel tunnel is being constructed and *(b)* when the Channel tunnel has been opened.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 2 March 1988]:* Eurotunnel has agreed to take measures to prevent animals gaining access to this country through the Channel tunnel during the period of construction and also when it is in use. These include the use of sealed trains, the installation of physical barriers and grids at entry and exit points, regular inspections, rigorous cleaning programmes, the continuous deployment of baited traps in both tunnel and terminal areas and facilities to detain and inspect animals. Discussions on the details and

specifications are still in progress. The Government will insist on diligent application of these safeguards to ensure that they are fully effective.

Customs and Excise officials will carry out checks, as they do at other ports of entry, to prevent the illegal importation of animals through the tunnel.

DEFENCE

Redundant Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has considered scuttling redundant nuclear submarines in order to dispose of them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: A number of options for the disposal of reactors from decommissioned nuclear submarines are under consideration. Disposal at sea is one of these.

HMS Dreadnought

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce a decision on his Department's plans for disposing of the submarine HMS Dreadnought.

Mr. Sainsbury: No decisions have yet been taken on the preferred disposal route for reactors from decommissioned nuclear submarines.

Valiant Class Submarines

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Royal Navy's Valiant class submarines to be phased out of service.

Mr. Sainsbury: The planned decommissioning dates of Royal Navy vessels are classified.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's progress on proposals for disposing of the Valiant class of submarines once they become redundant.

Mr. Sainsbury: No decisions have yet been taken on the preferred disposal route for reactors from decommissioned nuclear submarines.

Airships

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretry of State for Defence whether his Department has commissioned any studies into the performance of airships as airborne early warning systems for the protection of the naval fleet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: This proposition has been evaluated.

RAF Greenham Common

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he proposes to take, following the recent judgment at Reading Crown court relating to RAF Greenham Common; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The implications of the judgment will be considered in the light of the legal advice that I have requested. I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as conclusions are reached.

Shackleton Aircraft (Crashes)

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the nature of all crashes involving Royal Air Force Shackleton aircraft since 1968; if he will indicate in each case if the aircraft was on anti-submarine patrol; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Since 1968, there have been only two major accidents to Royal Air Force Shackleton aircraft. On 1 April 1968, an aircraft crashed on landing at RAF Ballykelly after a routine training sortie. On 19 April 1968, another Shackleton from RAF Ballykelly flew into the ground in Northern Ireland during an anti-submarine exercise.

Nuclear Weapons (Safety Devices)

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what use Her Majesty's Government make of electronic safety lock devices to deter the unathorised use of nuclear weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to comment on the details of the arrangements which exist to prevent any unauthorised use of nuclear weapons.

Buccaneer Aircraft

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all accidents involving Buccaneer aircraft since 1977, together with the route being flown in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Between 1 January 1977 and 31 December 1979 there were six accidents to Royal Air Force Buccaneer aircraft, classified as major (category 4 or 5) accidents:

Date	*Location*
3 February 1977	Vokel, FRG
4 April 1977	Claerwen Reservoir, Wales
8 August 1977	Laarbruch, FRG
31 October 1977	Glomfjorden, Norway
21 June 1978	Nordholz, FRG
12 July 1979	Furstenau, FRG

Since 1 January 1977, there have also been 23 accidents classified as category 3 (repairable locally). It would not be possible to list these without disproportionate cost and effort. Nor would it be possible to identify the routes flown by all these aircraft before the accidents without disproportionate cost and effort. However, since 1980, there have been placed in the Library of the House summaries of the findings of RAF boards of inquiry into all major Buccaneer accidents.

Tornado Aircraft

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of all accidents to nuclear-capable Tornado aircraft since 1983; and what was the risk to the public from each accident.

Mr. Freeman: Since 1 January 1983, 40 Royal Air Force Tornados have been involved in serious accidents. Of these, 25 were classified as category 3 (repairable locally). A further 15 Tornados suffered major or irreparable damage. All major accidents are listed in the appropriate

Statement on Defence Estimates. In addition, since 1980, there have been placed in the Library of the House summaries of the findings of RAF boards of inquiry into all major RAF Tornado accidents. No civilians have ever been killed or injured as a result of an RAF Tornado accident.

Jaguar Aircraft

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the nature of the 135 accidents to Royal Air Force Jaguar nuclear-capable aircraft between June 1975 and June 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The detailed information requested by the hon. Member could not be produced in the time available without disproportionate cost and effort. Most of the Royal Air Force Jaguars involved in serious accidents during this period were repaired at local RAF stations, but 49 such aircraft suffered irreparable damage or were lost. Since 1980 summaries of the findings of RAF boards of inquiry into all major Jaguar accidents have been placed in the Library of the House.

Military Equipment

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of United Kingdom military production is exported.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 26 February 1988]:* No precise figures are available but it is estimated that 20 to 25 per cent. of United Kingdom production of identifiable military equipment in the years 1984 to 1986 was exported.

EMPLOYMENT

Deaf People

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps are taken to ensure that communicators provided under the communication services for the deaf scheme are competent in communication skills with deaf people.

Mr. Cope: The Manpower Services Commission requires that all communicators working with trainees meet the appropriate level of competence established by the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People and the Scottish Association of Interpreters for the Deaf.

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average cost per trainee of providing communication support under the communication service for the deaf.

Mr. Cope: Information about the average cost of providing communication support is not readily available. However, communication support is provided for a maximum of 500 hours per trainee over a two-year YTS scheme. Managing agents are reimbursed for communicators at rates of £6·50, £8 or £12 per hour, according to their level of skill in communicating. Since the communication service for the deaf was introduced in April 1986, a total of 172 trainees have received communication support, at a total cost of £234,472 to date.

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he is taking to publicise the communication service for the deaf.

Mr. Cope: The communication service for the deaf (CSD) is publicised to all YTS managing agents and referral agencies and to other interested parties by means of MSC codes of practice on special training needs and equal opportunities and also by articles in a number of periodicals. MSC and employment service staff also take every opportunity to promote CSD to training providers and deaf people. MSC officials are currently considering the need for any further publicity.

Wages Councils

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the statistics on wages councils' employment and compliance with wages council rates in 1987, in the same format used in the reply on 5 May 1987, *Official Report*, columns 334 to 340.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is given in the tables.

Table 1
Establishments covered by wages councils on register—December 1987

Wages Councils	*London*	*South Eastern*	*Eastern*	*South Western*	*Midlands*	*North Western*	*Yorkshire and Humberside*	*Northern*	*Scotland*	*Great Britain*
Aerated Waters	7	14	57	16	110	25	24	23	66	342
Clothing Manufacture	3,006	160	306	301	1,281	937	452	214	307	6,964
Boot and Shoe Repairing	764	257	258	345	371	406	277	70	130	2,878
Button Manufacturing	18	4	4	4	18	4	3	1	1	57
Coffin Furniture and Cerement Making	1	—	—	2	8	2	5	—	2	20
Cotton Waste Reclamation	11	—	—	1	1	28	1	—	—	42
Flax and Hemp	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	6	8
Fur	147	8	8	7	14	28	11	3	36	262
General Waste Materials Reclamation	124	74	107	151	291	308	240	99	137	1,531
Hairdressing Undertakings	4,482	3,184	3,302	4,104	5,361	5,171	3,029	1,968	2,840	33,441
Hat, Cap and Millinery	25	2	44	5	12	14	8	11	2	123
Lace Finishing	—	—	—	1	73	—	—	—	—	74
Laundry	215	283	79	114	103	68	67	35	122	1,086
Linen and Cotton Handkerchief	2	1	3	3	10	80	9	1	5	114
Made-up Textile	34	13	36	31	51	34	42	18	33	292
Ostrich and Fancy Feather	12	1	6	4	—	—	—	4	3	30
Perambulator and Invalid Carriage	3	2	5	3	11	4	6	1	1	36
Retail Bespoke Tailoring	180	56	52	38	41	52	39	14	37	509
Rope, Twine and Net	—	1	5	12	5	20	18	5	19	85
Sack and Bag	20	—	7	5	14	20	12	2	6	86

Wages Councils	London	South Eastern	Eastern	South Western	Midlands	North Western	Yorkshire and Humberside	Northern	Scotland	Great Britain
Toy Manufacturing	17	16	45	30	35	40	32	15	9	239
Retail Non-Food Trades	20,069	12,050	9,840	12,085	19,383	13,350	8,712	4,495	8,854	108,838
Retail Food and Allied Trades	11,770	13,142	10,066	12,853	13,297	15,891	10,018	7,199	10,881	105,117
Licensed Non-Residential	6,263	5,980	6,363	9,323	12,388	9,540	6,452	4,001	5,429	65,702
Licensed Residential and Restaurant	5,023	3,911	3,595	6,842	3,581	3,355	2,013	1,418	3,890	33,628
Unlicensed Place of Refreshment	4,143	2,062	1,540	2,585	1,733	1,977	1,324	851	1,497	17,712
Total	56,336	41,221	35,728	48,866	58,192	51,354	32,794	20,449	34,313	379,253

Table 2
Establishments checked and underpayments found in wages council trades—1987

Wages councils	Establishments checked by all methods	Percentage of register checked	Establishments checked by visit	Percentage of register checked by visit	Establishments underpaying	Percentage of all establishments checked underpaying	Percentage of establishments visited underpaying
Aerated Waters	26	7·08	24	6·54	2	7·69	8·33
Clothing Manufacture	967	13·36	883	12·20	191	19·75	21·63
Boot and Shoe Repairing	224	8·46	103	3·89	7	3·12	6·79
Button Manufacturing	3	5·35	3	5·35	—	—	—
Coffin Furniture and Cerement Making	2	10·52	2	10·52	—	—	—
Cotton Waste Reclamation	5	9·43	5	9·43	2	40·00	40·00
Flax and Hemp	2	20·00	2	20·00	—	—	—
Fur	21	6·42	19	5·81	—	—	—
General Waste Materials Reclamation	116	7·33	96	6·06	5	4·31	5·20
Hairdressing Undertakings	2,200	6·59	1,132	3·39	290	13·18	25·61
Hat, Cap and Millinery	8	4·82	8	4·82	3	37·50	37·50
Lace Finishing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Laundry	107	11·18	84	8·77	10	9·34	11·90
Linen and Cotton Handkerchief	17	10·89	15	9·61	2	11·76	13·33
Made-up Textile	27	9·12	23	7·77	1	3·70	4·34
Ostrich and Fancy Feather	3	9·37	3	9·37	—	—	—
Perambulator and Invalid Carriage	3	10·34	3	10·34	—	—	—
Retail Bespoke Tailoring	37	7·18	33	6·40	3	8·10	9·09
Rope, Twine and Net	7	7·00	7	7·00	—	—	—
Sack and Bag	7	8·86	7	8·86	1	14·28	14·28
Toy Manufacturing	20	7·29	17	6·20	1	5·00	5·88
Retail Non-Food Trades	8,354	7·85	3,704	3·48	854	10·22	23·05
Retail Food and Allied Trades	8,171	7·45	4,520	4·12	1,399	17·12	30·95
Licensed Non-Residential	6,475	9·18	4,277	6·06	843	13·02	19·71
Licensed Residential and Restaurant	3,213	9·51	2,620	7·75	516	16·06	19·69
Unlicensed Place of Refreshment	1,509	9·58	1,346	8·55	313	20·74	23·25
Total	31,524	8·24	18,936	4·95	4,443	14·09	23·46

Table 3
Workers covered by wages councils and results of checks—1987

Wages councils	Estimated numbers of workers covered by Wages Council Orders (1982)	Workers whose pay was checked by all methods	Workers whose pay was checked by visit	Workers underpaid	Percentage underpaid of all workers checked	Percentage underpaid of all workers checked by visit	Arrears paid	Arrears not pursued at workers' request	Arrears not pursued for other reasons	Total arrears assessed
							£	£	£	£
Aerated waters	15,000	915	900	4	2·05	0·44	897	—	—	897
Clothing manufacture	252,800	27,879	19,778	630	2·25	3·18	42,599	4,623	34,058	81,280
Boot and shoe repairing	7,100	535	257	9	1·68	3·50	1,676	1,137	955	3,768
Button manufacturing	2,100	19	19	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Coffin furniture and cerement making	300	13	13	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cotton waste reclamation	500	88	88	9	10·22	10·22	1,467	1,940	453	3,860
Flax and hemp	1,400	137	137	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fur	4,500	138	123	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
General waste materials reclamation	19,300	890	795	10	11·23	1·25	1,139	110	595	1,844
Hairdressing undertakings	135,600	7,350	3,584	341	4·64	9·51	39,233	4,188	8,313	51,734
Hat, cap and millinery	6,800	54	54	5	9·26	9·25	727	—	—	727
Lace finishing	800	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Laundry	33,700	2,937	1,995	28	0·95	1·40	6,012	—	—	6,012
Linen and cotton handkerchief	5,200	261	257	9	3·44	3·50	1,283	296	—	1,579
Made-up textile	4,800	260	222	1	0·38	0·45	5	—	—	5
Ostrich and fancy feather	1,400	105	105	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Perambulator and invalid carriage	1,500	379	379	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Retail bespoke tailoring	5,200	149	142	4	2·68	2·81	174	—	765	939
Rope, twine and net	4,000	422	422	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sack and bag	1,400	149	149	10	6·71	6·71	1,202	—	—	1,202
Toy manufacturing	18,900	399	380	1	0·25	0·26	63	—	—	63
Retail non-food trades	512,800	105,932	14,101	1,394	1·31	9·88	172,445	74,451	22,943	269,839

Wages councils	Estimated numbers of workers covered by Wages Council Orders (1982)	Workers whose pay was checked by all methods	Workers whose pay was checked by visit	Workers underpaid	Percentage underpaid of all workers checked	Percentage underpaid of all workers checked by visit	Arrears paid	Arrears not pursued at workers' request	Arrears not pursued for other reasons	Total arrears assessed
							£	£	£	£
Retail food and allied trades	519,300	49,999	17,510	2,698	5·39	15·40	257,444	89,972	52,580	399,996
Licensed non-residential	508,700	47,409	26,017	2,295	4·84	8·82	149,636	20,014	35,241	204,891
Licensed residential and restaurant	555,300	37,572	26,590	981	2·61	3·68	85,405	6,070	26,088	117,563
Unlicensed place of refreshment	116,400	7,585	6,235	699	9·21	11·20	64,521	20,660	11,144	96,325
Total	[1]2,734,800	291,576	120,252	9,129	3·13	7·59	825,928	223,461	193,135	1,242,524

[1] From 26 July 1986, wages orders no longer applied to workers under 21 years of age. It is estimated that there are about 500,000 in this category.

Table 4
Checks carried out and underpayments found in wages inspectorate divisions—1987

Division	Establishments checked by all methods	Percentage of register checked	Establishments checked by visit	Percentage of register checked by visit	Establishments underpaying	Percentage of all establishments checked underpaying	Percentage of establishments visited underpaying
London	3,765	6·5	1,737	3·0	270	7·2	15·5
South East	3,305	7·9	2,350	5·6	503	15·2	21·4
Eastern	3,244	8·5	2,394	6·3	405	12·5	16·9
South West	4,073	9·2	2,410	5·4	961	23·6	39·8
Midlands	5,524	8·4	2,486	3·8	525	9·5	21·1
North West	3,950	8·3	2,707	5·7	541	13·7	19·9
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,906	9·0	1,917	6·0	511	17·5	26·6
Northern	1,678	7·9	1,069	5·1	404	24·1	37·7
Scotland	3,079	8·6	1,866	5·2	323	10·5	17·3
Great Britain	31,524	8·2	18,936	4·9	4,443	14·1	23·5

All branches of multiple firms are recorded under the division in which the head office is located. Account has to be taken of this when comparing divisional figures.

Table 5
Workers whose pay was checked in wages inspectorate divisions—1987

Division	Workers whose pay was checked by all methods	Workers whose pay was checked by visit	Workers underpaid	Percentage underpaid of all workers checked	Percentage underpaid of workers checked by visit	Arrears paid	Arrears not pursued at workers request	Arrears not pursued for other reasons	Total arrears assessed
						£	£	£	£
London	81,043	11,424	398	4·9	3·48	59,140	10,094	10,242	79,476
South East	20,687	12,994	1,048	5·06	8·06	94,934	23,349	31,010	149,293
Eastern	20,646	13,928	756	3·66	5·42	62,424	33,184	11,170	106,778
South West	26,378	13,390	1,763	6·68	13·16	124,171	26,293	21,068	171,532
Midlands	48,888	22,122	984	2·01	4·44	131,851	34,715	33,018	199,584
North West	32,400	15,659	1,484	4·58	9·47	116,107	37,703	28,606	182,416
Yorkshire and Humberside	28,401	12,275	1,255	4·41	10·22	92,944	41,248	27,033	161,225
Northern	11,622	6,203	871	7·49	14·04	85,049	5,233	15,066	105,348
Scotland	21,511	12,257	570	2·64	4·65	59,308	11,642	15,922	86,872
Great Britain	291,576	120,252	9,129	3·13	7·59	825,928	223,461	193,135	1,242,524

The numbers of workers in branches of multiple firms are recorded under the division in which the head office is located. Account has to be taken of this when comparing divisional figures.

Adult Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether unemployed adults will still be entitled to choose to study under the 21-hour rule after the adult training scheme is launched; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: The introduction of the new adult training programme from September 1988 will not affect the position of people who choose to study under the DHSS's 21-hour rule.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) whether a decision to undertake to study under the 21-hour rule is treated as a positive outcome after a restart interview; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he will include the option of studying under the 21-hour rule as one of the means of opportunities offered in the course of restart interviews.

Mr. Cope: So long as they remain available for work the option to pursue a course of study within the terms of the "21-hour rule" may be considered an appropriate way of helping unemployed people back into work. In such circumstances it would be regarded as a positive outcome of a restart interview.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed people are currently studying under the 21-hour rule.

Mr. Cope: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether individuals who join a job club are counted as unemployed in the unemployment figures.

Mr. Nicholls: Those people who are registered as unemployed when they join a job club remain on the register and are included in the unemployment figures.

Training

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, under the Government's proposals for training for the unemployed, how many *(a)* single persons and *(b)* married men are expected to receive (i) more and (ii) less than the present £67 per week average paid under the existing community programme; what percentages these are of the total; and if he will give a breakdown according to whether persons will gain or lose by multiples of £5 a week.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 1 March 1988]:* I regret the information requested is not available as it has not been possible to estimate the numbers of trainees who will receive particular amounts in the new programme.

Participants in the new programme will be paid an allowance at the rates recommended by the Manpower Services Commission. These payments will not be subject to income tax or national insurance contributions. All participants will be better off than they would be if they remain unemployed. Many will also be better off than they would have been on the £67 average wage paid on the community programme; such wages are of course subject to deductions for income tax and national insurance contributions.

The new training programme will replace not only the community programme but all the Government's training programmes for unemployed adults. In the large majority of cases, payments to trainees on the new programme will be at least as high as those on the existing programmes.

TRANSPORT

Trunk Roads (Pedestrian Safety)

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action is being taken to improve the safety of pedestrians intending to cross trunk roads; whether he has consulted the Ramblers Association on such matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The most appropriate means of securing pedestrians' safety will depend on the characteristics of the road concerned and the needs of all who use it. We are always happy to have the views of the Ramblers Association on any particular problem spots and on safety generally.

Manchester Airport

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, further to his meeting on 17 February with the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, and in the light of the proposal given by the United States Government to the British embassy in Washington on 19 February, when formal negotiations are to commence on the prospects for increased United States carrier access to Manchester airport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have requested an early meeting with the United States Government. We await their reply.

Aircraft Safety

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will call for a report from the Civil Aviation Authority as to whether the definition of time zero in the "Net Safety Benefit Analysis" (Civil Aviation Authority Paper 87017) equations refer to the time of ignition, the time the aircraft contacted the ground or the time the evacuation could have started;

(2) if he will call for a report from the Civil Aviation Authority as to the way in which it obtained an accurate indication of the time at which the first and last survivors evacuated the aircraft in each of the 20 accidents examined in detail in the "Net Safety Benefit Analysis" (Civil Aviation Authority Paper 87017);

(3) if he will call for a report from the Civil Aviation Authority as to why the only improvement which is allowed to extend the time available for successful evacuation in the "Net Safety Benefit Analysis" (Civil Aviation Authority Paper 87017) equation is the installation of fire-blocking layers;

(4) if he will call for a report from the Civil Aviation Authority as to why the "Net Safety Benefit Analysis" (Civil Aviation Authority Paper 87017) does not take into account the presence before flashover of hydrogen fluoride, hydrogen chloride and cyanide toxic fumes in the equations;

(5) if he will call for a report from the Civil Aviation Authority as to the basis on which it aligned the time at which the last survivor exited the cabin to the time the cabin environment became non-survivable in the equations for the "Net Safety Benefit Analysis" (Civil Aviation Authority Paper 87017).

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Civil Aviation Authority is wholly responsible for aviation safety regulation. I will ask the chairman of the authority to write to the hon. Member.

Panama Canal

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the number of British-owned ships using the Panama canal in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The number of United Kingdom flag vessels using the Panama canal over the five-year period from September 1981 to September 1986 is in the table below. British-owned vessels that do not fly the United Kingdom flag cannot be identified separately and are not included in the figures given below. The source of the information is the Panama Canal Commission's annual reports.

	Number
September 1981-September 1982	844
September 1982-September 1983	718

	Number
September 1983-September 1984	623
September 1984-September 1985	503
September 1985-September 1986	484

We continue to keep the situation concerning the canal under review in close consultation with British shipping interests.

Motorways

Mr. David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made with constructing and improving motorways in the current year.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Motorway developments continue to form a key element of the national road programme. They are large discrete projects and the progress of starts and completions is not necessarily a regular flow.

The connection of the M42 to the M5 for southbound traffic, opened in March 1987, was the most recent new section of motorway to be completed.

Extensive work is in progress. This includes widening six miles of the M25 between Chertsey and Staines to four lanes, and five miles of the M5 between Warndon and Rashwood to three lanes, as well as construction of the five-mile Portwood-Denton section of the Manchester motorway box and the systematic improvement of its older sections, including the installation of modern signalling. The Warwick section of the 59-mile extension of the M40 was started last summer and the first contract for the Banbury bypass section was let last month. We expect to start the Gaydon section, between the other two, in the summer.

Work will start shortly on new climbing lanes for slow heavy vehicles which will help to ease congestion on the M62, eastbound between junctions 21 and 22, and westbound between junctions 24 and 25.

We plan to start construction during the next 12 months of schemes to extend the M3 from Compton, south of Winchester to the M27, and to fill the 14-mile gap in the M20 between Maidstone and Ashford which will be the principal route to and from the Channel tunnel.

Motor Cycle Noise

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made towards the introduction of regulations under the Motor Cycle Noise Act 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department is circulating for comment draft regulations to be made under this Act, for which my hon. Friend deserves much credit. The regulations will require all replacement motorcycle exhausts and silencers offered for sale to be marked to show that they are identical to the original equipment or that they conform to British Standard AU 193 or that they are not for use on public roads.

In view of the European Commission's recent proposals for a Community directive on replacement silencers for motorcycles we have made it clear that we shall amend the regulations to implement this directive as soon as it is adopted by the Council.

Those regulations will enable us to curb an important source of excessive motorcycle noise.

Dual Speed Invalid Carriage

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he proposes to consult on draft regulations to introduce a dual speed invalid carriage.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department of Transport has today issued a consultation document. The vehicle we hope to introduce is an additional class of "invalid carriage" that would be able to travel at a speed of up to 8 mph on the carriageway, with the restriction remaining at 4 mph on the footway. Copies of the consultation document are available from:

The Disability Unit
Department of Transport
Room S10/21
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 3EB

Lorry Weighings

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that the records of lorry weighings which it is proposed to undertake under the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Bill *[Lords]* also be used as a basis upon which the law relating to the overloading of lorries on the highway is enforced.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 3 March 1988]*: The Department's consultative document No. 7, issued on 23 December 1987, proposed the individual weighing of all lorries before loading on to class II and II(A) ro-ro passenger ferries. This will be for the purpose of ferry loading and safety and will apply only to lorries joining outbound ferries. To enforce the lorry weight limits using this information it would be necessary to prove retrospectively in a court of law that a vehicle which had entered a port to join a ferry had travelled on the highway in an overloaded condition. Inbound vehicles checked at ferry ports and found to be overweight are prohibited from leaving until the overload is adjusted.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Central America

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the San Jose IV conference on Central America in Hamburg.

Mr. Eggar: The successful outcome of the San Jose conference is recorded in the economic and political declarations, copies of which I will place in the Library of the House as soon as possible. The conference was a valuable opportunity for the Twelve to discuss the peace process with the Central American and Contadora countries. The Community's support for peace is clearly shown by the commitment to take additional measures to assist the region.

European Foundation Treaty

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the aims of the European Foundation treaty; and what information he has on the Dutch refusal to ratify it.

Mr. Eggar: The aims of the European Foundation, which the 10 then members of the European Community

agreed to establish in 1982, were to promote European consciousness by various means including cultural activity. The Dutch Government have recently announced that they have been unable to ratify the agreement because of opposition in their Upper House. Without ratification by all the signatories, the foundation cannot come into existence.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many subject access requests under the terms of the Data Protection Act his Department has received; what was his estimate of this number; whether he is reconsidering the subject access fee charged by his Department as a result; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The diplomatic and aid wings together have so far received 26 requests for subject access, all from present or former members of staff: this figure is in line with forecasts of likely numbers of applications. There is no proposal to change the arrangements for charges set out in my reply to the hon. Member on 30 October 1987 at column *478*.

Royal Navy Submarines (Scuttling)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government have received any representations from the Irish Government concerning proposals for the scuttling of Royal Navy submarines in the Irish sea; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The Irish Government have made representations about the disposal of HMS Dreadnought. No decisions have yet been taken on the preferred disposal route for reactors from decommissioned nuclear submarines. A number of options are being considered, including disposal at sea. But there is no question of disposal in the Irish sea.

Panama

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government in respect of loan applications from Panama to international banking agencies upon which the United Kingdom is represented; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: It is for the management of the multilateral development banks in the first instance to consider and appraise such applications. It is our policy to consider loan proposals on their technical and economic merits in accordance with the articles of the organisations concerned.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests have been received from the Panamanian authorities for anti-terrorist training in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar: As a matter of standard practice, any such request from a foreign Government would be treated as confidential.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects that Her Majesty's Government will acknowledge acting President Palma as the new head of state of Panama; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: We recognise states, not Governments, in accordance with common international doctrine. The question of acknowledgement does not therefore arise. The European Community issued a statement on 2 March expressing deep concern at recent developments in Panama and appealing to the present rulers of Panama to open the way for internal peace and democracy.

El Salvador

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will be sending observers to the forthcoming legislative and municipal elections in El Salvador.

Mr. Eggar: We have accepted an invitation from the Salvadorean Government to observe the legislative and municipal elections in El Salvador on 20 March. Dr. David Browning, lecturer in geography at the university of Oxford has been appointed as the official Government observer. He will report his findings to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary.

SCOTLAND

Skoal Bandits

Mr. Harry Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations took place on the decision to ban the sale and export of Skoal Bandits.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government have announced that they are proposing to prohibit the supply of certain types of oral tobacco product, but in accordance with the requirements of the Consumer Protection Act 1987, under which the regulations would be made, are first consulting those whose interests would appear to be substantially affected by the proposal. Those consulted have been given to 26 May to make representations. Only after those representations have been received and considered will the Government decide their course of action.

Cancer Screening

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what screening facilities are available in each health board area for the early detection of ovarian cancer.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There is no proven screening test for ovarian cancer which can be applied to a particular population.

ENVIRONMENT

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many subject access requests under the terms of the Data Protection Act his Department has received; what was his estimate of this number; whether he is reconsidering the subject access fee charged by his Department as a result; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: By 1 March 1988 my Department — including PSA had received 381 subject access

requests. No prior estimate of this number had been made and I have no plans to reconsider the level of the fee charged.

Water Bills

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington, *Official Report*, 9 February, columns *127-8*, on what basis the national average figures for household bills for water supply for 1982-83 to 1987-88 have been calculated to produce a figure lower than both the English average and the Welsh figure.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of Wednesday 2 March at columns *583-6*.

Crown Suppliers

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of the leak inquiry in relation to the Crown Suppliers.

Mr. Chope: It is not the practice to comment on such matters.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has of how much of the material for which Nirex is currently seeking a repository *(a)* has originated or *(b)* will originate (i) in the United Kingdom, (ii) in Scotland and (iii) outside the United Kingdom.

Mr. Moynihan [*holding answer 25 February 1988*]: UK Nirex Ltd is responsible for identifying a suitable location for a deep underground repository for the disposal of low-level (LLW) and intermediate-level (ILW) radioactive wastes. I understand from UK Nirex that there are at present 41,800 cu m of ILW stored in the United Kingdom pending disposal of Nirex's repository. Ten per cent. of this ILW originated in Scotland and less than 3 per cent. from outside the United Kingdom. Some of the latter is returnable. Nirex expect to dispose of about 1 million cu m of LLW and about 0.3 million cu m of ILW in their repository by 2030. Eleven per cent. of the LLW and 10 per cent. of the ILW is expected to come from Scotland, and 1.4 per cent. of the ILW from outside the United Kingdom.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Trent RHA

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people were employed by Trent regional health authority on adminstrative duties in each year since 1982.

Mr. Currie: The table sets out the information requested. It excludes staff employed by district health authorities. I understand that the sharp changes in numbers of staff in 1983, 1985 and 1986 are due to transfers of functions (and staff) between the region and its districts and vice versa. The NHS in the Trent region employs more than 75,000 people (whole-time equivalents).

NHS Administrative and clerical staff in post Trent regional health authority at 30 September

Year	[1] *Whole-time equivalents*
1982	660
1983	930
1984	950
1985	880
1986	940

Source
DHSS Annual census of NHS non-medical manpower
[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest ten (10 whole-time equivalents)

Crewe DHA

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will tabulate in cost terms the expenditure of the Crewe district health authority for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Currie: Following is information derived from the annual accounts of the Crewe district health authority since its establishment on 1 April 1982:

	Revenue Expenditure £000	*Capital Expenditure £000*
1982-83	30,337	2,436
1983-84	32,185	2,425
1984-85	34,193	3,063
1985-86	36,011	1,264
1986-87	38,619	922

Notes:
1. The figures for capital expenditure include sums in respect of schemes within the district recorded in the annual accounts of the Mersey regional health authority. Revenue and capital expenditure incurred by the latter authority for the region as a whole is excluded
2. Prior to 1 April 1982 the authority's predecessor health district formed part of the Cheshire area health authority and district based figures were not collected centrally.

Pensioners

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he last met representatives of pensioners' organisations; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Scott: I last met representatives of pensioners' organisations on 22 February at a conference, "Winter of Action on Cold Homes", when the discussion covered state provision for the elderly and other groups.

I expect to accompany my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when she meets a delegation from the National Pensioners' Convention on 10 March.

Social Fund

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his reply on 1 February, *Official Report*, column *488*, showing planned social fund expenditure for 1989-90 and 1990-91, what is the planned gross outlay on loans, the amount set aside for contingencies, the total planned expenditure from the social fund and the cost of administration for each of those years, and for 1988-89.

Mr. Scott: The gross national budget for payments from the discretionary part of the social fund for 1988-89 was given in my reply to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) on 23 November

1987 at column *84*. The salary costs (including employer's national insurance contributions) of the administration of the discretionary part of the social fund will be £37 million in 1988-89. Details of the gross budget, the level of the contingency reserve and staffing levels for future years will be considered in the light of experience.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what help will be given to claimants if, despite the best endeavours of the social fund offices, a local office budget becomes fully spent before the end of the year.

Mr. Portillo: Social fund officers will be expected to manage their budgets flexibly over the course of the year to meet the highest priority needs whenever they occur. A model profile of expected expenditure on a month by month basis has been drawn up at national level to assist in planning expenditure. Local office managers may adjust the national profile to reflect particular local factors. Monthly profiles are indicative only and will not be operated as fixed monthly budgets. A central contingency reserve of £2 million has been set aside to make provision for unforeseen and unforeseeable demands.

RPI (Error)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the total amount of payments now made following the error in the calculation of the retail prices index.

Mr. Scott: Special payments should by now have been made to around 12 million people, some of whom will have received more than one payment. We estimate the amount disbursed to be about £98 million.

In-patients

Dr. Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list for each year since 1979 the average length of in-patient stay in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland;

(2) what was the average length of stay in acute hospitals for each year since 1979 in England, Wales and Scotland.

Mrs. Currie: The available information for England is given in the table. Statistics for the rest of the United Kingdom are a matter for my right hon and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

Teaching Hospitals

Dr. Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services by how much costs per patient in London teaching hospitals and provincial teaching hospitals exceed average costs per patient in non-teaching hospitals.

Mrs. Currie: Costing returns submitted to the Department for major hospitals in teaching disricts show average costs per patient for 1986-87 as in the table, which includes national averages for these types of hospitals. Costs of hospitals administered by the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals are not included.

	In-patients		*Out-patients*		*A and E patients*	
	Cost per in-patient day £	*Cost per case* £	*Cost per attendance* £	*Cost per new case* £	*Cost per attendance* £	*Cost per new case* £
Acute hospitals (over 300 beds): London teaching districts	133·91	1,138·93	37·86	174·32	22·80	27·82
Mainly acute hospitals: London teaching districts	129·91	1,227·58	46·53	187·14	30·53	38·65
Acute hospitals (over 300 beds): Provincial teaching districts	114·97	855·45	28·38	128·75	23·25	27·94
Mainly acute hospitals: Provincial teaching districts	90·43	813·13	29·36	137·46	19·69	25·28
Acute hospitals (over 300 beds): England	107·32	767·53	29·37	127·00	20·89	25·55
Mainly acute hospitals: England	85·92	763·79	26·05	111·20	19·76	24·84

Notes:
1. Costs for hospitals in London teaching districts will include London weighting staff costs.
2. Costs are not adjusted for variations in case-mix between hospitals. Teaching hospitals will tend to attract a different case-mix from non-teaching hospitals so that direct comparison may be misleading.

Free Milk

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the eligibility of playgroups, child-minders and nurseries to receive free milk.

Mrs. Currie: Children under five attending approved nursery schools and playgroups, or a registered childminder, are entitled to receive one third of a pint of free milk, or, in the case of children less than one year old, dried baby milk made up to provide one third of a pint, on each day of attendance. These arrangements will not be affected by the changes in social security provisions coming into effect in April.

Census Forms

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will arrange for the 1991 census forms to include a question asking if the respondent speaks a Celtic language; and asking him to identify that language.

Mrs. Currie: A question which would ascertain the number of people speaking a Celtic language is being considered, as are many other suggestions. However, no decisions have yet been taken on the content of the 1991 census; proposals will be published as a White Paper later this year.

Breast Cancer (Deaths)

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the numbers of women who have died of breast cancer in the Central Nottinghamshire health authority area for the years 1979 to 1987.

Mrs. Currie: The information is shown in the table. Data for 1987 are not yet available.

Numbers of registrations of deaths with breast cancer (ICD 9 174) as underlying cause to women usually resident in Central Nottingham district health authority[1], 1979-86

Year	Number
1979	57
1980	60
1981	63
1982	68
1983	58
1984	64
1985	85
[2]1986	73

[1] 1979-81 = Central Nottingham Health District.
[2] Provisional.

Operating Theatre Sessions (Wakefield)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about the number of operating theatre sessions cancelled between March and June 1986 owing to the unavailability of consultants in the Wakefield district health authority; which consultants were involved; what reasons were given for their unavailability; what action has been taken to prevent a recurrence; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Management of operating theatres is a matter for individual health authorities and the information requested is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may therefore wish to approach the chairman of Wakefield health authority for the information he seeks.

Wakefield was one of the authorities mentioned in the recent Comptroller and Auditor General's report on the use of operating theatres which was the subject of a Public Accounts Committee hearing on 29 February. A copy of the report is in the Library; the minutes of evidence will be published in due course. I understand that since the NAO study the health authority has taken action designed to increase utilisation rates.

Brighton Health Authority

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide details of the number of beds provided by Brighton health authority for each year since 1979, and the number of projected beds to be offered through Brighton health authority for each year until 1994.

Mrs. Currie: The information available is given in the table.

Information on projected bed levels in district health authorities is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Brighton health authority who may be able to provide this information.

The average daily number of available beds in Brighton health authority[1] each year since 31 December 1979 to 31 December 1986

Year	Average daily number of available beds
1979	1,896·2
1980	1,850·7
1981	1,769·5
1982	1,793·7
1983	1,802·8
1984	1,796·1
1985	1,704·2
1986	1,653·8

[1] Prior to 1982 the figures relate to Brighton health district which was part of the East Sussex area health authority.

During this period the throughput of patients treated per available bed rose from 16·7 to 25·8 and the total number of in-patients and day-patients treated rose from 33,806 to 46,023.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many staff were employed by the Brighton health authority in each of the following categories *(a)* medical, *(b)* nursing, *(c)* ancillary and *(d)* other support staffs.

Mrs. Currie: The figures shown in the table are the most recent available.

NHS staff in post Brighton health authority

At 30 September 1986	Whole time equivalents[1]
Medical and dental[2]	130
Nursing and midwifery[3]	2,340
Ancillary	760
Other support staff[4]	1,450
Total employed[2,3]	4,680

Source: DHSS. Annual Censuses of NHS Medical and Non-Medical Manpower.
[1] Figures are independently rounded to nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents.
[2] Includes permanent paid, honorary and locum staff. Excludes consultants and senior registrars — these staff have their contracts with the regional health authority.
[3] Includes agency staff.
[4] Includes: professional and technical, works, maintenance, administrative and clerical, and ambulance staff.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide actual or projected figures of the level of revenue and capital expenditure by Brighton health authority, in each year from 1979 to 1994.

Mrs. Currie: The finance of Brighton health authority is a matter for the South East Thames regional health authority. However, I understand that the table provides the latest information derived from the annual accounts of the Brighton health authority since its establishment on 1 April 1982.

	Revenue expenditure £000	Capital expenditure £000
1982-83	45,102	1,598
1983-84	49,133	3,283
1984-85	52,162	2,113
1985-86	55,475	2,139
1986-87	59,102	3,030

Notes
1. The figures for capital expenditure include sums in respect of

schemes within the district recorded in the annual accounts of the South East Thames regional health authority. Revenue and capital expenditure incurred by the latter authority for the region as a whole is excluded.

2. Prior to 1 April 1982 the authority's predecessor health district formed part of the East Sussex area health authority and district based figures were not collected centrally.

3. Prior to 1 April 1985 Brighton health authority had an associated family practitioner committee (FPC) and the authority's expenditure for the years before that date includes elements relating to the FPC's administrative expenses which are not separately identifiable.

Information on future expenditure by Brighton health authority is not available.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate on a regional basis the number of myalgic encephalomyelitis sufferers; and how many of these are *(a)* women and *(b)* men.

Mrs. Currie: Information on the incidence of myalgic encephalomyelitis is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he has taken to ensure that myalgic encephalomyelitis is a recognised viral disease for National Health Service treatment.

Mrs. Currie: The National Health Service does recognise myalgic encephalomyelitis which can be a distressing and debilitating condition. However, there is not yet any generally agreed method of treatment, apart from rest.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make further resources available for medical research into the myalgic encephalomyelitis syndrome; and if he will list the current research activities being undertaken in medical establishments in both the private and public sector in this field, showing for how long research has been conducted.

Mrs. Currie: The main Government agency for the promotion of medical and related biological research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from the Department of Education and Science. I understand that although the council is not funding any research directly on myalgic encephalomyelitis, some of the work it is supporting on immune responses to muscle, nerve cells and related structures may be relevant to the understanding and treatment of the condition. The council is always willing to consider soundly-based scientific proposals for research in competition with other demands on its research funds.

Information on research not directly funded by Government agencies is not held centrally. However, I understand that since 1984 research on myalgic encephalomyelitis and related conditions has been carried out at St. Mary's medical school, London, and the regional virus laboratory, Ruchill hospital, Glasgow.

21-hour Rule

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will provide full details of the instructions given to local offices about how to interpret the 21-hour rule in individual cases.

Mr. Portillo: Guidance to adjudication officers on interpretation of the 21-hour rule is given in paragraphs 1287 to 1307 of the S manual, a copy of which is in the Library.

"Resourcing the National Health Service"

Sir Barney Hayhoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will detail the alleged inaccuracies he has detected in the First Report of the Social Services Committee (H.C. 264-1) on "Resourcing the National Health Service"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I do not think it would be appropriate to anticipate the Government's formal response to the Select Committee, which we will of course be making in the usual way, by making a further statement at this stage. On a question of fact, however, I have already expressed my concern that the Committee's recommendation for an extra £95 million in respect of pay and price inflation in 1987-88 failed to take account of the additional £75 million announced by the Government on 16 December.

Benefit Disqualification

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will place in the Library a copy of the survey carried out by his Department entitled "Monitoring the Voluntary Unemployment Changes and the Extensions of the Period of Disqualification."

Mr. Portillo: I shall be placing a copy in the Library today.

Sickle Cell Anaemia

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the level of information and counselling provided by district health authorities to sufferers from sickle cell anaemia.

Mrs. Currie: Although we know of 12 NHS counselling centres in England, we cannot be sure we know of all screening and counselling services provided by DHAs.

The level of information and counselling provided by district health authorities is a matter for them to decide in the light of local needs and priorities.

Mental Nurses (Northumberland)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services how many registered mental nurses are employed in Northumberland health authority; what was the number in 1979; and what has been the percentage change.

Mrs. Currie *[pursuant to her reply, 19 February 1988 c. 778]:* I regret that there was an error in my previous reply. The figures given referred to all nurses employed in the mental illness area of work.

The figures shown in the following table relate to all registered nurses employed in the mental illness area of work.

Registered nurses in mental illness area of work
Northumberland District Health Authority at 30 September

	Number
Whole-time equivalents[1]	
1982	153

	Number
1986	177
Percentage change[2]	
1982 to 1986	+15·7

[1] Figures independently rounded to nearest whole-time equivalent.
[2] Percentage change calculated on unrounded figures.
Source: DHSS annual census of NHS non-medical manpower.

Remploy

Mr. Temple-Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give for the last three years for which figures are available the amount of public subsidy given to Remploy; how this is calculated and structured; and whether any separate or designated subsidy is given to the Remploy surgical appliance division.

Mr. Lee: I have been asked to reply.

The Government subsidy to Remploy for each of the last three years was as follows:

£ million

	Revenue subsidy	*Capital loans*	*Total*
1985-86	48·5	10·8	59·3
1986-87	47·9	9·2	57·1
1987-88	49·7	8·3	58·0

The level of subvention is agreed annually in negotiations between my Department and the company. The underlying principle is that the Government should meet that portion of the company's costs which cannot be covered by income generated through its trading activities. The company has been very successful in meeting the stringent financial targets agreed with the Government, and the level of Government revenue subsidy has declined by around £2 million in real terms over the last three years, while numbers of disabled workers employed have increased slightly.

There is no separate or designated subsidy for Remploy's surgical appliance division.

Single Payments

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the date of the commissioner's hearing in the case referred to in his answers of 16 November 1987, *Official Report*, column *445*, and 1 February, *Official Report*, column *487*, regarding payments for furniture where the claimant became the tenant or owner of an unfurnished home on the date of claim; when he expects to receive the decision; and what is the reason for the delay.

The Attorney-General: I have been asked to reply.

The hearing of the appeal in the case referred to took place before a commissioner on 15 October 1987. His decision was issued and sent to both parties on 26 February 1988. Decisions in these cases are matters for the commissioners in the exercise of their independent judicial function, and in 1987, 80 per cent. of decisions in oral hearings were issued within six weeks of the hearing date. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has asked for further information about the case referred to and will write to the hon. Member in due course.

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This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes.

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Rulings and Statements by Mr Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

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Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

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Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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